

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DTB SPEAKING  
MODULE ON ENGLISH-SPEAKING  
COMPETENCE, COLLABORATION SKILLS,  
AND CREATIVITY AMONG CHINESE ART  
MAJOR UNDERGRADUATES**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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**by**

**LI KE**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|         |                                                   |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------|
| AC      | Abstract Conceptualization                        |
| ADDIE   | Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate |
| AE      | Active Experimentation                            |
| ALM     | Audio-Lingual Method                              |
| AMUs    | Art Major Undergraduates                          |
| ATTA    | Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults              |
| CBI     | Content-Based Instruction                         |
| CE      | Concrete Experience                               |
| CECS    | College English Course Syllabus                   |
| CET     | College English Test                              |
| CETG    | College English Teaching Guide                    |
| CET-SET | College English Test Spoken English Test          |
| CHC     | Confucian Heritage Culture                        |
| CLT     | Central Limit Theorem                             |
| CLT     | Communicative Language Teaching                   |
| CSAT    | Collaboration Self-Assessment Tool                |
| CSSAT   | Collaboration Skills Self-Assessment Tool         |
| CSW     | Collaborative Summary Writing                     |
| CVI     | Content Validity Index                            |
| DIE     | Drama in Education                                |
| DPTs    | Drama Pedagogy Trainings                          |
| DTB     | Drama-technique Based                             |
| EFL     | English as a Foreign Language                     |
| ELT     | Experiential Learning Theory                      |
| ESL     | English as a Second Language                      |

|             |                                                           |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| ESC         | English-speaking Competence                               |
| ESP         | English for Specific Purposes                             |
| FVI         | Face Validity Index                                       |
| ICC         | Intraclass Correlation Coefficient                        |
| ICR         | Intercoder Reliability                                    |
| ICT         | Information and Communications Technology                 |
| I-CVI       | Item for Content Validity Index                           |
| ID          | Instructional Design                                      |
| I-FVI       | Item for Face Validity Index                              |
| IOC         | Item-Objective Congruence                                 |
| ISLA        | Instructed Second Language Acquisition                    |
| ISD         | Instructional Systems Development                         |
| ITA         | Inductive Thematic Analysis                               |
| LBD         | Learning by Doing                                         |
| LSI         | Learning Styles Inventory                                 |
| MNSQ        | Mean Square                                               |
| MOE         | Ministry of Education                                     |
| NCEASC      | Newstart College English Audio-visual and Speaking Course |
| NCEC        | Newstart College English Course                           |
| NCEE        | National College Entrance Examination                     |
| NCEIC       | Newstart College English Integrated Course                |
| PBL         | Project-Based Learning                                    |
| PTMEA Corr. | Point Measure Correlation                                 |
| RM          | Rasch Model                                               |
| RO          | Reflective Observation                                    |
| SCT         | Sociocultural Theory                                      |
| S-CVI       | Scale for Content Validity Index                          |

|       |                                    |
|-------|------------------------------------|
| SDGs  | Sustainable Development Goals      |
| S-FVI | Scale for Face Validity Index      |
| TBLT  | Task-Based Language Teaching       |
| TCCT  | Torrance Test of Creative Thinking |
| TEWTS | Tactical Exercises without Troops  |
| TIE   | Theatre in Education               |
| TP    | Total Physical Response            |
| UV    | Universal Agreement                |
| VAD   | Vocabulary Acquisition Via Drama   |
| ZPD   | Zone of Proximal Development       |

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

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**KEBERKESANAN MODUL BERTUTUR DTB TERHADAP KECEKAPAN  
BERTUTUR BAHASA INGGERIS, KEMAHIRAN KOLABORASI, DAN  
KREATIVITI PRASISWAZAH PENGKHUSUSAN SENI CINA**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani kecekapan berbahasa Inggeris (ESC), kemahiran kerjasama, dan kreativiti yang tidak mencukupi di kalangan Siswazah Sarjana Utama Seni Cina (AMU) dengan membangunkan modul pertuturan berasaskan teknik drama (DTB) untuk mengkaji sama ada terdapat sebarang perbezaan yang ketara dalam skor min ujian pasca ESC, kemahiran kerjasama selepas soal selidik dan pasca ujian kreativiti antara kumpulan eksperimen dan kawalan. Proses pembangunan modul ini mematuhi dengan ketat model pengajaran ADDIE yang merangkumi lima fasa analisis iaitu reka bentuk, pembangunan, pelaksanaan dan penilaian. Berdasarkan teori sosiobudaya (SCT), teori pembelajaran pengalaman (ELT), dan Struktur Teori Intelek (SIT), modul ini direka berdasarkan keperluan pembelajaran pelajar dan “zon perkembangan proksimal” mereka yang menekankan pembelajaran berpusatkan pelajar dan berasaskan pengalaman. Terdapat empat unit dalam modul ini, masing-masing dikhususkan kepada topik tertentu dan meneroka empat teknik drama utama iaitu penceritaan, lakon peranan, dan simulasi. Kajian ini mengguna pakai pendekatan kaedah campuran dengan menggabungkan kedua-dua kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Reka bentuk kuantitatif terdiri daripada kajian kuasi-eksperimen yang dijalankan selama lebih lapan minggu di Universiti P di Wilayah Henan, China. Para peserta merupakan 70 orang AMU tahun kedua dari dua keseluruhan kelas. Data kuantitatif dikumpul menggunakan CET-SET-4 yang disesuaikan dan Alat Penilaian Kendiri Kemahiran Kerjasama. Bagi bahagian

