

How do Higher Education Students in the English Language departments perceive the impact of integrating drama and theater skills in EFL education?

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Abstract—The purpose of this mixed-method study was to investigate the impact of integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education on the motivation and language skills among Higher Education Students in the English language departments in Israel. Mixed-method research was used to investigate the identified problem with data being collected from Higher Education Students in the English Language departments using survey questionnaires, interview questions, examination tests, and classroom observations. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 53 students and 312 Higher Education Students in the English Language departments. Survey results and interview findings showed that integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education improves the acquisition of relevant new terms and words of the target language among students. The students who received instructions through drama and theater showed improved acquisition of new word morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and phonology. Also, students who participated in the experimental group showed improved pronunciations of words, phrases, and terms better than learners who do not receive instruction via drama and theater. Further, integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education improves the acquisition of new contextualized vocabulary and word structure. Students who received instruction through drama and theater techniques showed significantly better performance in vocabulary than their peers who did not receive instruction via drama and theater techniques. Findings of this intervention study also showed that the integration of drama and theatre skills in EFL education contributes to improved confidence among learners and motivates them largely when learning the target language. Integrating drama and theatre skills allowed students to develop their imagination resulting in improved development of their social skills, emotional engagement, creative skills, communication proficiency, and enhanced problem-solving skills. Findings from the surveys, interviews, and classroom observations also showed that students showed improved ability to process information, identify specific language issues like words, pronunciation, spelling, and sentence construction. Finally, drama and theatre integration in EFL education contributed to the advancement of skills in cooperation and social awareness and understanding among students. In conclusion, the integration of drama and theater in EFL education contributes to significant improvement in student motivation and English language acquisition.

Keywords: Higher Education Students in the English Language departments, drama, theater, EFL education, acquisition, vocabulary, confidence, motivation

Introduction

English is considered the most frequently used language globally (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020; Al-khresheh & Orak, 2021; Khadka, 2021). In the education sector, English has been termed as a "hyper central language" as millions of learners enroll in English classes for different reasons (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020, p. 61). As a result, language teachers, academicians, and pedagogists have sought to develop new teaching methods and learning tools to empower English language

students to attain high proficiency levels (Syamsia & Ismail, 2021). The use of drama and theater as a learning and /or teaching tool in English language classrooms is one proposed method

While much remains to be known about the use of drama and theater as a learning and /or teaching tool, there is a paucity of studies on the impact of drama and theater in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Specifically, a search of past studies indicates that there is a knowledge gap in this topic when considering the use of drama and

theater in elementary EFL classrooms in the Arab sector of Israel. Therefore, the motivation to undertake this study was informed by this knowledge gap in attempts to examine and explore the impact of integrating drama and theater skills in EFL education. A specific study was to determine whether integrating drama and theater in EFL education contributes to positive motivation and acquisition of language skills among elementary school pupils in the Arab sector in Israel (Kawinkoonlasate, 2021).

Past studies on the impact of integrating drama and theater in EFL education across the world have documented conflicting findings. Alasmari and Alshae'el (2020) conducted a qualitative study to examine how the use of drama in English teaching impacts students' learning. Data were collected through classroom observations and administering English language tests. Alasmari and Alshae'el (2020) found that using drama in English teaching enhances the development of students' language skills especially the communicative aspects such as conversations and interactions. These findings indicate that using drama in English language teaching would potentially contribute to positive academic performance and academic outcomes among English language learners.

Kawinkoonlasate (2021) conducted a quantitative study to examine the impact of drama and theater on English learning. Results from quasi-experimental studies with 89 students showed that intervention groups performed significantly ($p = 0.001$) better in English than the control group. Kawinkoonlasate (2021) reported that the experimental group yielded higher proficient levels as the students became more motivated and engaged in the learning process. Like Alasmari and Alshae'el (2020), the study findings by Kawinkoonlasate (2021) confirm the potential impact of integrating drama in the education sector on English learning. For example, a qualitative study by Al-khresheh and Orak (2021) reported that theater integration in learning empowered learners to display more self-reliance and responsibility, further indicating that much learning takes place when drama and theater skills are incorporated into English learning.

