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Drama Appreciation as a Gateway to Empathy and Cultural Awareness in Schools

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the ways in which drama appreciation can improve students' empathy and cultural awareness within educational contexts. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, the study examines chosen conversations from *The Comedy of Errors* by William Shakespeare. The research emphasizes how misinterpretations and breaches of conversational maxims enable students to examine various viewpoints, feelings, and cultural backgrounds. The results indicate that drama offers significant learning opportunities that promote students' abilities to understand different perspectives and emotions. Furthermore, drama introduces students to various cultural norms and communication methods, enhancing their awareness of cultural variations. This research emphasizes the importance of drama as a powerful educational instrument by linking theoretical frameworks like pragmatics, emotional intelligence, and experiential learning with practical analysis. Consequently, it is suggested that drama appreciation serves as a method to enhance students' emotional and cultural growth in educational settings

Keywords: Drama Appreciation, Gateway to Empathy, Cultural Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education is characterised by an emphasis on not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of students' emotional and social competencies. Nevertheless, a considerable number of students continue to demonstrate an absence of empathy and cultural awareness, both of which are indispensable in a multicultural society. According to Daniel Goleman, empathy constitutes a pivotal component of emotional intelligence, which facilitates the ability to comprehend and empathise with the sentiments experienced by others. In contrast, cultural awareness entails the recognition and respect of differences in values, traditions, and perspectives, which are pivotal for the establishment of positive relationships and social harmony.

One efficacious approach to address this issue is through the medium of drama appreciation. As Gavin Bolton asserts, drama in education facilitates students' engagement with and comprehension of diverse human scenarios through active participation.

Engagement in dramatic activities has been demonstrated to facilitate exploration of a variety of roles, emotions, and cultural contexts, thereby enabling students to develop a more profound understanding of other perspectives. This gap highlights the need for further exploration of drama as an educational tool in this context. The present article thus seeks to examine the manner in which an appreciation of drama can serve as a catalyst for enhancing empathy and cultural awareness in educational establishments. The argument is posited that drama constitutes not merely a form of entertainment, but also a potent educational instrument for students' emotional and cultural development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication sits at the heart of human interaction. In every exchange, speakers and listeners cooperate to build and interpret meaning. Yet this process can be complex, especially in literary texts, where language is deliberately crafted to stir emotions, evoke humor, and expose social dynamics. To explain when communication succeeds or breaks down in literary dialogue, scholars rely on pragmatics, the field that examines how context shapes meaning. This section surveys the theoretical foundations relevant to this study: Grice's Cooperative Principle and its four maxims, the idea of maxim violation, the role of humor in literary discourse, drama as a form of human expression, and how linguistic deviation connects with empathy and cultural awareness in education.

1. Grice's Cooperative Principle

This study draws on Herbert Paul Grice's (1975) *Cooperative Principle*, introduced in his seminal essay *Logic and Conversation*. Grice argues that participants in any communicative act are guided by a basic rational maxim: make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. This principle assumes a shared expectation of cooperation; even when utterances seem to deviate from that expectation, listeners can infer deeper meanings through context and implicature.

As Hossain (2021) highlights, there is a key distinction between what is said and what is meant. Through conversational implicature, speakers often convey more than the literal content of their words. When an utterance flouts cooperative norms, listeners typically seek an implied meaning that reestablishes cooperative sense rather than labeling the speaker as uncooperative. This interpretive work is crucial for understanding both everyday conversation and stylized literary dialogue.

2. Grice's Four Maxims of Conversation

Under the Cooperative Principle, Grice (1975) proposed four conversational maxims that guide cooperative interaction:

1. **The Maxim of Quantity:** Concerns providing enough detail for the current purpose without being redundant. Hadi (2013) explains that insufficient information leaves listeners confused, while too much can overwhelm or mislead them.
2. **The Maxim of Quality:** Deals with truthfulness. Speakers should only assert what they believe to be true and avoid claims lacking adequate evidence.
3. **The Maxim of Relation:** Requires contributions to be relevant. Irrelevant responses force listeners to infer the speaker's hidden meaning, often producing humor or dramatic irony.
4. **The Maxim of Manner:** Governs clarity. Hadi (2013) advises being orderly and concise while avoiding obscurity or ambiguity.