kualitatif, enam pelajar daripada kumpulan eksperimen telah dipilih untuk temu bual separa berstruktur. Adalah penting bahawa semua instrumen menjalani pengesahan yang ketat untuk memastikan kebolehpercayaan dan kesahannya. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Modul Pertuturan DTB telah meningkatkan ESC, kemahiran bekerjasama, dan kreativiti dengan ketara dalam kalangan AMU Cina. Hasil kajian kuantitatif menunjukkan peningkatan bererti pada keseluruhan ESC dari segi perbendaharaan kata, sebutan dan kefasihan; kebolehan bekerjasama secara keseluruhan dari segi kemahiran interpersonal; serta pada kreativiti secara keseluruhan dari segi kefasihan dan fleksibiliti. Walau bagaimanapun, keberkesanannya terhadap kemahiran intrapersonal dalam kerjasama dan keaslian dalam kreativiti adalah tidak ketara. Tambahan lagi, data kualitatif daripada temu bual separa berstruktur menguatkan lagi hasil kajian ini dengan menonjolkan kecekapan bertutur yang lebih baik, peningkatan kerjasama pelajar dan pemikiran kreatif yang dipertingkatkan. Selain itu, dua tema yang muncul daripada data kualitatif mengukuhkan lagi keputusan ini: pengalaman positif dan pengalaman mencabar dalam menggunakan Modul Pertuturan DTB, menyerlahkan kecekapan pertuturan, kemahiran kerjasama dan kreativiti yang dipertingkatkan, dengan cabaran halangan bahasa untuk bertutur, kesukaran kerjasama, dan blok pemikiran kreatif. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa Modul Pertuturan DTB adalah alat pedagogi yang berkesan untuk meningkatkan tiga kemahiran penting abad ke-21 di kalangan AMU. Ia mencadangkan bahawa mengintegrasikan teknik drama dalam pengajaran bahasa memberikan pengalaman pembelajaran yang tulen, aktif dan menarik. Akhir sekali, ia menawarkan implikasi dan cadangan untuk penyelidikan masa depan untuk menyiasat lebih lanjut potensi modul pertuturan berasaskan teknik drama dalam mempromosikan kebolehan komprehensif dan kualiti keseluruhan pelajar.

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DTB SPEAKING MODULE ON ENGLISH-  
SPEAKING COMPETENCE, COLLABORATION SKILLS, AND  
CREATIVITY AMONG CHINESE ART MAJOR UNDERGRADUATES**

**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to address the inadequate English-speaking competence (ESC), collaboration skills, and creativity among Chinese Art Major Undergraduates (AMUs) by developing a drama-technique-based (DTB) speaking module to examine whether there is any significant difference in the mean scores of ESC post-tests, collaboration skills post-questionnaires, and creativity post-tests between the experimental and control groups. The module development process strictly adhered to the ADDIE instructional model, encompassing five phases: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Underpinned by the theories of sociocultural theory (SCT), experiential learning theory (ELT), and Structure of Intellect Theory (SIT), this module was designed based on students' learning needs and their "zone of proximal development," which emphasizes student-centred and experiential learning. This module has four units, each dedicated to a particular topic and exploring four primary drama techniques: storytelling, choral speaking, role play, and simulation. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach design, incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative design involved a quasi-experimental study conducted for eight weeks at P University in Henan Province, China. The participants were 70 second-year AMUs from two intact classes. Quantitative data were collected using the adapted CET-SET-4 and the Collaboration Skills Self-Assessment Tool. For the qualitative part, six students from the experimental group were chosen for the semi-structured interviews. All

instruments have undergone rigorous validation to ensure their validity and reliability. The findings indicate that the DTB Speaking Module significantly enhanced ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity among Chinese AMUs. Quantitative results demonstrate significant effectiveness in ESC in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency; collaboration skills in terms of interpersonal skills; as well as creativity in terms of fluency and flexibility. However, its effectiveness on intrapersonal skills within collaboration and originality within creativity is not significant. Additionally, two themes emerged from the qualitative data further corroborate these results: positive experiences and challenging experiences in using the DTB Speaking Module, highlighting the enhanced speaking competence, collaboration skills, and creativity, with the challenges of language barriers to speaking, collaboration difficulties, and creative thinking blocks. This study concludes that the DTB Speaking Module is an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing three essential 21st-century skills among AMUs. It suggests that incorporating drama techniques into language teaching fosters an authentic, interactive, and engaging learning environment. Finally, it offers implications and recommendations for future research to further investigate the potential of drama-technique-based speaking modules in promoting students' comprehensive abilities and overall quality.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

In contemporary times, English serves as an acknowledged passport to better educational and career platforms, which plays a crucial role in weaving the world into a single thread (Ahmad, 2016; Yu, 2019). To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all spectator nations need collaborative actions to realize the immediate and long-term challenges. English as a lingua franca is essential for effective communication and collaboration, especially for English-speaking skills more closely aligned with human needs (Kumar et al., 2022).

