

Innovative Research on Drama-Enhanced Language Teaching Under Drama in Education Theory: a Case Study of Foreign Literary Texts in Compulsory Education

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ABSTRACT

Facing the cross-cultural textual teaching challenges in the integration and teaching practice of foreign literature and Chinese language textbooks, educational drama theory can effectively empower Chinese language classrooms in the compulsory education stage. Based on this, this paper focuses on foreign novels in the compulsory education stage, and explores the feasible paths for activating Chinese foreign literature teaching through educational drama by analyzing the characteristics of the texts, the current status of teaching, and the design of activities. First, the core literacy of Chinese language education has put forward new requirements for curriculum innovation, and the introduction of drama education into the classroom can effectively expand the integration pathways of Chinese language teaching. Second, this paper investigates the distribution and thematic analysis of foreign novel selections in the unified edition Chinese language textbooks, thereby highlighting the compatibility between educational activities and the narrative structure of novels, and combining it with the developmental stages of students' psychology. Finally, this paper proposes innovative research on empowering Chinese language classrooms through drama by starting from four aspects: reconstructing teaching objectives, designing teaching content, innovating teaching methods, and improving teaching evaluation.

KEYWORDS

Drama in education; Foreign literary texts; Compulsory education language teaching; Theater; Tableau

1 Introduction

Drama in Education (DiE) originated in the United Kingdom, where primary school teacher Harriet Finlay-Johnson first incorporated dramatization of curriculum themes into elementary pedagogy. In 1912, she published *The Dramatic Method of Teaching*, recognized by DiE theorists as the inaugural work applying theatrical methods to formal schooling (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985). Subsequently, research on DiE proliferated internationally. In the Chinese context, Li Yingning (2013) introduced the DiE concept through her seminal article "Drama and Theatre Education in Britain," defining it as "an educational approach utilizing theatrical techniques in classroom instruction".^[1]

As theoretical foundations developed, applications of dramatic pedagogy in language education advanced significantly. Since 2006, drama has been formally integrated into literacy frameworks as a distinct instructional component with defined learning objectives.^[2] Recent scholarship has examined practical implementations, including Wang Yanfang's (2020) investigation of performance-based writing instruction models in elementary education.^[3]

For compulsory education language teaching, DiE integration aligns with core competency requirements for curricular innovation. Theatrical pedagogy enhances two critical dimensions: (1) linguistic expressiveness and creative capacity development, and (2) unit design innovation guided by curriculum standards. Foreign literature instruction occupies a unique position in elementary language education, serving dual purposes: aesthetic cultivation through poetic interpretation of classics, and cultural literacy development by fostering intercultural understanding while strengthening Chinese cultural identity.

However, foreign literature pedagogy faces inherent challenges as "cultural otherness" creates barriers including: (1) cross-cultural comprehension gaps, (2) textual interpretation difficulties, and (3) pedagogical insularity. Traditional comparative approaches between national literatures often obscure universal literary qualities. DiE offers an evidence-based solution through immersive, interactive methodologies that transform static texts into dynamic learning experiences. Role-playing and dramatization techniques demonstrably improve students' textual analysis, artistic appreciation, and thematic interpretation competencies. The concept of "educational drama" represents a new definition that involves a re-examination of "educational culture."^[4] This study examines foreign fiction texts in compulsory education, analyzing instructional characteristics, pathways, and case designs to establish feasible DiE implementation frameworks for revitalizing foreign literature instruction.

2 Analysis of current teaching status of foreign fiction texts in compulsory education

2.1 Characteristics of foreign literature selection in national standardized textbooks

The distribution of foreign literature selections in the compulsory education stage unified edition Chinese language

textbooks across different grades is shown in Table 1:

Table 1 Distribution of Selected Foreign Literary Works in National Standardized Language Textbooks