3. Maxim Violation in Literary Communication

Gricean pragmatics distinguishes between maxim flouting and maxim violation. Both involve breaking cooperative norms, but they differ in purpose and effect. Flouting is an intentional breach meant to generate a conversational implicature conveying something beyond the literal words. Violation, by contrast, is a failure to follow a maxim without the deliberate intention of adding meaning, often causing misunderstanding or communicative breakdown (Yule, 1996).

In literary drama, however, the line between flouting and violation often blurs. Playwrights like Shakespeare craft dialogue where characters seem to break maxims, while audiences recognize these breaches as devices that produce comic, ironic, or dramatic effects. Attardo (1994) demonstrates that the violation of conversational maxims is a fundamental mechanism for generating humor, as it creates a linguistic mismatch that reveals deeper social meanings. Furthermore, Hadi (2013) shows in his study of multicultural comedies like *Mind Your Language* that maxim violations often stem from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These communicative gaps serve as a direct route into cultural learning. In *The Comedy of Errors*, these breaches function as deliberate linguistic tools rather than accidental slips, where characters talking past one another generate the very confusion that fuels the plot.

4. Humor in Literary Drama and Its Linguistic Construction

Humor has been studied since antiquity. In *Poetics*, Aristotle framed comedy as an imitation of human mistakes that are laughable without causing harm. This idea that humor springs from portraying human fallibility and incongruity still helps explain Shakespearean comedy. Morreall (2009) offers a philosophical account of humor focused on incongruity, where humor emerges when something unexpected, illogical, or out of place disrupts an audience's expectations. This incongruity view dovetails with a Gricean perspective, since violating conversational maxims inherently breaches conversational expectations. Linguistically, then, drama's humor is shaped by deliberate manipulations of conversational norms. Dynel (2009) emphasizes that humor in interaction is often a result of pragmatic failure or intentional wordplay. *The Comedy of Errors* produces laughter through characters' failures to communicate cooperatively, and Gricean pragmatics makes that linguistic construction of humor analytically visible.

5. Drama as a Medium of Human Expression and Learning

Drama holds a unique place among literary forms because it is created to be performed; its meaning emerges through physical action, spoken dialogue, and actors' presence before an audience. Neelands and Goode (2015) argue that studying drama in classrooms enhances students' literary understanding and helps them interpret human communication in context. Engaging with dramatic dialogue goes beyond reading words on a page: it exposes students to portrayals of relationships, social dynamics, and communicative practices that require active interpretation. Furthermore, as Lazar (1993) points out, literary works often mirror real-life experiences, allowing their themes to arise from complex interpersonal relationships and social issues. Using these texts in education helps students build linguistic skills and broader interpretive abilities that apply to real-world communication.

6. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and share others' feelings and viewpoints. In communication, Hossain (2021) observes that speakers often convey implicit meanings that listeners must infer from context. This act of "reading between the lines" is an empathic exercise: listeners must adopt the speaker's perspective to reconstruct intent. Drama is especially effective at eliciting this because it transforms written text into a living art. Neelands and Goode (2015) contend that the shared emotional engagement with characters trains the perspective-taking and affective responsiveness at the heart of empathic understanding. Because literature reflects human situations, engaging with characters' emotions and dilemmas connects directly to real-world empathy.

7. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness involves recognizing and understanding the values, norms, and communicative practices that shape how people behave and interact within a specific social framework. Herawati (2013) provides significant evidence of this cultural dimension by demonstrating that communicative norms are not universal but are deeply rooted in specific social and local contexts. In her study of Indonesian discourse, she found that while the Maxims of Quality and Relation are generally respected, the Maxims of Quantity and Manner are frequently violated not as a sign of uncooperativeness but as a means to uphold social harmony, indirectness, and politeness. Furthermore, Thomas (1983) stresses that the Cooperative Principle and its maxims are central to communication but are applied differently across cultures, leading to what is known as cross-cultural pragmatic failure. What counts as an appropriate conversational contribution in one setting may seem excessive, insufficient, or irrelevant in another, which is a crucial realization for students studying Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. Since the play takes place in a historical and cultural context far from the students' own, much of its humor stems from mismatches between characters' expectations and actual meanings. As Neelands and Goode (2015) argue, drama offers a unique space for building this kind of cultural awareness because working with dramatic texts exposes students to portrayals of relationships and social dynamics that differ from their everyday experience. This interpretive work forces students to negotiate meaning within unfamiliar cultural frameworks, ultimately highlighting that social interaction follows culturally constructed norms rather than universal, rigid rules.

8. Emotional Intelligence Theory

Emotional intelligence theory helps explain how drama fosters both empathy and sophisticated social perception in a classroom setting. Hossain (2021) notes that speakers in dramatic communication often convey meanings that exceed literal words, which means audiences and readers must constantly infer intent from the surrounding context. That inferential work depends heavily on emotional attunement and social perception, which are core emotional intelligence skills such as reading subtle social cues, understanding others' feelings, and responding appropriately to complex intentions. Drama offers a structured and emotionally vivid setting to practice these skills, as it requires a high level of interpersonal sensitivity. Building on this, Goleman (1995), a pioneer in the field, suggests that recognizing emotions in others is a fundamental pillar of social competence, which is directly exercised when students analyze characters' motives. Furthermore, Arbain et al. (2023) show through their research on media discourse that characters sometimes break language rules specifically to achieve social goals or steer conversations toward emotional outcomes. This indicates that such norm violations often serve deliberate emotional and social aims rather than being mere errors. Recognizing those aims,

understanding why a character speaks indirectly, unexpectedly, or excessively, relies on the same interpersonal competencies central to emotional intelligence. By repeatedly presenting scenarios that require this intense interpretive effort, drama creates an ongoing practice ground for developing a deeper emotional and social understanding of others.

9. Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning theory provides a robust framework for understanding drama's educational role in building empathy and cultural awareness through active engagement. The theory, largely defined by Kolb (1984), asserts that learning is strongest when it emerges from a cycle of active experience and reflective observation rather than passive information intake. Drama is inherently experiential, as it demands active involvement, emotional investment, and rigorous interpretive work from participants and audiences alike. O'Toole (1992) argues that performance turns a written script into a living art form that communicates human emotions and ideas through lived, vicarious experience. This shift from static text to a lived encounter lies at the heart of drama's power in experiential learning; engaging with a dramatic piece is not just reading about human life but experiencing it through imagination and feeling. Additionally, Lazar (1993) points out that literary works mirror real-life situations and draw themes from social life, culture, and relationships, which supports the reflective phase essential to the experiential learning cycle. When students analyze and discuss in dalam teks drama, they engage in the kind of reflective observation that promotes meaningful and lasting learning. This process ensures that students do not just memorize linguistic rules but actually internalize how those rules are applied and negotiated in the complex, "lived" scenarios presented on the stage.

10. Maxim Violations as a Gateway to Empathy and Cultural Awareness

Grice's framework does more than analyze humor; it also offers valuable educational benefits for developing empathy and cultural awareness. Empathy in communication means understanding not just what someone says, but why they say it that way. When students examine maxim violations, they practice this: they ask not only what went wrong in an exchange, but why a speaker responded as they did and which social, cultural, or emotional factors shaped that response.

Herawati (2013) provides a significant cultural perspective on this educational angle through her study of Indonesian communicative interactions. Her findings reveal that while the Maxims of Quality and Relation are generally respected, the Maxims of Quantity and Manner are frequently violated not as a sign of uncooperativeness but as a means to uphold social harmony, indirectness, and politeness. This evidence underscores that judgments regarding maxim violations are not culturally neutral; rather, what constitutes an appropriate conversational contribution is deeply rooted in local norms. By integrating such perspectives, students can learn to recognize that communicative differences in drama often reflect complex cultural priorities rather than mere misunderstandings, allowing them to interpret linguistic deviations with greater sophistication.