Speaking is an interesting and interactive language aspect, representing the most natural and prevalent form of human communication (Rao, 2019). Humans are granted the ability to speak before learning to read and write (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). The skill of speaking in English is commonly regarded as the most vital component of language learning (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023; Hassan et al., 2021; Muljani & Suwartono, 2020), holding the foremost position in the realm of academic study (Kumar et al., 2022). Moreover, speaking is considered one of the most challenging language skills (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Kumar et al., 2022; Rao, 2019) because students need to share their ideas orally and react immediately, requiring much practice (Ratnasari, 2020). Given this, mastering English speaking is a priority for many English learners as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Students usually evaluate their language learning achievement and the efficiency of their English course by advancements in speaking competence (Uzer, 2017). Proficient spoken English facilitates access to

career opportunities, business interactions, and contemporary information (Muljani & Suwartono, 2020; Syakur et al., 2020).

Studies have proved that language learners benefit from effective learning through collaborative actions by sharing resources and ideas (Darmuki et al., 2017a; Lai, 2011). Besides, utilizing collaborative activities instead of individual and regulated tasks can support acquiring specific language features (Khansir & Zaab, 2015). Being one of the learning and innovation skills of 21st-century skills, collaboration skills allow individuals to work effectively towards a shared goal, which facilitates the acquisition of vital skills such as communication and teamwork that are pivotal for their forthcoming academic and professional pursuits (Saleh, 2019). Mutually speaking competence is essential for successful communication, enabling collaboration (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023; Darmuki et al., 2017b).

Furthermore, learning collaboration skills has unique value and advantages for developing creativity (Huan, 2009; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). A creative outcome results from the combination and interaction of different, intricate elements through collaboration (Ross et al., 2023; Zbainos & Lubart, 2020). Creativity is also a key component of learning and innovation skills of 21st-century skills, gaining more international attention (Irugalbandara, 2023; Saleh, 2019). Besides, the *2020 Future of Jobs Report* regards creativity as one of the ten most vital core skills needed in the coming decade (Kanlı, 2021).

The *College English Teaching Guide* (CETG), compiled by the National College Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Board of China (MOE, 2020), provides a detailed description of what non-English major undergraduates should achieve in their English learning. Despite implementing a few English teaching

reforms in recent years, the demands of students for their future academic and professional pursuits are consistently overlooked. The development of their English-speaking competence (ESC), collaboration skills, and creativity has also not been paid much attention. The examination-oriented tendency was still serious (Qian & Qian, 2019). Students were taught with unfitted English-speaking textbooks, disregarding their learning needs (Feng, 2018; Wang & Yuan, 2019; Xie, 2018). Conventional teaching methods like drilling and memorization, and mechanical imitation, had failed to improve their English proficiency, particularly English speaking skills, resulting in a phenomenon of “Dumb English” (Han & Yin, 2016; Hui, 2021; Li, 2020; Liu, 2013; Shi & Cui, 2020; Tian, 2017; Yuan, 2017; Zhang & Yin, 2009).

Among Chinese non-English major undergraduates, there is a special group—Art Major Undergraduates (AMUs)—still encountering many problems in English learning, especially in English speaking (Han, 2021; Liu, 2021; Xie, 2018). Also, most of them have collaboration barriers with others in group studies, demonstrating a lack of skills in optimizing task accomplishment (Horne & Tzipora Rakedzon, 2022). Due to the influence of the teacher-centered learning atmosphere, students are inclined to answer one-standard thinking and cannot think from multidimensions (Fu et al., 2022; Jia & Lian, 2020). Therefore, there is an urgent need to solve these problems, or they will graduate with unfavorable qualities.

Previous literature has revealed that incorporating drama techniques in English language learning provides students with multiple authentic communication chances, which can boost students’ collaboration skills and creativity as they communicate in the target language (English) within and beyond the educational

setting (Abraham, 2018; İkinci, 2019; Romero & Tandingan, 2022). However, there is an absence of drama-related English speaking modules targeted at Chinese AMUs. Within the current educational context and the above issues, this study seeks to develop a drama-technique based (DTB) speaking module to enhance the ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity among Chinese AMUs. It hopes that students can discuss and collaborate using English to fulfill various creative drama tasks through mastering collaboration skills. During the procedure, students have the opportunities to practice and improve their ESC, and it is their collaborating efforts to generate a creative product as a collaborative learning outcome. Since speaking competence alone is insufficient, a creative drama product can be accomplished based on collaboration.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

English is a compulsory subject in China's standard national curriculum. Many Chinese students begin learning English at an early age, some even in kindergarten. They generally receive their first English lessons in the third grade in primary school. There are estimated to be around 400 million Chinese people learning English, and the number of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) takers reached 300,000 in 2018, ranking first globally (Li, 2020).

