

# Perceived Challenges of Studying Drama among Fifth-Semester EFL Students at the University of Zawia, Faculty of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### **Abstract:**

*This research paper explores the challenges encountered by EFL fifth-semester students in the English department at the faculty of Arts at Zawia University in their study of drama. The aim of the study is to shed light on these challenges and their types in order to help students overcome them to improve their engagement and comprehension of literature in general and particularly drama. To fulfil this aim, a Likert scale questionnaire administered to a class of 30 students studying in the fifth semester in the Department of English/ Faculty of Arts at Zawia University. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results have shown that students encounter a number of challenges in their study of drama including linguistic and cultural barriers as well as lack of facilities. To deal with these hurdles, the study recommend that teachers should use more effective pedagogical strategies for teaching drama that are suitable for Libyan students. It also recommends that policy makers and administrations provide the necessary facilities including providing up-to-date sources and free and reliable internet services.*

**Keywords:** EFL, Challenges, Drama, Literature, Comprehension

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of drama into the EFL syllabus at the university level serves various educational purposes: Firstly, it exposes students to authentic language in the form of conversations. Secondly, it introduces complex literary devices. Thirdly, teaching drama enhances cultural awareness; and, finally, it develops critical thinking and interpretative skills (Boudreault, 2010; Piazzoli, 2018). Drama provides real opportunity to fifth-semester Libyan EFL students to improve their language including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation and helps them become more fluent in the language.

The challenges encountering those students are of several types. Linguistically, drama genre contains idiomatic expressions, and syntactic structures and vocabulary that may differ from modern English. Culturally, students must explore historical contexts, social conventions, and idiomatic expressions that are not part of their life experience (Savvidou, 2004). Furthermore, drama is a text written for performance which may make it difficult to understand in a traditional lecture style. This study aims to investigate these issues to identify their precise nature within Zawia University. The study collects data directly from the students to have in-depth information related to these difficulties encountered by those students in order to find suitable ways of overcoming them.

## 2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Based on the researchers' experience as teachers of literature, fifth semester students at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Zawia University encounter a number of difficulties comprehending literary genres, particularly drama. These challenges can be attributed to several reasons including linguistic, contextual, affective

and cultural factors. Therefore, this research paper attempts to shed light on these challenges to specify them and find practical ways to deal with them.

### 3. AIMS OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to specify the challenges encountered by fifth semester students at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Zawia University in studying drama and comprehending dramatic texts as perceived by these students. It also aims to find practical ways that can help in overcoming these challenges from these students' perspectives.

### 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper attempts to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the challenges perceived by EFL fifth semester students in studying drama?
2. How can these challenges be overcome from the students' perspectives?

### 5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study can be significant to teachers, students and policy makers. By shedding light on the challenges encountered by students in studying drama, teachers will be aware of the way students see these problems which may lead to raising these teachers' awareness of these problems in order to find practical ways to deal with them through using different teaching strategies which in turn will benefit the students and enable them to gain better understanding of drama as a literary genre and comprehending dramatic texts and conventions. Also, This study may help policy makers make informed decision especially with regard to providing and equipping educational institutions with the necessary facilities which will help both teachers and students overcome such challenges.

### 6. METHODOLOGY

To collect data from students, a quantitative approach using a Likert-scale questionnaire was considered most effective to measure perceptions and attitudes in a reliable and efficient manner (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Students' identities were not required to encourage the students to participate and give honest answers. The study included 30 fifth-semester EFL students (male and female) enrolled in an obligatory drama course at Zawia University. Their proficiency level is expected to be intermediate to upper-intermediate. A 20-item questionnaire divided into five thematic components was used as a data collection tool. Five-point Likert scale: ranging from Strongly Disagree, to Strongly Agree was utilized. The questionnaire asked students indicate their level of agreement with the following statements regarding their experience studying drama subject. They were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers and there were no marks given for their responses. It is only meant to improve the teaching and learning of the subject. (See the appendix for a copy of the questionnaire).

#### 6.1 Participants

The participants are 30 fifth semester students constituting a class which is studying drama as an obligatory subject in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia in the Autumn semester 2025.

#### 6.2 Sampling technique

The participants were selected as a sample of this study for accessibility reasons. They are taught by one of the researchers who has been teaching them Drama from the beginning of the semester. So, it was convenient for the researcher to select them as the sample of this study. The research being a teacher of this group of the students makes it easy to contact the participants and collect the required data, the students being familiar with teacher made it easy for them to cooperate and participate in the questionnaire willingly.