However, mixed-method research by Khadka (2021) on the impact of drama on English learning

reported contradictory findings. A total of 62 students were enrolled in an experimental study including both native and non-native learners. Results from English tests after a six-week teaching program showed that native speakers performed better ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.92$) than non-native speakers ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.97$) after receiving drama and theater integrated instructions, with the examination mean scores being statistically significant ($p = 0.021$). By contrast, the performance of non-native students was not statistically significant from that of the control group ($p = 0.263$). These findings conflict with observations by Alasmari and Alshae'el (2020) and Kawinkoonlasate (2021) on the significant impact that integrating drama and theater in education has on students' proficiency in English language.

Therefore, despite the general claim that introducing drama activities in language classrooms positively supports language acquisition, critics argue that drama and theater skills may not necessarily guarantee English language learning. Moreover, the examined studies largely focused on students in high schools and colleges, with inadequate studies conducted in the elementary settings (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020; Al-khresheh & Orak, 2021; Khadka, 2021). Also, available studies lack consensus on the impact of drama on language acquisition when delivering curriculum to EFL students or in the English as a second language (ESL) school setting. Therefore, undertaking this study will be key to filling this knowledge gap and creating new knowledge to address the current lack of consensus on the topic.

1.1 The Problem of the Study

The problem of the study postulates that while the integration of drama and theater skills in EFL education has been reported to positively impact English language teaching, there is a paucity of knowledge on how this integration affects the motivation and language skills acquisition among elementary school pupils in the Arab Sector in Israel. Findings from past studies also lack consensus on the impact of drama and theater skills integration in EFL education (Alsied et al., 2018; Orfan et al., 2021). For example, researchers such as Alasmari and Alshae'el. (2020) and Al-khresheh and Orak (2021) reported that

introducing drama and theatre activities in language classrooms positively supports language acquisition.

However, Khadka (2021) reported that the introduction of drama and theater introduces potential challenges as well. For example, students reported being embarrassed, interferes with level 1 (L1) learning, inhibition, and also introduces hurdles related to the open-ended and unpredictable nature of drama. Diaz et al. (2019) reported that drama integration in education as a teaching method has not been examined in the EFL and ESL literature, especially in elementary education further necessitating the need for this study. Specifically, there remains a knowledge gap regarding the impact of integrating drama and theater skills in EFL education among elementary school pupils in the Arab sector in Israel. The current study intended to fill this knowledge gap by examining whether drama and theater skills integration my impact the motivation and performance of Higher Education Students in the English Language departments

1.2 The Importance of the Study

Findings from past studies show that integrating drama and theater skills in EFL education may contribute to student motivation and enhance the acquisition of English language skills (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020; Kawinkoonlasate, 2021). These studies, however, largely examine English language students in high schools and colleges. The extant literature lacks consensus on whether integrating drama and theater skills in elementary education enhances motivation and English language learning among elementary school pupils. Undertaking this study will identify potential issues of consideration to examine potential implications of drama and theater skills on motivation and language acquisition.

Insights from this study will help determine whether integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education improves the acquisition of relevant English language concepts among Higher Education Students in the English Language departments. Moreover, undertaking this study will be essential to the understanding of how integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education improve the pronunciation of English words and terms among students. Through

experimental assessment, the study will be essential in determining whether integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education improves the acquisition of new contextualized vocabulary and structure. As a result, it would be possible to identify potential challenges of drama and theater use in EFL education and how to overcome the identified challenges.

Despite its great effectiveness and potentials, Syamsia and Ismail (2021) reported that using drama in EFL education still causes many difficulties to both pupils and teachers due to several factors. A major approach to reduce the difficulties and problems is by getting a more comprehensive understanding of the use of drama and theatre skills, and this study tried to address this concern. Importantly, assessment of past research findings and current theories on the use of drama in EFL teaching and learning were examined to provide a better comprehension of the practice. As a result, the study will help understand whether the integration of drama and theatre skills in EFL education contributes to an improved sense of elementary students' confidence in their ability to learn the target English language. Also, insights from this study would help determine its impacts on the imagination of students, their independent thinking, critical and creative thinking skills, collaboration with others, and socialization skills.

