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## Research Article

**Drama-Based Input Enhancement and Fostering Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Ability: A Pedagogical Orientation**Armaghan Moshirnia<sup>1</sup>, \*Ramin Rahimy<sup>2</sup><sup>1&2</sup>Department of English Language, To.C., Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran.  
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**ABSTRACT****Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate the impact of drama-based input enhancement on English speaking achievement of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The question this study tried to answer was whether enhancing in-class input via drama-based interventions while teaching speaking could result in higher achievement and ability among the target experimental group. To deal with the research question, 40 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were selected via administering an OPT; were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups; then, exposed to pretest of speaking achievement. The experimental group received drama-based treatment of speaking while the control group received a placebo. The quantitative data were analyzed via running an Independent Samples T-test and Paired Samples T-test. Results indicated that the experimental group improved their overall speaking performance significantly more than the control group. The study found drama-based input enhancement to influence learners' speaking quality and supported the use of drama as a potential pedagogical tool for increasing learners' English speaking ability. Furthermore, the application of drama techniques to foster speaking can enhance the EFL curriculum by increasing student involvement, creativity, and confidence in speaking.

**Keywords**

Drama-Based Input Enhancement, Speaking Ability, Language Pedagogy, Language Production



## Introduction

### *Focusing on the Controversy: Problems of Enhancing Classroom Input*

A controversial issue in the area of language teaching and learning is the concept of “input” and the way it is presented (enhanced) to language learners in the classroom. The rationale behind such a controversy seems to be the problem of potential for language learners’ cognitive overload which causes a reduction in language learning (deJong, 2010). Specifically, the human brain possesses a limited capacity for processing new information in its working memory (Afify, 2020). In learning environments saturated with concurrent multimedia stimuli—such as video, audio, and interactive content—students often transition from active learners to passive consumers. The cognitive load required simply to process this constant influx of information depletes the mental capacity necessary for higher-order thinking, including synthesis, in-depth analysis, and memory retention; thus, the way teachers enhance input while their classroom teaching seems significant enough to be focused and investigated.

This points, directly, to a second core issue: “the decline of critical thinking (Well, 2023)” allotted time. Learning is not just about gathering facts; it is a reflective process that needs space for contemplation and internal questioning. An environment saturated with non-stop and non-enhanced input eliminates these essential pauses. The moments where a student wrestles with a concept or connects it to what they already know are lost to the demand to cover more material.

Another problem, to be considered, is that students with different learning preferences, cognitive processing speeds, or backgrounds may find such environments particularly disorienting and exclusionary. Those without prior familiarity with the technological tools or the cultural capital embedded in the enhanced content can quickly fall behind, turning a well-meaning intervention into a mechanism for widening the achievement gap. Thus, enhancing input needs acceptable level of implementation. Definitions can support such an idea; accordingly, input enhancement is said to be a method employed in second language acquisition (SLA) to heighten the salience of particular linguistic features for students (Simard, 2018) (Smith & Truscott, 2014) (Smith, 1993). It also includes manipulating the input students experience such that they attend to explicit forms or structures with the intent to promote acquisition (Smith & Truscott, 2014) (Benati, 2016) (Aldukhayel, 2021).

Teachers’ insufficient awareness of the principles of input enhancement and how to employ them into their teaching can be considered a third controversial problem in the field (Ziegler et al., 2017) (Smith, 1993). Teachers might use many approaches to enhancing the input they give to learners by, for



example, making use of visual cues, overt explanations, and opportunities for interaction and output (Ziegler et al., 2017). Input enhancement could be incorporated in the development of language learning materials like textbooks and other online resources (Smith, 1993). Data regarding the effects of input enhancement can be difficult to obtain due to the challenge of controlling or isolating various enhancement factors (Smith & Truscott, 2014). More research is warranted to study the best types and amounts of input enhancement for various learners and linguistic features (Cheng & He, 2023).