#### 6.3 Data collection Procedure

In a formal setting, the questionnaire was distributed during class to the participant students. It was distributed manually in the presence of one of the researchers, who is the drama teacher of the same class. Her presence was important to clarify the questions if required. Students were assured that their answers will not affect their assessment in the course and ensured that the propose of the study is to improve the course in subsequent semesters. To encourage the students to complete the questionnaire and give reliable answers, they were not

required to write their names. Students were given sufficient time to answer the questionnaire and were asked to complete all the items included.

## 7. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating the students selecting each option in the Likert scale. Students agreeing with the item indicate that face a difficulty related to what is expressed in the item. As a result, several themes have emerged from the analysis. These themes include linguistic and textural difficulties, contextual and cultural challenges, interpretive and analytical challenges, pedagogical and classroom related challenges, and, finally, perceptions and motivations. These themes will be analyzed in the following section.

### 7.1 Questionnaire Results

In what follows, results related to each theme will be presented with numbers of the participants who selected each option in the questionnaire. The following table presents all the results of the questionnaire before they are discussed in more detail:

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	0	0	1	12	17
2.	0	0	1	14	15
3.	0	0	0	14	16
4.	0	2	4	10	14
5.	0	5	5	8	12
6.	1	5	3	8	13
7.	1	3	3	10	13
8.	0	0	5	10	15
9.	3	5	3	10	9
10.	2	3	4	13	8
11.	0	0	5	10	15
12.	0	0	4	11	15
13.	0	0	10	15	5
14.	0	0	0	5	25
15.	0	0	1	3	26
16.	5	3	8	5	9
17.	5	5	7	5	8
18.	5	8	5	5	7
19.	0	0	5	5	20
20.	0	2	10	5	13

Table 1: Questionnaire results

#### 7.1.1 Theme One: Linguistic and textual difficulties

This theme was covered by 4 items (1-4) in the questionnaire.

The first item says 'I find the vocabulary used in the plays (e.g., by Shakespeare or other classic dramatists) to be too old and difficult'. In their responses to this statement, the majority of the participants either strongly agreed (17) or agreed (12) with the statement. One student remained neutral and no one has disagreed or strongly disagreed.

As for the second statements 'I find difficulty understanding the idiomatic expressions and figurative language (similes, metaphors, etc.) in dramatic conversations', again the majority have either strongly agreed (14) or agreed (14) with the statement. Only one participant remained neutral while none of them disagreed or strongly disagreed. The third item 'The complexity and length of utterances in the plays often confuse me' received almost similar responses to those obtained for item one and two, Here, 16 strongly agreed and 14 agreed whole none of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed, and no one remained neutral either.

The final item that is related to this theme is item 4. which says 'Reading drama is more challenging for me than reading short stories and novels'. 14 students strongly agreed and 10 students agreed with the statement. However, 4 participants remained neutral while 2 disagreed with the statement.

### **7.1.2 Theme Two: Contextual and Cultural Challenges**

This second theme was also covered by 4 items (5-8) in the questionnaire.

Item 5 says 'I find difficulty understanding the social and historical context of the plays of the subject'. The results show that 12 students strongly agreed and 8 agreed with the statement whereas 5 disagreed and 5 remained neutral. Item 6 says 'The satire, irony and humor found in the plays are often hard to understand'. Responses to this item show that 13 strongly agreed and 8 agreed while 5 disagreed and 1 strongly agreed. However, one participant remained neutral.

In their responses to item 7 that says 'The cultural, and religious references made by characters are difficult to grasp', 13 participants strongly agreed and 10 agreed with the statement. On the other hand, 3 participants disagreed and only 1 participant strongly disagreed. However, 3 participants were neutral.

The last item that is related to this theme is item 8 which says 'I find it difficult to link the themes of the plays to my own life and Libyan culture' the results show that 15 students strongly agreed and 10 students agreed with this statement while no one disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. However, 5 students selected the 'Neutral' option.

### **7.1.3 Theme Three: Interpretive and Analytical Challenges**

This third theme was covered by 4 questions (9-12) in the questionnaire as follows:

Responses to item 9 'I find it hard to analyze the psychology and the motives of the characters' showed that 10 agreed and 9 strongly agreed with statement which constitutes the majority of the participants. On the other hand, 5 disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed while only three participants remained neutral.