Grade Level	Country/Region	Author	Selected Text
Primary School			
Grade 5, Semester 2	Russia	Leo Tolstoy	The Dive
Grade 6, Semester 1	Russia	Leo Tolstoy	The Poor
	United States	O. Henry	In Berlin
Grade 6, Semester 2	United Kingdom	Daniel Defoe	Robinson Crusoe (excerpt)
	Sweden	Selma Lagerlöf	The Wonderful Adventures of Nils (excerpt)
	United States	Mark Twain	The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (excerpt)
Junior High School			
Grade 7, Semester 1	France	Jean Giono	The Man Who Planted Trees
Grade 7, Semester 2	France	Alphonse Daudet	The Last Lesson
	France	Jules Verne	Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (excerpt)
Grade 8, Semester 2	Soviet Union	Nikolai Ostrovsky	How the Steel Was Tempered (excerpt)
Grade 9, Semester 1	France	Guy de Maupassant	My Uncle Jules
Grade 9, Semester 2	Russia	Anton Chekhov	The Chameleon
	United Kingdom	Charlotte Brontë	Jane Eyre (excerpt)

Macroscopically, the foreign literary texts in the unified edition Chinese language textbooks (some being excerpts) vary significantly in form, content, and theme. In terms of form, some selections are short stories, such as works by Alphonse Daudet and Guy de Maupassant, while others are excerpts from longer novels. These texts guide students toward whole-book reading through variations in length and intensive reading of excerpts. Regarding content, the novels are primarily categorized into three types: realism, romanticism, and modernism. Through reading and studying these different types of foreign literature, students can learn and appreciate the corresponding artistic techniques, typical characters, and thematic emotions. The thematic distribution of foreign literature selections in the compulsory education stage unified edition Chinese language textbooks is shown in Table 2. As students progress through different grades, the selections shift from fables and fairy tales to personal diaries, and from biographies to longer novels. The foreign literary texts in the unified edition textbooks mainly cover themes such as adolescent growth, adventure stories, science fiction, and the fate of human life.

Table 2 Thematic Distribution of Selected Foreign Literary Works in National Standardized Language Textbooks for Compulsory Education

Educational Stage	Selected Text	Content Summary	Theme
Primary School			
Grade 5, Semester 2	The Dive	A child attempts self-rescue in a dangerous situation, while the captain demonstrates wisdom and decisiveness in resolving the crisis.	Quick-witted bravery, youthful wisdom
Grade 6, Semester 1	The Poor	A poverty-stricken couple maintains their kindness and generosity despite harsh living conditions, showcasing the beauty of human nature.	Benevolence and mutual aid, beauty of humanity
	In Berlin	Through conversations in a train compartment, the story reveals the psychological and physical trauma caused by war, exposing its brutality.	War trauma, peace advocacy
Grade 6, Semester 2	Robinson Crusoe	Depicts Crusoe's survival on a deserted island, demonstrating human resilience and ingenuity.	Survival against odds, perseverance
	The Wonderful Adventures of Nils	Chronicles the growth and adventures of Nils after his transformation into a tomte.	Youthful adventure, coming-of-age
	The Adventures of Tom Sawyer	Portrays Tom's maturation through adventures, reflecting childhood innocence and yearning for freedom.	Youthful adventure, pursuit of freedom
Junior High School			
Grade 7, Semester 1	The Man Who Planted Trees	A shepherd dedicates decades to transforming a wasteland through tree-planting.	Selfless dedication
Grade 7, Semester 2	The Last Lesson	The final French lesson under Prussian occupation expresses hatred for invaders and profound attachment to homeland.	Patriotism and professional dedication

The second unit of the unified edition of the sixth-grade second semester primary school Chinese textbook is themed around "Foreign Literary Classics," compiling excerpts from three long foreign novels: Robinson Crusoe, The Wonderful Adventures of Nils, and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. Through reading and analysis, it is evident that the humanistic theme of this unit is "Following the footsteps of foreign literary classics to discover a broader world." The learning objectives are "to understand the main content of the classics with the help of outlines," and the language elements are "to exchange feelings about impressive characters and plots." From understanding the content, clarifying the outline, exchanging feelings, to discovering the world, students will experience a complete and effective process of thinking and expression. At the same time, the theme of the "Happy Reading" section in this volume is "Strolling in the Garden of World

Classics," which is an extension and expansion of the second unit's texts, further guiding students to broaden their reading scope and appreciate more foreign classics centered around adventures and biographies.