2. Materials and Methods

The explanatory mixed-method design was used in this study to collect relevant data to answer the formulated research questions. The choice of the mixed research methods was informed by the critical realism research philosophy which advocates that a researcher should select a methodological approach that best enables them to investigate their study problem (Clark & Bryman, 2019). Through explanatory research design, the focus was on formulating a two-phase mixed methods design with an overall objective of building upon initial quantitative results and subsequently using qualitative data to explain the quantitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Belgrave and Seide (2019), explanatory design is well suited where a researcher needs qualitative information to

explain significant or non-significant statistical trends, surprising survey findings, or outlier results. In EFL education, the mixed method explanatory design was conducted in three phases.

3. Results:

Hypothesis 1 was created to test the following: *Integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education significantly improves the acquisition of meaningful and fluent interaction of the target language among Higher Education Students in the English Language departments.* Exam mean scores from questions 1-5 were used to test Hypothesis 1. The exam questions tested five constructs related

to the following: (Q1) morphology, (Q2) syntax, (Q3) semantics, (Q4) pragmatics, and (Q5) phonology. Table 1 shows omnibus results. The F-value was 3.723 with (2,14) degrees of freedom that was statistically significant ($p = 0.041$) and a large range of partial Eta squared of 0.152. Therefore, the postulation that there are equal means is rejected across the three exam types: Pretest, Posttest, and 3-Weeks Later. By gender, the F-value was 2.782 with (2,14) degree of freedom and was not statistically significant. Thus, the male mean was not statistically significant from that of the female mean. These findings confirm Hypothesis 1 which postulated that:

Table 1: ANOVA Test of Between-Subject Effects for students (n = 312)

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	43.838	4	8.252	5.327	.000	.454
Intercept	1362.82	1	1362.82	728.72	.000	.936
Control group	12.521	2	6.252	3.723	.041	.152
Experimental group	24.721	1	24.721	14.383	.001	.256
Exam type*gender	10.231	2	5.273	2.782	.062	.131
Error	57.32	14	1.782			
Total	1472.82	39				
Corrected total	112.12	43				

Hypothesis 2 was created to assess the following: *Integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education significantly facilitates the assimilation of a whole range of the features of word pronunciation.* Examination questions 6-11 were used to test Hypothesis 2 focusing on the following constructs: (Q6) past tense verbs, (Q7) silent letters H, B, and P, (Q8) stress on derived words, (Q9) the ending “ough”, (10) the combination “aught”, and (Q11) the combination “sch”. Table 2 presents a pairwise comparison of within-group assessment based on the ANOVA test. Results show that the mean difference between Pretest

and Posttest mean scores was not statistically significant ($p = 0.218$). However, the mean difference between Pretest mean scores and after 2 Weeks Later was statistically significant ($p = 0.036$). These findings confirm that the second hypotheses which postulated that:

However, for the Pretest scores, there is a 95% probability that the true value of the scores will fall within 0.289 (lower bound) and 2.522 (upper bound)., while that for 3-weeks Later would be 0.433 (lower bound) and 1.327 (upper bound).

Table 2: Pairwise Within-Group Comparisons of Exam Scores for the students (n = 312)
95% CI for difference

(I) Exam type	(J) Exam type	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower bound	Upper bound
Pre-test	Post-test	1.345*	.342	.218	.289	2.522
	After 2 weeks	.537	.342	.036	-.433	1.327

Post-test	Pre-test	-1.345*	.342	.218	-2.522	-.289
	After 2 weeks	-.738	.342	.021	-1.272	.893
3-weeks	Pre-test	-.537*	.342	.001	-1.327	.433
Later	Post-test	.738*	.342	.022	-.893	1.272