The autonomy of input enhancement, as an entity, can also be controversial: while input enhancement is valuable in its own right, it should be used alongside other proven pedagogical approaches such as task-based learning and communicative language teaching (White, et al., 1991). Overall, input enhancement is a good way to support second language acquisition by drawing attention to specific linguistic features in a given text and promoting learners' noticing of those features. Now that you have a basic understanding of input enhancement's principles, some of the research outcomes, and theories related to input enhancement, I hope you will feel comfortable employing input enhancement in your classroom to increase the likelihood of learners becoming successful language learners (Smith, 1993), (Ziegler et al., 2017).

#### *Input Enhancement Studies in Teaching L2 Speaking*

Speaking is a skill that requires significant mental and social effort. It involves organizing and conveying thoughts in coherent and contextually suitable speech. The process of thinking, developing, and expressing these ideas takes up a considerable amount of working memory, which can hinder learners from fully focusing on all elements of speaking (el-Majidi; de Graaff; & Janssen, 2024).

Achieving proficiency in speaking is challenging for many language learners, with difficulties varying based on individual strengths and weaknesses in different intelligences. To improve speaking skills, diverse teaching strategies that consider these differences are essential. Speaking is a key skill in English, distinguished by monologue (one speaker) and dialogue (multiple speakers). The behaviorism theory and audio-lingual method highlight the need for students to develop language habits and engage in communication, supporting the principles of 'communicative language teaching' (Salehi; Keshtiarast; & Rahimi, 2024).

According to Richards (2008), the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second-language or foreign-language learners. Consequently, learners often evaluate their success in



language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how much they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. Oral skills have hardly been neglected in EFL/ESL courses (witness the huge number of conversation and other speaking course books in the market), though how best to approach the teaching of oral skills has long been the focus of methodological debate. Teachers and textbooks make use of a variety of approaches, ranging from direct approaches focusing on specific features of oral interaction (e.g., turn-taking, topic management, and questioning strategies) to indirect approaches that create conditions for oral interaction through group work, task work, and other strategies (Richards, 1990).

There are numerous studies in the background of the issue of speaking which focus on its improvement via different tasks or inputs. According to Mugiraneza et al (2024), studies show that students are less active in speaking the English language when their speaking level is low and it is difficult to pronounce some words. In addition, the researcher, being a secondary school teacher himself, observed that students have a low level of mastery of English, especially in speaking skills where they want to speak fluently but are still struggling in this way due to excessive influence of their mother tongue, being too shy to speak English with others, a lack of pressure to motivate themselves in their speaking, and fearing to make mistakes in their speaking. A low level of English speaking refers to a lack of speaking practice, fear of mistakes, lack of word usage and grammar practice, low motivation, low participation, unfamiliar word pronunciation, and fear of criticism (Václav, 2009).

When considering speaking, input enhancement could refer to opportunities for learners to hear and practice specific pronunciation features or grammatical structures (Plakans et al., 2018). This might include pronunciation drills, role-plays, or simulations (Plakans et al., 2018). For example, Rashtchi and Yousefi (2017) and Plakans et al. (2018) compared reading input flooding and listening input flooding techniques on the accuracy and complexity of Iranian EFL learners' speaking skills. They concluded that both input flooding techniques can facilitate speaking skills (Plakans et al., 2018).

Fadilah and Habibah (2021) and (Liao et al., 2021) researched employing YouTube video lessons for the improvement of a learner's English speaking skills, affirming that learners need both input (time receiving language) and the output (time using the language). Both aspects are served by YouTube videos that can provide rich and full input, and speaking activity following the video lessons offers the opportunity for output (Liao et al., 2021).



### *Enhancing Psycho-drama input in Teaching L2 Speaking*

Recent studies have indicated that innovative pedagogical approaches, such as psychodramaturgy-an interactive method that combines drama and psychotherapy-may offer significant benefits in developing oral proficiency by encouraging self-expression and peer interaction (Ali-Abdalahdi-Abu-Qbeita et al, 2024).

Nguyen (2023), quoting from a number of studies referred to below, has focused on the successful application of drama-based activities on achievements in the speaking skill. Accordingly, there are many studies conducted by various researchers in relevance to effects of drama-based activities on students' speaking performance in language teaching and learning. The first study was conducted by Nhi in 2017 with thirty freshmen at An Giang university. It is about drama-based role play activities to impact students' speaking performance. The researcher used the pre- and post- tests and interview to collect the data. The findings reveal that students in the experimental group got more positive effects in their speaking performance. Also, it finds out that students had positive attitudes towards the use of this technique in the classroom.