Robinson Crusoe mainly tells the story of Robinson, who, after experiencing a storm during a voyage, is stranded alone on a deserted island. After living there for 28 years, he is rescued and returns to his homeland. The story praises Robinson's perseverance and yearning for freedom. The selected text excerpts Robinson's life state and personal reflections shortly after being stranded on the island. The teaching objectives of this lesson focus on using the outline and analyze the story content, requiring students to grasp information and draft outlines, thereby stimulating their interest in extracurricular reading.

The Wonderful Adventures of Nils describes the story of a little boy named Nils who, after being transformed into a little fox spirit, rides a male goose on a journey. The selected text is full of childlike fun, expressing a yearning for freedom and a desire for innocence. Teachers should guide students to observe the changes in the world after Nils becomes a little fox spirit. Not only can they list and compare the reactions of animals and Nils, but they can also appreciate the customs, history, and geography of Sweden.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer narrates the adventures of Tom Sawyer, shaping the image of a naive, lively, witty, brave, adventurous, and freedom-seeking teenager. The selected text excerpts the plot of Tom and Becky's adventure and return. During the teaching process, teachers should guide students to use subtitles to summarize and analyze the story plot, evaluate Tom's character traits with evidence, and read the entire book to follow Tom's footsteps to "discover a broader world."

2.2 Challenges in teaching cross-cultural texts

In general, the integration of foreign literature into unified Chinese language textbooks and its subsequent teaching practice primarily faces the challenge of teaching cross-cultural texts. On one hand, although the unified textbook compilation reflects a layered characteristic, it suffers from issues such as a narrow regional and national scope, inconsistencies between selected and required readings, and sensitivity in translation and introduction. On the other hand, the teaching process is hindered by the labeling of textual interpretations, the utilitarianism of teaching objectives, and the routinization of plot analysis. Cross-cultural texts should embody the characteristics of intercultural communication and exchange, reflecting the customs and cultures of different regions and countries in the teaching process. However, teachers often focus their class time on analyzing the internal context and plot of the literature, neglecting the analysis of the external historical background and social landscape. This leads to an increase in class hours and a slowdown in progress. In addition, Chinese language teaching is plagued by traditional fixed thinking and rigid teaching models, overemphasizing the three elements of fiction—"environment," "plot," and "character"—while failing to explore the features and appearances of different genres and types of foreign novels. These issues have also impacted students' enthusiasm and interest in reading and learning cross-cultural texts.

In the specific teaching process, taking the primary school stage as an example, the second unit of the sixth-grade second semester is the "Foreign Classics" unit. Teachers face challenges such as complex and difficult-to-understand plots, limitations in the length of selected textbook materials, difficulties in integrating multimedia resources, and significant cultural background differences. For instance, Robinson Crusoe reflects the Western spirit of adventure and independent survival consciousness, which differ to some extent from traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, the spirit of adventure may set a wrong example for primary school students, requiring teachers to strengthen guidance and help with understanding. Furthermore, if teachers merely explain the content of the text in a simple manner, students are likely to find it boring and fail to develop an interest in foreign novels.

Foreign literature teaching at the junior high school stage also faces numerous challenges. Some teachers have weak interpretive abilities and monotonous teaching methods. Although junior high school students have grown to some extent, their understanding of foreign cultures and social backgrounds remains limited. For example, students may not fully comprehend the British class system and women's status issues involved in Jane Eyre. However, foreign literature teaching in junior high school needs to achieve the goals of imparting literary knowledge, cultivating aesthetic abilities, and developing critical thinking within limited class hours. This requires teachers to enhance their own abilities, broaden the depth and breadth of teaching, and dare to meet the challenges of teaching cross-cultural texts.