Item 10 'I struggle a lot to identify and understand main dramatic techniques', 13 participants agreed and 8 strongly agreed with the statement while only 3 disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed with the statement. However, 4 participants selected the 'Neutral' option.

As for item 11 'Writing an assignment about in drama subject is more difficult than writing assignments in other literary subjects', the majority of the participating students strongly agreed (15) and agreed (10) with the statement. The remaining students remained neutral and no one strongly disagreed or agreed.

The final item that is related is to this them is item 12, which says 'I find it difficult to imagine the play performance on stage just by reading it'. 15 students strongly agreed and 11 students agreed with this statement while no one has strongly agreed or agreed. However, 4 participants selected the 'Neutral' option.

### **7.1.4 Theme Four: Pedagogical and Classroom-Related Challenges**

This theme was covered by four questions (13-16) in the questionnaire as follows:

Item 13 says 'The teaching methods used in the form of lectures do not help me to understand and enjoy drama'. Responses to this item show that 15 students agreed and 5 students strongly agreed with the statement while none of them was on the agreement side. However, 10 participants remained neutral.

Regarding item 14 'Plays can be better understood if they are performed on the stage or as films', all participants either strongly agreed (25) or agreed (5) with the statement and now one expressed disagreement or even neutrality,

Item 15 'Opportunity for group work and classroom discussion to explore the plays is not adequate' received almost similar responses to that of the previous item. That is, 26 participants strongly agreed and 3 agreed with the statement while only no one of them was on the disagreement side. However, one participant selected the 'Neutral' option.

The final item that is related to this them is item 16 which says 'The methods used to assess my understanding of plays such as exams and essays do not sufficiently reflect my level'. The response to this item should more variations in that 9 participants strongly agreed and 5 agreed while 8 remained neutrals. On the other hand, 5 strongly disagreed and 3 disagreed with the statement.

### **7.1.5 Theme Five: Perceptions and Motivations**

This is the final theme and it was covered by 4 questions (17-20) in the questionnaire as follows:

Answers to Item 17 which says 'I think that taking drama as a subject is less useful for my career in the future than other subjects' varied. 8 participants strongly agreed and 5 agreed with the statement. On the other side, 5 participants strongly disagreed and 5 strongly agreed while 7 students remained neutral.

Item 18 'I often feel worried or demotivated when studying play because I think it will be too hard' should similar variation in the students' responses. On the agreement side 7 students strongly agreed and 5 agreed. On the disagreement side, 5 strongly disagreed and 8 disagreed with the statement. Finally, 5 students selected the 'Neutral' option'.

As for item 19 'Despite difficulties, I believe studying drama enhances my English language skills', apart from 5 participants who remained neutral, all other students either strongly agreed (20) or agreed (5) with the statement. Finally, item 20 says 'I think that performing scenes or participating in character role in theatre activities help me learn the English language'. Responses to this item showed that 13 students strongly agreed and 5 students agreed with the item while only 2 disagreed with it. However, 10 students remained neutral.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

The discussion of the results obtained from this study will be dealt with in light with the themes emerged from the analysis conducted in the previous section.

### **8.1 Linguistic and textual difficulties**

The results showed that a considerable majority of the students face linguistic and textual difficulties regarding understanding vocabulary used in the plays, idiomatic expressions and figurative language like similes and metaphors in addition to the complexity of utterances in dramatic conversations, they also maintained that drama is more challenging than other literary genres such as a novel and a short story. This result is in line with research conducted by Al-Mahrooqi & Denman (2020), who stress that archaic language including lexical density and non-standard grammar of literary texts remain a main obstacle for Arab EFL learners.

### **8.2 Contextual and Cultural Challenges**

Results related to contextual and cultural challenges also show that the majority of the students who are studying drama encounter challenges understanding the social and historical context of the plays. As noted by Kramsch (2013), meaning in a text is embedded in a cultural context that is not always transparent to foreign language learners. This necessitates explicit contextual teaching.

### **8.3 Interpretive and Analytical Challenges**

Regarding interpretive and analytical challenges, a considerable majority of the students encounter problems when analyzing the psychology and motives of characters in a play. They also struggle to identify and understand dramatic techniques. This resulted in difficulty in writing their assignments in drama subject. These difficulties with character motivation or dramatic techniques suggests an urgent need to do some deliberate effort by teachers to improve analytical skills. Techniques like character mapping or identifying dramatic irony in specific passages can help in this respect (Boudreault, 2010).