In this study, AMUs refer to undergraduates who first need to take exams for specialized art courses, then take the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in China, and finally be recruited through advanced admission (Wang, 2017). Art majors here include but do not include Broadcasting and Hosting Major; TV, Radio Editing and Directing Major; Music Performance Major; Musicology Major; Visual Communication Major; Fine Art Major; Environmental Design Major; Ceramic Art

Design Major; and Product Design Major. Compared to the general undergraduates, AMUs have the psychological characteristics as follows: a. sensitivity, rich imagination, good at image thinking (Wang, 2017), b. active mind, inclined to verbal expression, versatility (Zhang, 2016), c. chasing romantic sentiment and aesthetic feeling (Li, 2004), d. pursuing uniqueness and individuality (Zhang, 2006), e. having strong performance desires (Su, 2008), f. advocating freedom, lacking organization, and opposing discipline (Zhang, 2012). The respondents of this study are art major sophomores aged 19 to 22 years old who have adapted to the university learning mode for a whole year and have a certain degree of English language foundation, learning ability, and organizational ability, with a relatively high learning initiative.

Due to the substantial amount of time and effort dedicated to their specialized courses since high school, they often have a relatively limited understanding of general education courses, particularly College English Courses (Qing, 2021; Tan, 2018). Tan (2020) survived and summarized three main characteristics of English learning among AMUs: first, a weak foundation in the previous stage; second, poor absorption capacity; third, deficient learning motivation. In fact, AMUs have more advantages and need more opportunities to develop English-speaking competence (Liu & Li, 2019; Tan, 2018), collaboration skills (Kim et al., 2018; Nolan & O'Flynn, 2022), and creativity (Miller, 2018; Silvia & Nusbaum, 2012).

Speaking English has become an essential skill that needs to be obtained for AMUs (Qing, 2021; Wu, 2020). Proficiency in English speaking allows students to participate in global art forums, exhibitions, and collaborations (Han, 2021). Also, many prestigious art institutions, international meetings, and social media networks require English as a communication tool for admission and employment. However, the College English Course occupies a marginalized and disadvantaged position

within the education system (Yang et al., 2020). Despite years of learning English, they still struggle to communicate effectively in English to meet their employment requirements (Tan, 2020; Li et al., 2022). The conventional teaching method for English language education prioritizes the memorization of vocabulary and sentence translation, restricting opportunities for speaking practice (Niu & Liu, 2013; Wu, 2019). Although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been prominent in foreign language teaching for the last two decades, AMUs' overall achievement is below the expectations of the university curriculum (Nie & Fan, 2018; Qian, 2021). Thereby, how to hone their speaking skills tends to be a crucial question (Ma & Wang, 2021; Meng, 2022).

According to CETG (2020), AMUs should attain proficiency in the ESC at three levels: Basic, Improved, and Developed. The corresponding ESC requirement of sophomores is the "Improved Level" (Table 1.1): Students can demonstrate the ability to engage in fluent and coherent communication across various contexts, including general topics, social issues, and professional discussions. The language used should reflect structural clarity, phonetic accuracy, rich vocabulary, and fluency, enabling effective elaboration, explanation, comparison, and summarization of familiar concepts and ideas, among which the correct "pronunciation and intonation," "rich vocabulary," and "fluent expression" are referred to as the dimensions of ESC in this study.

**Table 1.1***Requirements of ESC Improved Level for Art Major Sophomores*

| Level          | English-speaking Competence Descriptions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Improved Level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Be able to have fluent conversations on a general topic.</li> <li>b) Be able to discuss hot social issues or familiar topics in the professional field with others.</li> <li>c) Be able to express personal opinions, feelings, viewpoints, etc., and make appropriate responses and comments to others' speeches and interjections.</li> <li>d) Be able to state facts and reasons, describe events or objects, etc.</li> <li>e) Be able to elaborate, explain, compare, and summarize familiar viewpoints, concepts, theories, etc.</li> </ul> <p>The structure of language expression is relatively clear.</p> <p>The pronunciation and intonation are basically correct, the vocabulary is rich, and the expression is fluent.</p> <p>Have the capability to use oral expression and communication strategies well.</p> |

**Source:** Translated from the CETG (2020).

Furthermore, with the internationalization of China's economy, the steady promotion of the Belt and Road National Strategy, and the gradual implementation of the "Double First-class" construction of universities, all walks of life in society put forward higher requirements for interdisciplinary and practical talents (MOE, 2020). The rise of China necessitates a shift of talent to transform from a "population-bonus country to a talent-bonus one, from a China-making country to a China-creating one, and from an investment-driven economy to a talent-driven one" (Guo, 2016), who are not only good at their professions, but also proficient in English, and capable of collaborating with others to become global citizens. Therefore, cultivating the 21st Century learning skills (4Cs skills), i.e., communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, is becoming a focus of education reform. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) asserts that collaboration boosts creativity and solution quality through exposure to the ideas of fellow group members. In this study, these two skills are of particular concern, namely, collaboration skills and creativity.