In summary, in the practice of Chinese language teaching, the teaching of cross-cultural texts should be approached by combining the common characteristics of realistic novels and the foreign novelists selected in the unified textbooks. This can be achieved by understanding the authors, analyzing the characters, and utilizing critical materials, thereby awakening students' interest in autonomous reading and fostering a positive learning attitude. The integration of educational drama and the Chinese language discipline can open up a new perspective for the teaching of Chinese.^[5]

3 Path exploration from the perspective of drama education

3.1 Compatibility of educational drama and foreign literature teaching

Firstly, educational drama is closely integrated with foreign novels. The unified edition of the sixth-grade second semester primary school Chinese textbook provides the following explanation of classics: those books that people often say, "I am rereading..." rather than "I am reading..." In fact, dramatic performance is another form of "rereading" of novel narratives. Both drama and novels possess complete and conflict-ridden plots, with characters and descriptive objects presented. Drama originated from the integration of song, dance, and poetry, while novels can also be adapted for the stage or screen. Both reflect the common pursuit of humanistic education and aesthetic supremacy. Therefore, drama and novels exhibit structural compatibility, content relevance, and aesthetic commonality.

Moreover, the form of educational drama aligns with the psychological development stage of students in the compulsory education phase. On one hand, students aged 7-15 are in the compulsory education phase, lacking the ability to discern right from wrong and tending to think in simple and direct ways, requiring guidance in correct values. On the other hand, educational drama possesses situational, plot-driven, entertaining, and group-oriented characteristics, which are conducive to combining with mental health services and thematic education dissemination. This helps break individual isolation and closure, facilitating the transition and adjustment of students' psychological development stages.

Finally, educational drama meets the needs of the times, promotes the "double reduction" policy, assists teaching, and achieves the purpose of "cultivating people." One of the educational functions of drama is reflected in its impact on the personality development of participants.^[6] Educational drama not only focuses on foreign literature teaching in the compulsory education phase but also subtly cultivates children's healthy and positive childhood and life perspectives. From an educational dimension, the compatibility of the two is thus demonstrated in four aspects: reconstructing teaching objectives, designing teaching content, innovating teaching methods, and improving teaching evaluation.

In terms of innovating teaching methods, teachers can introduce the "space" of drama into the classroom, using freeze-frame techniques to deepen students' understanding of the text. Teachers can also provide relevant scenarios requiring students to engage in role-playing, thereby enhancing the interpretation of character personalities and destinies. In terms of improving teaching evaluation, teachers focus on students' body language and role portrayal in classroom group presentations, and can assign homework such as character biographies and post-drama analyses to determine whether students truly understand the knowledge points.

3.2 Teaching paths starting from drama

3.2.1 Reconstructing teaching objectives: from text interpretation to experiential learning

Traditional teaching objectives focus on the imparting and understanding of knowledge. While the overemphasis on text interpretation can strengthen students' understanding of the content, themes, and writing techniques of the text, it also leads to issues such as single objectives, lack of interaction, neglect of the whole, overemphasis on exams, and rigid teaching models. Traditional teaching objectives mostly revolve around knowledge and skills, neglecting the cultivation of students' emotional experiences, innovative spirit, and creative thinking abilities. There is also a lack of effective interaction between teachers and students, and students' innate abilities for independent thinking are constrained in the process of following fixed procedures.

Drama education is an important vehicle for implementing humanistic quality education.^[7] Using drama education to achieve experiential learning can effectively compensate for the shortcomings of traditional text interpretation. On one hand, drama education provides students with immersive experiences through situational simulation and role-playing, effectively stimulating their interest and participation in learning. On the other hand, students actively participate, create expressions, and gain in-depth understanding during the experiential learning process, surpassing the inherent text interpretation model in their interpretation of the connotations and emotions of the text. By reconstructing teaching objectives, shifting from text interpretation to experiential learning, teaching objectives transition from traditional knowledge analysis and theme interpretation to students' literary experiences and emotional resonance, helping students gain a deeper understanding of the text's connotations through drama activities and enhancing their comprehensive qualities.