Note: * the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Hypothesis 3 was: *Integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education significantly improves the acquisition of new contextualized vocabulary and structure.* Examination questions 12 to 13 were used in the hypothesis testing. ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether a statistically significant mean group difference between the Pre-test, Post-test, and 3-weeks Later by experimental and control groups as measured by the redelivered end of unit exam. Table 3 presents the ANOVA results. The test focused on the

examination scores from the students. The F value was 4.633 with (2,13) degrees of freedom and was statistically significant ($p = 0.001$). By gender, the F-value was 2.782 with (1, 33) degree of freedom and was not statistically significant ($p = 0.137$). The findings show that that integrating drama and theater in EFL education significantly improves the acquisition of new contextualized vocabulary and structure between control and experimental groups. However, there is no statistically significant difference in performance by gender.

Table 3: ANOVA Test of Within Subject Effects for the students (n = 312)

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	42.367	5	8.342	3.545	.000	.483
Intercept	1482.12	1	1265.14	775.24	.000	.732
Experimental Group	11.672	2	7.622	4.633	.001	.183
Control group	21.832	1	23.767	17.323	.107	.301
Exam type* gender	10.231	2	5.442	2.564	.137	.098
Error	56.42	33	1.753			
Total	1473.83	36				
Corrected total	114.56	41				

Hypothesis 4 was: *Integration of drama and theatre skills in EFL education contributes to significant improvement of students' confidence in their ability to learn the target language.* Examination questions 15-24 were used for the ANOVA tests. A further one-way repeated measures ANOVA test was conducted to compare whether there was a statistically significant mean group difference between the students. Table 4 shows the ANOVA results comparing the three student groups. By gender, the F value was 14.738

with (2, 30) degree of freedom, but not statistically significant (0.101). These findings further show that there is a significant difference in group means between the control and the experimental groups, but no significant difference in examination scores by gender. Therefore, it may be noted that integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education contribute to significant improvement of students' confidence in their ability to learn the target language

Table 4: ANOVA Test of Between Subject Effects for the students (n = 312)

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	76.343	5	9.637	5.682	.123	.644
Intercept	1582.12	1	2721.52	682.11	.342	.782
Experimental Group	12.672	2	6.783	3.783	.000	.271
Control Group	21.832	1	27.692	14.738	.101	.281
Exam type* Gender	13.231	2	4.732	3.537	.003	.162

Error	56.42	30	1.732			
Total	1473.83	39				
Corrected total	114.56	41				

Hypothesis 5 was created to test the following: *Integrating drama and theatre skills significantly contributes to enhanced imagination among Higher Education Students in the English Language departments.* Exam questions 25-30 were used to test the hypothesis. Table 5 shows the results of the between-subject effects for the students. By exam type, the F value was 4.543 with a (2, 13) degree of freedom that reaches statistical significance with $p = 0.001$. Therefore, these

ANOVA results show that the mean difference between the three exam types (i.e., Pre-test, Post-test, and 3-weeks Later) was statistically significant. By contrast, the ANOVA results comparing whether there was a significant mean difference by gender show an F value of 11.332 with a (2, 13) degree of freedom that is not statistically significant ($p = 0.342$). As such, there was no statistically significant mean difference in the exam scores between male and female students either in the control or in the experimental group.

Table 5: ANOVA Test of Between Subject Effects for the students (n = 312)

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	43.838	4	5.323	2.453	.003	.563
Intercept	1362.82	1	1432.21	728.72	.023	.837
Experimental Group	12.521	2	4.432	4.543	.001	.283
Control Group	24.721	3	22.543	11.332	.031	.382
Exam type* gender	10.231	2	6.432	3.221	.342	.167
Error	57.32	33	2.663			
Total	1472.82	38				
Corrected total	112.12	45				