### **8.4 Pedagogical and Classroom-Related Challenges**

Regarding pedagogical and classroom related challenges, the majority of the students were not happy with the lecture style as a teaching method used to teach drama. They believe that plays can be better understood if they are performed on a stage or seen as films. They also agree with providing opportunities for them to work in groups and to have whole class discussion. These results urge for pedagogical innovation not only in the methods of teaching but also in the techniques used in the classroom. This supports the arguments made by Piazzoli (2018) and Rawson (2022) for a different approach to teaching drama, integrating performance-based activities and multimedia to make the text clear and easily understood.

### **8.5 Perceptions and Motivations**

The results related to this theme show that students are divided regarding the idea that drama as a subject is less useful for their career in the future than other subjects. While less than half agreed with this, the other half either disagreed or took a neutral position. Similar results were found regarding being worried or demotivated when studying drama due to its difficulty, and as a result, those students had doubts that studying drama would enhance their English language. This reveals a complex array of student attitudes; while they recognize the value but are hindered by affective filters (Krashen, 1982), which highlights the need to build their confidence alongside their competence.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

The study addressed a number of challenges encountered by students studying drama, these challenges are classified into linguistic, pedagogical, contextual, interpretive, and motivational issues. Many students struggle

with the language and the complexity of dramatic texts, which aligns with previous research which asserts that these challenges are significant for Arab EFL learners including Libyan students. Contextual understanding is also an obstacle due to the cultural references in found in plays, which require explicit explanations. Also, students find it difficult to analyze character personalities and dramatic conventions, which may indicate a need for modern pedagogical method. Finally, students expressed dissatisfaction with traditional teaching methods and asked for using more innovative teaching strategies, such as performance-based tasks.

## 10. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data from this questionnaire provides an evidence-based diagnosis of the specific challenges encountered by fifth-semester EFL students at Zawia University in studying drama. The results suggest major difficulties in understanding linguistic and cultural aspects, and a desire for more visual and performative teaching techniques. Based on the data analysis results, several pedagogical recommendations can be given:

1. Abandon lecture-based delivery in favor of task-based activities where students can collaborate to analyze specific scenes for language use, character development, and dramatic technique.
2. Begin each lecture with multimedia presentations on the acts' historical, social, and biographical background, to making links to main ideas of the play.
3. Integrate films or recorded stage performances as a part of the syllabus material to bridge the gap between the written text and performed action on the stage.
4. Utilize performance-based assessments alongside traditional essays to reduce anxiety and cater to different learning styles.
5. Integrate regular in-class readings where students play character roles, with focus on emotion and tone, before conducting deep textual analysis.

By addressing these identified challenges with targeted techniques, the study of drama can become a more engaging, more accessible, engaging, and more rewarding element of the EFL syllabus in the Department of English at Zawia University.

## 11. REFERENCES

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## 12. APPENDIX: Student's Questionnaire

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I find the vocabulary used in the plays (e.g., by Shakespeare or other classic dramatists) to be too old and difficult.					
2.	I find difficulty understanding the idiomatic expressions and figurative language (similes, metaphors, etc.) in dramatic conversations.					
3.	The complexity and length of utterances in the plays often confuse me.					
4.	Reading drama is more challenging for me than reading short stories and novels.					
5.	I find difficulty understanding the social and historical context of the plays of the subject.					
6.	The satire, irony and humor found in the plays are often hard to understand. .					
7.	The cultural, and religious references made by characters are difficult to grasp.					
8.	I find it difficult to link the themes of the plays to my own life and Libyan culture.					
9.	I find it hard to analyze the psychology and the motives of the characters.					
10.	I struggle a lot to identify and understand main dramatic techniques.					
11.	Writing an assignment about in drama subject is more difficult than writing assignments in other literary subjects.					
12.	I find it difficult to imagine the play performance on stage just by reading it.					
13.	The teaching methods used in the form of lectures do not help me to understand and enjoy drama.					
14.	Plays can be better understood if they are performed on the stage or as films.					
15.	Opportunity for group work and classroom discussion to explore the plays is not adequate.					
16.	The methods used to assess my understanding of plays such as exams and essays do not sufficiently reflect my level.					
17.	I think that taking drama as a subject is less useful for my career in the future than other subjects.					
18.	I often feel worried or demotivated when studying play because I think it will be too hard.					

19.	Despite difficulties, I believe studying drama enhances my English language skills.					
20.	I think that performing scenes or participating in character role in theatre activities help me learn the English language.					