Collaboration has been acknowledged as a significant educational outcome in recent years and is universally regarded as the most crucial skill by all sectors of society (Child & Shaw, 2016; Kuhn, 2015; Lee & Yang, 2020). By enhancing their skills to collaborate, Chinese AMUs can improve their interdisciplinary communication, creative output, career prospects, and professional growth. In China, collaboration was clearly stated in the *Decision of the State Council on the Reform and Development of Basic Education*: “Encourage collaborative learning, promote mutual communication and common development among students, and promote teachers and students to learn from each other” (MOE, 2001). Also, *the State Council’s decision on the issuance of the overall promotion of world-class universities and Notice of the overall plan for the construction of first-class disciplines* (MOE, 2015) required to “Promote first-class undergraduate education and improve the quality of personnel cultivation,” which includes the cultivation of their collaboration abilities. Later, *Education Modernization in China 2035* (CPC Central Committee, 2019) pointed out that “It is necessary to strengthen the cultivation of practical, collaborative, and creativity abilities, as well as to promote the teaching methods that are heuristic, inquiry-based, participatory, and collaborative,” which further emphasizes the importance of collaborative abilities. Hence, collaboration skills are indispensable for undergraduates in their future study and work in the present society (Qian & Qian, 2019). The assumption that the collaborative skills required should come naturally is erroneous. Instead, these skills must be learned and cultivated in the classroom.

Also, collaboration can combine the potential and expertise of participants to generate creativity (Knoll et al., 2010). Therefore, a close relationship can be observed between collaboration skills and creativity. Since 2000, China has

vigorously advocated creativity as an essential element of its educational system (Preus, 2007; Zhao, 2009). With innovative and creative education advocated by colleges and universities in China, the research on college students' creativity has gradually increased (Chen, 2011; Gong & Cao, 2017; Sun & Shi, 2015; Wei, 2020; Zuo, 2017). In 2006, Chinese leaders planned to turn China into an innovative society by 2020 (MOE, 2010). The *Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)* (MOE, 2010, p. 18) proposed the training model of innovative talents that "Stimulate students' curiosity, foster their interests and hobbies, and create a conducive environment for independent thinking, unhindered exploration, and creativity." Recently, the *Administrative Measures for the National College Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program* (MOE, 2019) proclaimed, "It should strengthen the cultivation of innovation and entrepreneurship ability of college students and comprehensively improve the quality of talent training." Also, it was required in the *Implementation Plan for Review and Evaluation of Undergraduate Education and Teaching in Ordinary Institutions of Higher Learning (2021-2025)* (MOE, 2021, p. 6) that the "Talent Training Program in higher education should focus on the cultivation of student's creativity and innovation ability". In addition, it was stated in the CETG (2020, p. 23) that "Colleges and universities should help students enhance the spirit of creativity and innovation".

The emphasis on creativity in national education policies reflects the state's prioritization of cultivating creativity. Creativity is the core foundation of all artistic disciplines, shaping the future of art, media, and design (Chen, 2024). For AMUs, creativity constitutes a foundational concept within educational and professional domains (Ji & Chang, 2024). AMUs need to master creativity to become innovative

and creative problem solvers (Hua et al., 2020). However, creativity was not taught as an independent subject in most schools and universities; instead, it was infused into the regular, highly conventional, and knowledge-centered curriculum (Cheng, 2010; Xiandong & Wei, 2019). Most education systems favor training students with substantial memory and analytical abilities with rote memorization and recitation (Dello-iacovo, 2009; Xu & Sun, 2021). Consequently, students lose the opportunities to practice creativity. Fortunately, many studies have found a way to integrate creativity into foreign language learning since creativity is “at the heart of all successful communication” (Jones & Richards, 2016) and is inherently linked to language (Schoff, 2016). It is considered that creativity can be better developed in language classes than in any other subject, and language activities can help students develop their creativity (Durdas et al., 2022; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023).

EFL learners can improve their language ability through a more tightly coordinated textbook, which offers increased opportunities to engage in targeted language forms across various activities (Doe, 2021). However, the utilization rate of current textbooks is rather low, thus not achieving their intended role in English teaching (Meng, 2020), and far from meeting the practical needs of AMUs at different universities in China (Niu & Liu, 2013; Wang & Yuan, 2019; Xie, 2018).

Given the background of English language study and the psychological characteristics of AMUs, it is essential to identify a more effective learning approach and an appropriate English-speaking module. A substantial and expanding body of literature has proved that drama techniques are influential tools for teaching and learning, with profound positive impacts on a student’s academic, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Angelianawati, 2019; Bessadet, 2022; Bsharat & Barahmeh, 2020; Dawoud et al., 2020; Holmwood, 2021; Gabriella, 2014;