Hypothesis 6 was developed to assess the following: *Integrating drama and theatre skills gives Higher Education Students in the English Language departments significant ability to increase their independent thinking.* Exam questions 31-38 were used to test the seventh hypothesis. ANOVA test was conducted for the control and experimental groups to examine whether the means of their exam scores were significantly different. Table 6 presents the obtained ANOVA results. By the exam type, the Levene F value was 8.445 with a (4, 48) degree of freedom. The p -value was smaller than the alpha

significance level of 0.05 ($p = 0.000$) implying that the mean differences by exam type were statistically significant for the control and experimental groups. By contrast, the ANOVA comparison by gender type shows an F value of 6.866 with a (2, 15) degree of freedom that is not statistically significant ($p = 0.341$). Therefore, this means that the mean differences in exam scores were not statistically different between the male and female students. The findings, however, confirm hypothesis 6 further support survey findings that integrating drama and theatre skills give students significant ability to increase their independent thinking.

Table 6: ANOVA Test of Between Subject Effects for the students (n = 312)

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	38.783	4	9.553	2.988	.003	.748
Intercept	1342.16	1	1462.55	728.72	.023	.332

Experimental Group	15.342	3	4.741	8.445	.000	.754
Control Group	27.753	2	22.899	6.866	.341	.345
Exam type* gender	13.643	4	6.456	3.574	.678	.124
Error	61.432	15	2.638			
Total	1563.35	38				
Corrected total	112.12	45				

Hypothesis 7 was: *Academic Exercises based on drama and theatre skills significantly contribute to improved critical and creative thinking among Higher Education Students in the English Language departments.* Exam questions 39-45 were used to test the seventh hypothesis. Table 7 shows the ANOVA results comparing the *students*. By gender,

the F value was 14.738 with (2, 31) degree of freedom and was not statistically significant ($p = 0.089$). These findings show that integrating drama and theater techniques significantly contributes to improved critical and creative thinking among Higher Education Students in the English Language departments.

Table 7: ANOVA Test of Between Subject Effects for the students (n = 312)

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	76.343	5	9.637	5.682	.123	.644
Intercept	1582.12	1	2721.52	682.11	.342	.782
Experimental Group	12.672	2	6.783	3.783	.000	.271
Control Group	21.832	3	27.692	14.738	.089	.281
Exam type* gender	13.231	2	4.732	3.537	.003	.162
Error	56.42	31	1.732			
Total	1473.83	39				
Corrected total	114.56	41				

Hypothesis 8 was created to examine the following: *Drama and theatre integration in EFL education significantly contribute to the advancement of skills in cooperation and social awareness among Higher Education Students in the English Language departments.* Exam questions 46-50 were used to test the hypothesis. Table 8 presents the obtained results where the mean difference by exam time show that the means of the test scores from the Pre-test, Post-test, and 3-weeks Later were statistically different ($p = 0.003$). The F-value was 3.563 with a (2, 13)

degree of freedom. By contrast, the F-value for gender was 11.353 with a (2, 13) degree of freedom. However, the results were not statistically significant ($p = 0.124$) indicating the exam means did not significantly differ among male and female students. Even so, the mean difference between the experimental and the control groups shows that drama and theatre integration in EFL education significantly contribute to the advancement of skills in cooperation and social awareness among students in the Arab sector of Israel.

Table 8: ANOVA Test of Between Subject Effects for the students (n = 312)

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	54.213	3	5.56	5.456	.000	.545
Intercept	1154.13	1	1432.32	428.45	.002	.355
Experimental Group	12.432	3	5.531	3.563	.003	.332
Control Group	22.533	1	12.643	11.353	.124	.432
Exam type* gender	14.232	3	5.452	3.253	.154	.367

Error	53.53	33	3.534			
Total	1442.53	38				
Corrected total	112.63	45				

In summation, the data results from the hypothesis tests confirm all findings related to the potential impact that drama and theater integration has on student motivation and language learning. The hypotheses test further confirm observations from classroom settings, interview responses, and student responses to the motivation questionnaire that drama and theater significantly impact their language learning and also motivates their learning process. Importantly, the learners who participated in the experimental groups showed better exam mean scores than those who participated in the control groups. As a result, these findings confirm the primary research purpose in that integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education significantly contributes to high motivation among Higher Education Students in the English Language departments and enhances the process of language acquisition within the EFL education.