The next study concerns about Effects of Dramatic Activities on Improving English Communicative Speaking Skill by Iamsaard and Kerdpol (2015) at high school in Thailand. The research instruments used to collect data were the speaking test and questionnaire. The results were that after using dramatic activities to teach speaking skill, students made progress in English communicative speaking skill and their attitudes to this technique on speaking were highly positive.

The study conducted by Aryn (2021) is about the effects of drama activities on EFL students in Kazakhstan. The researcher used the pre- and post- tests, questionnaire and interview to find out the effect of drama on students in EFL classroom. The results revealed that the use of drama in EFL greatly affected students. Also, it was to assure that drama activities benefited not only speaking skills of EFL learners, but also other factors such as confidence.

Finally, Miccoli (2003) conducted the study with 37 participants in a Brazilian University. She used students' portfolios and interviews to investigate how drama activities influenced her students' oral skills. The results showed that in the aspects of structure, vocabulary and pronunciation, they greatly improve students' speaking competence.



## Significance of the Study

The incorporation of technology into language learning has created new opportunities for enhancing input, including the use of computer applications to provide diacritics or online comments to draw attention to aspects of the input (Aldukhayel, 2021) (Gascoigne, 2006). Input enhancement is related to Input Processing theory in that it focuses on how learners notice form in the input (Sulaiman & Salehuddin, 2022). The Noticing Hypothesis states that for acquisition to take place, learners need to consciously notice a feature in the input (Jang, 2009) (Lee, 2021). The MOGUL (Modular On-Line Growth and Use of Language) framework serves as a theoretical lens for investigating and explaining the processes/connections of input enhancement through analyzing cognitions (Smith & Truscott, 2014).

Research shows that input enhancement may help in acquiring different linguistic aspects, including vocabulary, grammar, and discourse markers (Cheng & He, 2023) (So, 2006) (Torkaman & Mohamadi, 2018). Studies have focused on the effectiveness of various types of input enhancement, including textual enhancement, input flood, and processing instruction (Benati, 2016) and (Rassaei, 2014). Some studies show that input enhancement combined with output activities, such as production tasks, may promote learning by providing opportunities for learners to actively use the target features (Jang, 2009). There are many factors that may influence the effectiveness of input enhancement, including learner proficiency, learning styles, and learner motivation (Lee, 2021).

The current study can claim its significance since it will employ a brand-new technique i.e. drama-based input in teaching English speaking to Iranian EFL learners. Enhancing input is a significant issue: it plays a crucial role in language acquisition, particularly in speaking skills. It refers to the techniques used to make certain aspects of language input more noticeable to learners, thereby facilitating their understanding and retention. It is also significant in speaking as it helps learners notice and internalize important language features, ultimately leading to improved communication skills. According to White et al (1991), In programs that focus on communicative language teaching, it is intended that primarily naturalistic positive evidence be provided in the classroom. However, learners in classrooms where much of the input comes from other learners will inevitably be exposed to incorrect 'positive evidence'. Teaching programs that include a focus on form and some error correction provide more emphasis on what is possible in the L2, as well as explicit indications of what is not possible.



Drama-based input enhancement may not be widely implemented in Iranian educational settings, showing its innovative potential to improve speaking skills. Iranian Intermediate EFL learners might be an under-researched group. This article has integration of practice and theory. This integration can provide a framework for educators to enhance speaking skills effectively. It applies linguistics and education by exploring innovative methods and their impacts, potentially inspiring further research in this area.