Kumar et al., 2022; Mreiwed et al., 2017; Romero & Tandingan, 2022; Yildirim et al., 2022). In the 1980s, educational drama was introduced in China (Li & Li, 2018). In 2001, drama began to enter the “Art Curriculum” system officially; the Ministry of Education formulated the *Full-time Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards (experimental draft)*, which was the first time to put drama into disciplined teaching (Shi & Zeng, 2022). Students who struggle in conventional schooling models due to language difficulties, learning disabilities, or physical or mental disabilities can shine in drama (Clark, 2013). Because of their weak English foundation, they experienced embarrassment and inhibition when speaking in front of their peers, leading to frustration, burden, and lack of collaboration (Torrico, 2015). Also, over-reliance on teacher instruction nurtured through conventional classrooms would prevent their active, voluntary participation in English learning. Although educational drama in English language education is a hot topic in current academic research in China (Gu & Luo, 2023), most of the research results are theoretical discussions on educational drama, and quantitative research with an empirical orientation is relatively scarce (Fu, 2018).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Many Chinese students continue to experience challenges in using English for effective communication and applying their classroom knowledge to practical contexts (Tan, 2020). This deficiency in speaking competence poses a significant drawback for EFL learners in China regarding vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, reflected in their unsatisfactory results on the College English Test Spoken English Test Band Four (CET-SET-4) (Bai, 2018; Zheng, 2019). The scores of CET-SET-4 are divided into seven levels: A+, A, B+, B, C+, C, and D. A+ and A belong

to the “Excellent” level; B+ and B belong to the “Good” level; C+ and C belong to the “Qualified” level. While the D level will not show oral scores in the report.

Wu (2024) surveyed three universities and found that about half of the students achieved 550 points or above in the written test of CET-4, but only got a good or qualified grade in CET-SET-4. It could be seen that the ESC of many college students did not match the written test ability, and there is a large room for improvement. To further illustrate students’ ESC problem, the researcher conducted second-hand data analysis on the CET-SET-4 scores over the past four years at P University (pseudonym), the data was provided by its Office of Academic Affairs. The priority level predominantly fell within the range of qualified grade, which represented the minimum passing threshold. There were occasional instances of Level B and no occurrences of A+. Notably, there was only a single instance of Level A. This implied that most of the undergraduates’ ESCs were unoptimistic and fell below the required standards of the CETG and the College English Course Syllabus.

The most apparent issue of ESC is represented by the lack of English vocabulary (Liu, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Throughout English learning, memorizing and mastering vocabulary is one of the important challenges AMUs face, which seriously affects their English acquisition effectiveness (Guo & Liao, 2024). They often struggle with English vocabulary due to the conventional learning styles and an input-poor environment (Liu, 2016; Wei, 2025). Limited exposure beyond textbooks results in rigid vocabulary memorization, making it time-consuming (Sun, 2018; Zhang, 2021). The extensive vocabulary presented in textbooks may potentially undermine AMUs’ interest in language learning; even if they manage to memorize the spelling of words, they often encounter challenges in using these words correctly,

which can impede the development of their ESC (Liu, 2020; Xie, 2018; Zhang, 2021).

Then, the issue of English pronunciation is often widely overlooked from primary schools in China (Meng, 2020). The inclusion of an English phonetics course is inconsistent, and in some cases, it is notably absent (Hui, 2021; Yan, 2018). Chinese students traditionally focus on consonants and vowels learning from their junior high school, neglecting supramolecular phonemes learning, resulting in a deficit in knowledge and skills (Shang, 2020). Specifically, coming from a non-stressed language background, Chinese AMUs often struggle with English word stress and sentence stress acquisition (Bu & Zhou, 2021; Guo, 2022; Hu, 2020). Furthermore, linking words poses a challenge among Chinese students as the correct rate of all types of links is low, lacking knowledge of when and how to connect words (Hu, 2020; Wu, 2021), which had a negative impact on their English listening and speaking competence (Wang, 2022). The typical intonation problems encountered by Chinese AMUs include poor pronunciation accuracy, inaccurate intonation patterns, and insufficient mastery of intonational features (Gui, 2020). In addition, the issues are also reflected in misused patterns, a lack of emphasis, and suitable emotions for the context (Yang et al., 2020). Many students exhibit monotonous English with little pitch variation or misuse of falling intonation, struggling to express different tones and attitudes accurately (Jia, 2018; Shang, 2020; Yang et al., 2020).

For the issue of fluency, there is a predominant emphasis on reading and recitation in English language education, leading to a deficiency in speaking fluency (Niu, 2021). Additionally, the teaching of spoken English tends to prioritize accuracy over fluency (Zhang, 2020). This results in some students' unnatural pauses,

hesitations, and difficulty choosing the right words or pronouncing them accurately during communication, even a serious “jam” situation in opening their mouths, hindering their fluent speech (Wei, 2016; Yang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2022).

Despite the English speaking difficulties, there is a prevalent issue of insufficient development in their collaboration skills, disharmony, and even significant conflicts when communicating and working with classmates and teachers, making it difficult for them to integrate into employers and society after graduation (Zhu, 2020). It is also reflected in differences in inactive participation and a superficial form of collaboration (Gao, 2021; Qin & Zheng, 2022). This challenge is commonly observed in tertiary education, highlighting the need for improvement (Guo, 2016; Horne & Tzipora Rakedzon, 2022; Lin, 2017). To further identify student collaboration skills deficiencies, the researcher conducted a preliminary survey in 2023 among three public universities in Henan Province, China. The survey included 249 AMUs respondents from the five main categories of art majors, and 240 valid questionnaires were collected. This survey used the questionnaire named Collaboration Self-assessment Tool (CSAT) (Appendix H) by Ofstedal and Dahlberg (2009). Problems of collaboration skills are categorized into two dimensions, i.e., interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills. The questionnaire comprises 11 items, each rated from 1 to 4 points. The total score ranges from a minimum of 11 points to a maximum of 44 points (see Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2***Preliminary Survey on Collaboration Skills*