Taking *The Last Lesson* and *My Uncle Jules* as examples, the traditional teaching objectives of the former focus on understanding the main plot of the novel, analyzing character portrayal techniques, and grasping the patriotic emotions. Under experiential learning, students can experience the scene of the last lesson through role-playing. By leveraging emotional resonance, students can experience the psychological transformation of Little Francis from being playful to patriotic, as well as the grief, indignation, and reluctance of Mr. Hamel. Through language practice, they can gain a deeper understanding of the artistic charm of the novel's language description. The traditional teaching objectives of the latter also focus on mastering the plot of the novel, character portrayal methods, and understanding the naked money

relationships between people in capitalist society. After experiential learning enters the classroom, students can be divided into groups to play roles such as the Philip couple and Jules, simulating different scenarios of "looking forward to Jules," "praising Jules," "meeting Jules," and "avoiding Jules." This enables them to reflect on the distorting and alienating effects of money worship on human nature and to establish correct interpersonal relationship concepts.

3.2.2 Enlivening teaching content: from traditional classroom to immersive theatre

Traditional classrooms have many limitations in the teaching process, mainly reflected in the 单一 teaching form, neglect of student subjectivity, disconnection from real life, and lack of innovation cultivation. Traditional classrooms are teacher-centered and mostly adopt the lecture method. The overly procedural teaching model and overly limited teaching content neglect students' innovative and practical abilities, leading to students' difficulty in understanding the practical application value of knowledge and lack of opportunities for active exploration.

Immersive theater, as an emerging teaching model, has significant advantages and can effectively compensate for the shortcomings and defects of traditional classrooms. Firstly, it significantly enhances interactivity and participation. Teachers can use new media technology to create real drama scenes, enabling students to transform from passive "audiences" to active "actors," thereby strengthening the psychological identification of active experience and eager exploration. Secondly, it is conducive to providing personalized performances. Immersive theater supports students in choosing different plot directions based on their interests and needs, participating in performances and becoming part of the story. In addition, high-tech means such as multimedia and virtual reality will fully engage students' visual, auditory, and tactile senses, allowing students to experience the charm of drama in all aspects. Finally, it helps promote the deep understanding and practical application of knowledge. Immersive theater transforms abstract knowledge into specific situations, allowing students to understand and apply knowledge in practical experiences.

Moving from traditional classrooms to immersive theater, leveraging drama characteristics to enliven traditional classrooms, requires not only the creation of immersive drama situations but also the balance between teaching content and drama activities. On one hand, to create immersive drama situations, attention should be paid not only to the external construction of story scenes, designing drama scenes that match the style and theme of foreign novel texts, setting up simple stage scenery, and using corresponding lighting and sound effects to create an immersive drama atmosphere; but also to the internal construction of story themes, introducing social backgrounds and cultural elements, and displaying social customs through character dialogues. On the other hand, to integrate teaching content and drama activities, the importance of language arts knowledge teaching cannot be ignored, and the classroom cannot be overly entertaining. Drama activities should be reasonably arranged according to students' age characteristics and cognitive levels.

In specific implementation, for example, in the introduction phase, classic drama performance clips can be played to attract students' attention and guide them into the text; in the learning phase, role-playing and group discussions can be used to deeply analyze the plots and characters of foreign novels; in the summary phase, report performances and character biographies can be used to review and summarize the learned content. During the role-playing process, not only can students be guided to appreciate and learn the beautiful words and rhetorical devices of the original work to better tell and express lines, but also students can be promoted to deeply analyze the structure of the novel, thereby deeply understanding the causes, development, process, climax, and results of the novel's plot.

3.2.3 Innovative teaching methods: utilizing readers' theatre and freeze-frame techniques

After using drama education to complete the reconstruction of teaching objectives and the design of teaching content, innovative teaching methods also draw inspiration from it and become the key to promoting changes in Chinese classrooms. Traditional teaching methods of lecturing and analysis are difficult to stimulate students' subjective behavior and difficult to evoke students' deep experiences. Using readers' theater and freeze-frame techniques can transform monotonous and serious text content into vivid and visual drama performances, helping students improve language expression, thinking ability, and emotional experience in drama practice.