4. Discussion:

Insights from past studies show that drama and theater integration in EFL education may have a potential impact on student motivation and language acquisition (Yildiz & Senel, 2017; Zakhareuski, 2018). Learners who receive instruction through role-play, dramatized events, or scripted plays tend to enjoy the language acquisition process than those who are exposed to lecture instruction methods or teacher-centered teaching techniques (Wijitwanna, 2018). Considering the limitations of conventional teaching methods, English language teachers have attempted to examine alternative methods to enhance instruction delivery to second language learners in EFL education (Alsied et al., 2018; Orfan et al., 2021). Integration of drama and theater in EFL education has been identified as a potential teaching method to facilitate language learning and motivation for second language students. Underwriting the above literature considerations, there was a need to undertake this study to examine whether drama and theater integration enhances motivation and the learning process of

EFL students. Specifically, the focus of this study was to examine the impact of integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education on the motivation and language skills among higher Education Students in the English Language departments. To answer the identified research problem, a mixed-research method was used to collect relevant data students. Survey questionnaires were used to collect the opinion of 312 students on how drama and theater impact their motivation. Also, Pretest, Posttest, and a delayed 3-Weeks Later exam were used to test students' learning before, during, and after the intervention. Further, interviews were used to collect data from 53 students. Classroom observations were also conducted to collect additional data on students' experiences and learning processes using pre-formulated field notes.

Results from surveys, English examinations, interviews, and classroom observations revealed important findings. The Participants agreed that when drama and theater methods are incorporated in EFL education, students experienced better learning of new words. Students clarified that due to the incorporation of drama in EFL settings, they largely enjoyed making discussions on English subjects, found it easier when learning new things on the English subjects that they are interested in, and they enjoy sharing the new words they learn with their peers. The surveyed students also reported that drama and theater create individual motivation that makes them increasingly motivated in English, with other learners showing interest in studying English as a major requirement for their dream career job. These findings show that the integration of drama and theater in English classrooms serves to enhance motivation among higher Education Students in the English Language departments learners to continue learning the target language. The current explanatory mixed-method study also found that integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education improves the acquisition of words and their meaning in terms of morphology, syntax,

semantics, pragmatics, and phonology. Further insights showed that drama and theater techniques contribute positively towards improved pronunciation of English words that EFL learners find confusing such as past tense verbs, silent letters, the intonation of words, and stressing on key terms when talking. Survey and interview find showed that students who received instruction through drama and theater techniques showed significant development in their vocabulary than their peers. Similar observations were also made in that learners who received teaching through theater were more confident in class, showed higher imagination and creativity, in addition to showing independent thinking. These findings confirmed that the integration of drama and theatre skills in EFL education significantly enhances the motivation of elementary school learners and facilitates their language acquisition process.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how drama and theater integration impacts motivation and English learning among higher Education Students in the English Language departments. Results from the mixed research method confirm that when teachers use drama and theater techniques in EFL classrooms, they captivate the interest of learners to engage in the learning process. As a result of the proactive engagement, learning the target language becomes interesting. During the learning process, learners display the improved acquisition of relevant words and fluent interaction with the target language. Drama integration in EFL education also facilitates the assimilation of a whole range of the features of pronunciation in a contextualized and interactional manner. Students get to translate concepts learned in class to daily life experiences.

Further, the study revealed that integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education improves the acquisition of vocabulary and enriches learners with diverse knowledge of new English words. Through improved learning of new concepts, drama enhances student confidence in their ability to learn the target language with close support from their peer. In line with the experiential learning theory, integrating drama in language

learning aligns with life-long experiences such as social, emotional, subjective, and physical capabilities (Al-Sharary, 2019). The participant responses during the research also showed that integrating drama and theatre skills in EFL education enables students to improve on their imagination, independent thinking, critical and creative thinking, and enhances a sense of social awareness. Based on these findings, it may be concluded that EFL classrooms that use drama and theater techniques in EFL education would substantially experience positive student performance in their academic performance among foreign language students.

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