| Descriptive Statistics |     |         |         |       |      |          |
|------------------------|-----|---------|---------|-------|------|----------|
|                        | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | SD   | Variance |
| Interpersonal skills   | 240 | 6.00    | 16.00   | 9.86  | 2.12 | 4.509    |
| Intrapersonal skills   | 240 | 10.00   | 20.00   | 14.59 | 2.09 | 4.385    |
| Collaboration skills   | 240 | 18.00   | 33.00   | 24.46 | 3.06 | 9.362    |
| Valid N (listwise)     | 240 |         |         |       |      |          |

According to Ofstedal and Dahlberg's (2009) scoring rubric, scores of 11-25 represent "emerging collaboration skills", 26-34 represent "developing collaboration skills", and 35-44 represent "established collaboration skills". The results revealed a foundational understanding of collaboration skills among AMUs. The minimum score for interpersonal skills is 6 points, the maximum score is 16 points, and the mean score is 9.86 points ( $SD = 2.12$ ). The minimum score for intrapersonal skills is 10 points, the maximum score is 20, and the mean score is 14.59 ( $SD = 2.09$ ). Comparatively, their intrapersonal skills are better than their interpersonal skills, which indicates they are better at managing themselves than interacting with others. For the total collaboration skills, the minimum score is 18 points, the maximum score is 33 points, and the mean score is 24.46 ( $SD = 3.06$ ). The findings suggest that the collaboration skills of AMUs are mainly at an "emerging level," indicating a requirement for further development through practice.

In the early 21st century, Chinese education officials noticed a lack of creativity hindering global competitiveness (Osborne, 2014). However, the education system did not prioritize creative thinking, emphasizing rote learning (Oliver et al., 2015). Some universities associated "creativity" mainly with Arts and Design Courses, neglecting other courses (Papaleontiou-Louca et al., 2014). Despite the

reforms in China, there is little evidence of a notable improvement in students' creativity (Chen, 2024).

Influenced by Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) and schemas, students tend to follow teachers' instructions without questioning, hindering their creative thinking abilities (Wu, 2019; Yan, 2024). Due to the emphasis on standardized examinations and tested subjects, they become passive learners and struggle to generate unusual and unique ideas (Jia & Lian, 2020; Yan, 2024). Creative individuals are characterized by their willingness to explore novel ideas and approaches; however, Chinese students frequently engage in self-censorship, opting for conventional responses, which can constrain their divergent thinking (Fu et al., 2022). Their challenge lies in breaking free from schemas or prior knowledge, thinking broadly, and not just seeking teachers' approval for a single correct answer (Fu et al., 2022; Jia & Lian, 2020; Yan, 2024).

Moreover, English-speaking textbooks generally used by Chinese AMUs at present are *Audio-visual and Speaking Courses* from different publishers, such as *New Horizon College English Audio-visual and Speaking Course* from Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and *Newstart College English Audio-visual and Speaking Course* from Shanghai Foreign Language Press. The listening section is not separated from the speaking section, so the oral training is not systematic and targeted (Hui, 2021). There are few or no explanations and related activities about pronunciation or fluency, which are the weaknesses of Chinese AMUs. In addition, for the integrated content, there are too many tasks and activities to be finished in a minimal class time, which makes teachers and students feel pressured to complete all of them. Thus, the quality of these tasks and activities is compromised, and the aims of these tasks and activities are partially achieved (Meng, 2020). Some students

using the textbook stated that speaking tasks have a limited effect on improving their speaking skills, hinting that speaking exercises may not be productive (Li, 2009; Niu & Liu, 2013; Xie, 2018). Finally, the stereotyped learning content and the sometimes-irrelevant learning materials, which involve the mechanical drilling of decontextualized words and sentences in a decidedly uncommunicative way, make it difficult to arouse students' learning interests. Therefore, these textbooks cannot meet the AMUs' needs (Wang & Yuan, 2019; Xie, 2018).

Based on the issues discussed above, there is an urgent need for a newly designed English-speaking Module to enhance the ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity of Chinese AMUs. However, although there are abundant advanced studies that have discussed the benefits of drama techniques and drama in education abroad (Abraham, 2018; Bsharat & Barahmeh, 2020; Gabriella, 2014; McGovern, 2018; Romero & Tandingan, 2022), not many frontier studies investigated drama in education in China. For most Chinese researchers, it is still a new field to explore (Wu, 2021; Zheng & Cziboly, 2022). Besides, existing research in China primarily focuses on primary and secondary school students (Dai, 2022; Ma & Liu, 2022; Ren & Ke, 2023; Zheng, 2021) on Chinese, Mathematics, English, etc. Up to now, insufficient focus has been given to undergraduates (Cao, 2017; Ge et al., 2018; Gu & Luo, 2023; W. Yan, 2019), especially AMUs (Zhao, 2020), who have an urgent need for this active, effective, and practical approach in improving their ESCs. Furthermore, despite some attempts have been made to introduce the drama approach into the classroom, and a certain number of empirical studies have proved its effects on ESC (e.g., Astiandani & Mustofa, 2021; Brouillette, 2012; Bsharat & Barahmeh, 2020; Hışmanoğlu & Çolak, 2019), there has been few in-depth investigations of combining the other two competencies, i.e., collaboration skills and creativity, which