### Purpose of the Study

The present study enjoys a two-fold purpose. First, it has the aim of investigating possible answers to the question whether or not drama-based input enhancement may improve the speaking abilities among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Second, it is supposed to suggest drama techniques to be integrated into teaching L2 speaking skills to EFL learners through engagement and motivation. It will also provide students and teachers with practical guidelines and recommendations for implementing drama-based activities in their classrooms. To target the first purpose of the study, the following research question and null hypothesis were postulated:

**RQ:** Does using drama-based input enhancement have a statistically significant effect on speaking ability among Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

**H0:** Using drama-based input enhancement does not have a statistically significant effect on the speaking ability among Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

### Methodology

#### *Participants*

A population of 40 Iranian intermediate EFL learners participated in the experiment of the study in an “intact” manner. They were selected for the intermediate level based on the results of an OPT between 1 standard deviation below to 1 standard deviation above the mean since they needed the minimum proficiency to participate in the speaking test of the study. Since the participants of the current study were supposed to be selected via an “intact” method, the 40 participants were representative a “convenient” sampling. Due to the fact that the researcher in this study faced the problem of participant availability in practicality in test administration, there was no room for more than 40 participants for this



experimentation. Thus, the sample size remained 40; and that they were participants in the researchers' private English courses.

### *Materials and Procedure*

#### THE PROFICIENCY TEST

The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) used in the study included "Grammar (5 items)" to check the basic grammatical rules and language structures; "Vocabulary (5 items)" to check the participants' correct vocabulary use. It typically included multiple-choice and gap-fill questions; "Listening Comprehension (5 items)" to test the participants' ability to understand spoken English in various situations, such as conversations, announcements, and instructions at a minimum level. It consisted of multiple-choice questions based on audio recordings; "Reading Comprehension (5 items)" including a short reading passage True/False items to check the participants' comprehension; and finally, "Speaking (5 items)" to check their oral language production. This included five wh-questions for which the participants had to provide answer.

#### PRETEST AND POSTTEST

An experimental group and a control group were formed from the participants on a randomization basis. Before beginning any intervention, a pretest of English speaking was given to both groups to gauge participants' starting speaking ability. A teacher-made speaking interview created especially for this study and based on the subjects and linguistic functions covered in the participants' textbooks served as the pretest. This format made it possible to assess students' oral skills in a way that was more curriculum-aligned and authentic in spite of the fact that the participants of the study were not being trained in a language institute. The speaking pretest used inter-rater reliability procedures to guarantee the validity of the scoring process: three qualified experts independently assessed the interviews, and scores were only accepted if raters agreed. Ten treatment sessions of drama-based English speaking instruction were given to the experimental group after the pretest methods for improvement. In order to make input more salient and interesting, role-plays, dialogues, and performance-based tasks were used. The control group, on the other hand, received no-treatment placebo instruction, which consisted of conventional speaking instruction using the current classroom methodology without any drama integration. To gauge any improvement in speaking ability, a posttest with the same format as the pretest was given to both groups following the instructional phase:



Table 1  
Criteria for scoring the speaking test as pretest and posttest (0-5 total)

Criteria	Score	Description
Fluency	0–1	Speaks with natural rhythm and without long pauses
Grammar Accuracy	0–1	Uses correct verb tenses and sentence structure
Vocabulary Use	0–1	Appropriately uses vocabulary from the textbook
Pronunciation	0–1	Clear and intelligible pronunciation
Task Completion	0–1	Fully responds to the questions and maintains relevance

Table (1) illustrates the scoring procedure for the speaking as the pretest and the posttest of the study. The speaking test used in this study was a teacher-made, curriculum-based oral interview designed specifically to assess the speaking proficiency of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The test consisted of three open-ended questions aligned with themes and language functions from the students' English textbooks (Units 3 and 6). Each test (pretest and posttest) was created to assess key features of oral performance, including fluency, grammar accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and task completion, with each component scored on a 0 to 1 scale. The test designers were three qualified English language instructors with extensive experience in speaking assessment and curriculum alignment. The researcher, who was also the instructor of the class, directly conducted the interviews and administered both the pretest and posttest. During each interview, the researcher asked one question at a time, and students were given up to five minutes to respond to each question. To ensure objectivity and minimize rater bias, three expert raters independently evaluated each performance using a standardized scoring rubric.