Other studies reinforce the link between dramatized maxim violations, empathy, and cultural awareness. Scholars in linguistic pragmatics, such as Attardo (1994), have demonstrated that breaches of conversational norms in dramatic texts do more than just generate humor; they function as a device to expose culturally embedded meanings and social expectations. By analyzing these deviations, students can uncover the underlying values that shape communication within a specific cultural context. Furthermore, in multicultural educational settings, drama reveals how maxim violations often arise from

differing cultural and linguistic frameworks, as shown by Hadi (2013) in his study of the sitcom *Mind Your Language*. Students who examine these violations gain deeper insights into the way cultural norms govern interaction. This aligns with the observations of Davies (2003), who argues that humor and conversational norms are fundamentally culturally constructed and often amplified through the violation of linguistic expectations. Collectively, these studies indicate that analyzing maxim violations in drama serves as an effective pedagogical tool for fostering empathy and intercultural understanding by exposing students to the diverse ways meaning is negotiated across cultures.

Applied to Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, this approach offers two clear benefits. First, it familiarizes students with early modern English dramatic conventions and the communicative norms depicted in the play. Second, it encourages a broader recognition that communicative differences, in how people bend or break conversational rules, often reflect cultural and situational contexts that deserve interpretation rather than judgment. In short, studying maxim violations in comedic drama helps build both linguistic skill and intercultural empathy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology to investigate how drama appreciation helps school-age students develop empathy and cultural knowledge. The goal of qualitative descriptive research, according to Hall and Liebenberg (2024), is to provide clear, detailed accounts of experiences or events in common language while remaining close to the facts and avoiding significant abstraction or theorization. Because it enables the researchers to observe, characterise, and evaluate the social and communication phenomena buried within dramatic conversations in a natural and contextual manner, this method is especially appropriate for the current study.

The play script for William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, which was acquired from the Folger Shakespeare Library Digital Texts, served as the study's main source of data. This literary work was chosen due to its abundance of interpersonal conversation, misunderstandings, and cross-cultural interactions between characters, all of which offer pertinent content for examining how drama might increase students' awareness of the emotions and cultural contexts of others. In order to find dialogues that exhibit communicative patterns helpful for teaching empathy and cultural awareness in educational contexts, the screenplay was carefully and methodically studied.

The chosen dramatic text was closely read and documented in order to gather data. Based on their applicability to the topics of empathy, miscommunication, and cultural awareness, dialogues were found and chosen. After that, a contextual analysis of each chosen conversation was conducted, taking into account the setting, the characters' relationships, and the communication impact. In order to comprehend how transgressions of the conversational maxims Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner create tense, humorous, or miscommunicative moments that have substantial educational value, the analysis additionally makes use of Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) framework as a linguistic lens. According to Abdullah et al. (2025), examining how characters break conversational norms shows deeper levels of social significance that are present in discourse.

After that, the findings were conceptually evaluated from the standpoint of teaching cultural knowledge and empathy. This means that the researchers look at what each communicative breakdown or humorous exchange teaches the audience about respecting differences, understanding others' viewpoints, and recognising cultural norms rather than just categorising different kinds of maxim violations. The results are

described, backed up by concrete examples from the dramatic text, and addressed in terms of how they might be used in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Comedy of Errors by William Shakespeare has a variety of exchanges that can be used as teaching aids to foster empathy and cultural awareness in educational settings, according to an examination of the play. Four main theme categories were found by analysing the play's communicative patterns. These categories each represent a distinct aspect of empathy and cultural awareness that students may acquire by appreciating drama. The following table shows how these topic groupings are distributed.