Readers' theater emphasizes the reasonable adaptation of selected foreign novel fragments, transforming the text into a script suitable for performance. It is necessary to focus on retaining the language style of the original work and understanding the expressed thoughts and emotions, while also making appropriate adjustments and effective supplements based on the performance form. In the preparation process of readers' theater, students should assign tasks such as script writing, stage performance, and logistics work based on their strengths, learning to listen, communicate, and coordinate in teamwork; in the rehearsal process of readers' theater, the guiding and organizing role of teachers should be strengthened. Although the podium or stage is handed over to students, the guiding position of teachers should be retained; in the performance process of readers' theater, students should be guided to recreate the text through oral language such as reading and speech, and body language such as gestures and dance, combining

background music to deeply experience the language charm and aesthetic emotions of foreign novels; in the summary process of readers' theater, audience feedback and self-reflection should be used to continuously improve students' performances and further deepen their understanding of the text.

Freeze-frame techniques require selecting key plots, climax fragments, or popular and exciting scenes from foreign novels, analyzing character actions, psychology, expressions, and positions, and achieving static presentation and detailed analysis of representative moments. In the creation process, teachers need to encourage students to use body language and homemade props to cultivate creativity and enhance expressiveness. In addition, through group cooperation and class exchange, students' understanding and interpretation of foreign novels can become more diversified and multi-dimensional.

On the basis of comprehensively using readers' theater and freeze-frame techniques, the integration of drama education into Chinese classrooms can also expand to incorporate other drama elements, such as introducing drama conflict analysis and portraying character psychological monologues. This guides students to approach the material from different angles, thereby making Chinese classrooms more engaging and effective.

3.2.4 Improving teaching evaluation: deepening learning through post-drama analysis

Post-drama analysis is also an important component of improving teaching evaluation. Based on the results of post-drama analysis, teachers first reflect on the achievement of teaching objectives, analyzing whether the teaching objectives are reasonable and clear, and whether they can effectively meet the actual needs of students, thereby further adjusting and optimizing teaching objectives. Secondly, teachers reflect on the design of teaching content and activities, considering how to enhance the tight integration of foreign novel texts and drama elements, making teaching and demonstrations more lively and interesting. In addition, deeper exploration and pursuit of teaching method reforms can be proposed. To achieve effective post-drama analysis, diversified post-drama analysis indicators should be advocated, and multi-subject post-drama analysis activities should be carried out.

Advocating diversified post-drama analysis indicators, diversification is reflected in two major aspects. For foreign novel texts, the four main indicators are students' understanding of the content, analysis of character images, grasp of the plot, and depth of theme thinking. For drama situation performances, the three important indicators are students' engagement in role-playing, the compatibility of division of labor and cooperation, and the creativity of improvisational performance. Incorporating these seven dimensions of indicators into the post-drama analysis system is conducive to comprehensively evaluating students' learning performance and practice after the integration of drama education into Chinese classrooms.

Carrying out multi-subject post-drama analysis activities, the multi-subject aspect is reflected in students and teachers, with students as the main body and teachers as the guide. Individual students should conduct self-analysis, reviewing and summarizing the strengths and weaknesses in drama performances; student groups should discuss and evaluate the drama cooperation of a team in groups to continuously improve; teachers should conduct final summary evaluations and comprehensive guidance, combining students' self-evaluations, group mutual evaluations, and observation records, to provide students with objective and comprehensive guidance, and to provide referential and implementable plans and basis for subsequent teaching improvements.

4 Conclusion

After reviewing the theoretical origins of educational drama and its internal compatibility with foreign literature teaching, we find that drama teaching aligns with the innovative requirements of the core competencies of the Chinese language subject in the compulsory education stage. In response to the current dilemmas in foreign novel teaching—such as cultural barriers, obstacles in text comprehension, and rigid teaching models—Chinese language teachers can, from the perspective of educational drama theory, reconstruct teaching objectives, enliven teaching content, innovate teaching methods, and improve teaching evaluation. Through situational immersion and role interaction, static texts can be effectively transformed into dynamic cognitive experiences, helping students overcome cultural barriers and enhance their cross-cultural understanding abilities and core competencies.

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