## THE TREATMENT

The drama session of the current study was organized into stages adopted from Scrivener (2005). The drama-based activities in this study included “Get warmed up and Contextualization” to activate prior knowledge and introduce the linguistic focus, the session starts with theme-based activities, brief scenarios, or introductory role-play tasks; “Activities for Guided Drama” in which the participants participated in a range of performance-based exercises that incorporated target vocabulary and grammatical structures, including role-playing, improvisation, scripted dialogues, and dramatic storytelling; “Speaking Practice and Reflection” to reinforce learning and evaluate their own speaking abilities, participants act out their scenes, get feedback from peers and the instructor, and take part in thoughtful conversations; “Script Adaptation” during which the participants altered preexisting dialogues



to represent various communicative contexts or social roles; “Role Cards” to promote conversation in the form that each participant was given a character description and background information; “Dialogue Journals” Following each session, students’ performances were recorded, their difficulties were considered, and a list of new words or phrases was made by them; and finally, “Rehearsal Sheets” as resources which helped them improve fluency by providing guidance on pronunciation, intonation, and the use of functional phrases.

## Results

### *Descriptive Analysis of the Data*

This section focuses on the descriptive analysis of obtained data in this study. Such analysis was done using SPSS software as well as the numerical data gathered for such a purpose. Table (2) shows the descriptive analysis for the pretest and posttest of general English in the experimental group of the study:

Table 2.  
Descriptive results of the experimental group of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Possex	78.9000	20	8.42240	1.88331
	Preex	46.4000	20	9.05190	2.02407

As is indicated in table (2), the number of participants is 20 in each experiment (N=20). There has been no missing value which shows all selected students took part in the experiments of the study. The mean for the pretest scores of general English exam in the experimental group is shown to be 46.4000, as compared to the mean for posttest scores in the same group which is 78.9000. As for the standard deviations obtained for the experimental group, there seems to be more variability among the pretest scores than the posttest. The higher mean confirms that drama work led to better achievement and was effective in better speaking. The same descriptive analysis has been done for the pretest and posttest of speaking in the control group of the study illustrated in table (3) below:

Table 3  
Descriptive results of the control group of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Precon	57.1500	20	13.86505	3.10032
	Poscon	64.4000	20	12.52534	2.80075



Table (3) indicates that the number of participants is 20 in each experiment (N=20), and there has been no missing value. The mean for the pretest scores of general English in control group is shown to be 57.1500 as compared to the mean for the posttest scores of the same group which was shown to be 64.4000. As for the standard deviation obtained for the control group, there seems to be more variability among the pretest scores in the post test.

### *Inferential Analysis of the Data*

This section presents the inferential analysis of the obtained data of the study. Such analysis was done using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). In fact, the rationale behind using an Independent Samples T-test is to investigate whether or not there may be any after-treatment difference of the posttest scores of speaking between the experimental and control group of the study. Table (4) illustrates the results of the independent samples t-test:

Table 4  
Independent Samples T-test results of the study

		Observed t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speaking	Equal variances assumed	4.296	38	0.000
	Equal variances not assumed	4.296	33.266	0.000

Table (4) shows that that the observed t-value of the study was calculated as to be (4.296) and the degree of freedom is (38). The level of significance was calculated as to be 0.000. The interpretation of the obtained numerical findings will be presented in conclusion section of this report. Table (5) illustrates the results of the paired samples t-test of the study:

Table 5.  
Paired Samples t-test result of the study

		Observed t	Critical t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest EX – Posttest EX	16.655	2.093	19	0.000
Pair 2	Pretest Con – Posttest Con	1.595	2.093	19	0.001

According to table (5), the observed t value between the two sets of pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group is 16.655 while it is 1.595 in the control group of the study. The critical T in two groups is same. Both levels of significance in the results are lower than 0.05 that is, 0.000 for the



experimental group and 0.001 for the control group. These indicate that the estimations are not by chance. Like for the independent samples t-test, the interpretation will be presented in the conclusion section of this report.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Referring to the main hypothesis of the study that targeted the effect of drama-based input enhancement on the speaking ability of Iranian intermediate EFL Learners, it is now possible to discuss the results on the basis of the descriptive and inferential analyses to witness whether or not the existence of the hypothesized differences can be supported or rejected. Further, the contribution of the study in the sub-fields of language teaching can be justified. It is also possible to focus on the limitations and delimitations of the study and explain the main hindrances the researcher encountered during the study. Finally, in this section, the researcher will make attempts to provide suggestions for further studies in the field of language teaching as related to the intervention of drama-based activities in order to enhance the participants' speaking ability.