Table 1. Thematic Categories of Drama-Based Learning in The Comedy of Errors

No.	Thematic Category	Educational Value	Frequency
1	Perspective-Taking through Misunderstanding	Empathy toward others' viewpoints	16 dialogues
2	Cultural Norms and Social Expectations	Awareness of cultural context	13 dialogues
3	Emotional Response and Identity Conflict	Emotional literacy and self-awareness	11 dialogues
4	Ambiguity and Tolerance for Uncertainty	Open-mindedness toward differences	10 dialogues
Total			50 dialogues

According to the data, the most common thematic category which appears in 16 dialogues is perspective-taking through misunderstanding. This is followed by 13 dialogues that discuss cultural norms and societal expectations, 11 talks that discuss emotional response and identity conflict, and 10 dialogues that discuss ambiguity and tolerance for uncertainty, for a total of 50 dialogues that are examined throughout the play. Below is a detailed discussion of each category.

1. Perspective-Taking through Misunderstanding

The most prominent thematic category in Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors involves dialogue in which characters interact using completely different frames of reference, leading to profound and often chaotic misunderstandings. These instances are especially beneficial for drama-based empathy education because they allow students to concurrently adopt numerous viewpoints and comprehend the reasons behind the speaker's words as well as the listener's differing interpretations. According to Hossain (2021), audiences can deduce speakers' intended meanings through conversational context, yet when that assumption is incorrect, a communication gap emerges that needs to be filled with empathy.

In Act 5, Scene 1, Antipholus of Syracuse is accused by the Second Merchant of falsely claiming to have a gold necklace that he never truly acquired. Since Antipholus of Ephesus, his twin, was involved in the actual transaction, the Syracuse twin has no memory of the denial despite the merchant's insistence. The conversation quickly escalates beyond control; instead of trying to figure out what is confusing the customer, the merchant starts insulting them personally. Students are prompted to think about why the merchant reacts so severely in a classroom context. They must analyze how Antipholus feels and consider what might have happened if either character had decided to pay closer attention. Through these situations, students learn to understand that miscommunication

is frequently the consequence of incomplete knowledge or different life experiences rather than an indication of malice. This realization is fundamental to empathy, which is the ability to comprehend and experience another person's emotions. As Morreall (2009) suggests, drama is a particularly effective tool for schools because it offers a secure environment where students can practice this ability without real-world risk.

2. Navigating Cultural Norms and Social Conventions

The play's dialogues frequently focus on instances in which characters act in accordance with cultural norms or social conventions that are either invisible to or misunderstood by others. Because they make clear the unwritten rules governing social interaction and communication that students frequently take for granted in their own cultural context, ini merupakan bagian yang sangat kaya akan pembelajaran budaya.

Act 1, Scene 1, where the Duke asks Egeon, a Syracusan merchant who has entered Ephesus illegally, to briefly explain his presence, is a clear illustration. Rather than adhering to the legal and social norm of a succinct defense, Egeon begins a long, passionate account of his entire life. From a linguistic perspective, this can be viewed as a breach of the Maxim of Quantity since Egeon gives significantly more information than is necessary for a judicial setting. From the standpoint of cultural awareness, however, Egeon's answer reflects his upbringing as a bereaved father who yearns to be understood. The institutional brevity required in a formal judicial interaction conflicts with his culture of expression, which is emotional and context-heavy.

As Herawati (2013) observes, there is no one universal standard for appropriate communication, as norms vary significantly between cultures. Students can learn a lot about cultural communication methods by examining this scene. For example, they explore why certain cultures value directness while others emphasize context and storytelling. They also analyze whose communication style is being deemed unsuitable and according to what criteria. Through these conversations, students progress from passively appreciating a narrative to actively considering how cultural background affects how people speak, listen, and evaluate one another.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this research indicates that appreciating drama can enhance students' empathy and cultural understanding. Analyzing *The Comedy of Errors* reveals that the dialogues, particularly those featuring misunderstandings and breaches of conversational norms, provide students with chances to grasp various viewpoints and feelings. This enables them to concentrate not only on the content being expressed but also on the reasons behind it and the emotions of others.

Moreover, drama serves as an efficient educational resource since it enables students to actively interact with authentic scenarios via storytelling and acting. This research demonstrates that drama is valuable in education, not merely for entertainment, by linking theory with instances from the play. Consequently, educators are urged to incorporate drama in their lessons to assist learners in enhancing their emotional comprehension and awareness of various cultures.

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