Accordingly, the descriptive statistics revealed that the experimental group made a considerable improvement from the pre-test mean ( $\bar{X}=46.4000$ ) to post-test mean ( $\bar{X}=78.9000$ ). The control group also made improvement, lower than that of the experimental, from the pre-test mean ( $\bar{X}=57.1500$ ) to post-test mean ( $\bar{X}=64.4000$ ). This could point to a more significant and positive treatment effect to the experimental group. The results from the independent samples t-test in table (4) indicated that the observed t value of 4.296 ( $t= 4.296, df = 38, p = 0.000$ ) was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This can indicate that the posttest scores difference between the experimental group and the control group did not differ by chance. The paired samples t-test results for the experimental group in table (5) as for the post-test scores compared to the pre-test ones revealed a highly statistically significant t value of 16.655 ( $t= 16.655, p = 0.000$ ). The control group improvement, however, was marginal t value of ( $t = 1.595, p = 0.001$ ) and considerably lower in magnitude. Based on the findings discussed, the null hypothesis of the study ( $H_0$ ) was rejected. It can therefore be concluded that using drama-based input enhancement had a statistically significant positive effect on the speaking ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

Such findings support Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, which theorizes learners need to notice linguistic features before they can notice even notice the features they are trying to acquire. Input enhancement techniques that we used, such as highlighting, contextualized tasks and role-plays, engaged



students noticing these features and made the linguistic forms more salient. In addition, drama provided learners with opportunities to interact meaningfully with language, reducing anxiety, and increasing fluency and accuracy. As is the case with previous research, our findings corroborate that input enhancement strategies can assist the acquisition of language features (Simard, 2018; Aldukhayel, 2021) and that drama-based techniques can facilitate student oral performance through engaging them in authentic communication (Do & Nguyen, 2017; Zineb, 2021). The input enhancement was then engaged to help learners both notice language forms and use them in communicative context. In language education contexts such as what exists in Iran, the contributions of the study seem to play a significant role. As was pointed out in the literature review, Iranian EFL learners faced the problem of failing to reach satisfying levels of speaking fluency due to the specific traditions that are publicized in the language teaching community often is led to aimless communication. This study tried to present an innovative strategy using drama-based input enhancement which could follow a communicative, student-centered approach and result in both confidence and competence in speaking.

The findings of the study can further provide implications for its target audience. Foreign language teachers may incorporate drama-based input enhancement activities (role-plays, simulations, improvisations) to develop an engaging interactive learning environment that can have an impact on fluency, accuracy and confidence. Carrying out drama tasks with explicit attention to the language forms means that learners will be more likely to notice them and embed them internally. Curriculum designers' syllabi and teaching materials may provide drama activities with input enhancement principles to ensure that speaking is a priority along with the grammar/vocabulary. L2 learners can take advantage from drama-based tasks in that they seem to promote speaking, reduce anxiety, and giving learners motivation and confidence when they are placed in real target language situations. Finally, educational policy makers will be benefitted from the results of this study provided that they can accept the fact that second language education policies in Iran should tend further toward communicative or learner-center approaches that shift away from traditional teacher-centered approaches, or they should at least mix them together.

The current study was not free from limitations; first, there was the problem of sampling: the study was limited to 40 subjects (20 in each group). The results and outcomes could be much more generalizable if the researcher could access to a larger sample size. Treatments such as drama-based input enhancement may not be conducted in non-longitudinal designs. This study focused specifically on speaking ability. Other language skills, like listening, reading, and writing were not considered. It is suggested that future



researcher manage to make studies on other skills or replicate it in an integrated form of the skills. For delimiting the study it was decided that intermediate-level Iranian EFL learners be selected as the participants, omitting both beginner and advanced learners both for the reason of availability and proficiency of the learners.

The selection of only drama-based input enhancement as the treatment, excluding other communicative techniques such as task-based learning or project-based learning for comparison.

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