are closely related to drama and language learning. Until 2023, no doctoral dissertations specifically studied educational drama in college English education (Gu & Luo, 2023). According to Richards (2006), the benefits of developing materials can be adjusted to cater to the specific needs of learners and institutions, providing flexibility to make revisions as needed. It has not yet developed a systematic module based on drama techniques under the sociocultural and experiential learning theories for Chinese AMUs to enhance their ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity according to their learning needs. To this end, this study will attempt to narrow this gap.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This study aims to design and develop a DTB Speaking Module to enhance Chinese AMUs' ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To design and develop a DTB Speaking Module to enhance Chinese AMUs' ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity.
2. To examine whether there is any significant difference in the mean scores of ESC post-tests between the experimental and control groups, and in terms of:
  - a. vocabulary,
  - b. pronunciation,
  - c. fluency.

3. To examine whether there is any significant difference in the mean scores of collaboration skills post-questionnaires between the experimental and control groups, and in terms of:
  - a. interpersonal skills,
  - b. intrapersonal skills.
4. To examine whether there is any significant difference in the mean scores of creativity post-tests between the experimental and control groups, and in terms of:
  - a. originality,
  - b. fluency,
  - c. flexibility.
5. To explore the students' learning experiences using the DTB Speaking Module with ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

Based on the objectives mentioned above, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference in the mean scores of ESC post-tests between the experimental and control groups, and in terms of:
  - a. vocabulary,
  - b. pronunciation,
  - c. fluency?

2. Is there any significant difference in the mean scores of collaboration skills post-questionnaires between the experimental and control groups, and in terms of:
  - a. interpersonal skills,
  - b. intrapersonal skills?
3. Is there any significant difference in the mean scores of creativity post-tests between the experimental and control groups, and in terms of:
  - a. originality,
  - b. fluency,
  - c. flexibility?
4. What are the students' learning experiences using the DTB Speaking Module with ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity?

## **1.6 Research Hypothesis**

In this study, the null hypothesis is used for hypothesis testing to establish the statistical significance of the results. This study proposes three null hypotheses:

- H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean scores of ESC post-tests between the experimental and control group and in terms of:
- a. vocabulary,
  - b. pronunciation,
  - c. fluency.

**H02:** There is no significant difference in the mean scores of collaboration skills post-questionnaires between the experimental and control groups and in terms of:

- a. interpersonal skills,
- b. intrapersonal skills.

**H03:** There is no significant difference in the mean scores of creativity post-tests between the experimental and control groups and in terms of:

- a. originality,
- b. fluency,
- c. flexibility.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes a hands-on module based on appropriate drama techniques for Chinese AMUs to enhance ESC, collaboration skills, and creativity. This provides an important opportunity to touch on “learning by doing” and a student-centered approach. The findings of this study are beneficial for advancements in this particular field. The present study is important for college English teachers, AMUs, policymakers, module designers, and researchers.

This module represents a bold step forward in college English teaching reform, tackling existing challenges through the innovative use of diverse, interactive, and engaging drama techniques. It not only enriches the classroom experience but also serves as a practical toolkit that eases the burden on English teachers during lesson preparation. Rather than spending excessive time designing activities from

scratch, educators can draw upon the ready-made materials and structured frameworks provided by the module. This not only reduces the workload on teachers but also ensures consistency and quality in the delivery of content.

For AMUs, the module is thoughtfully and systematically designed following the principles of the “zone of proximal development”. By customizing its content to address the unique challenges and aspirations of students, it provides an engaging and comprehensive array of learning strategies, materials, and activities, ranging from compelling texts to dynamic videos, that align with students’ interests. Through this approach, the module nurtures essential skills such as effective communication, collaboration, and creativity. As a groundbreaking addition to the college English curriculum, this module holds broader implications.

For policymakers, it sparks conversations around the selection of textbooks, optimizing class schedules, and fostering deeper engagement among teachers and students. For module designers, it lays out a clear and actionable blueprint for developing learner-centered modules, offering practical insights and inspiration for future innovations. From a researcher’s perspective, this study offers a treasure trove of data, ranging from test scores and questionnaires to rich narratives of students’ learning experiences. These findings not only pave the way for further refinement of the module to meet evolving trends but also provide a valuable foundation for advancing research in this field.

Ultimately, this study serves as a beacon for future explorations, inspiring new ideas and offering thoughtful recommendations for shaping the future of English language education.

## **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of any particular study encompass potential weaknesses that are often beyond the researcher's control, such as the scope, validity, generalizability, and reliability of the research findings (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Owing to the enrolment restriction put forth by the target classes, it was not viable to employ a true experimental design to manage the validity issues of research results properly (Gopalan et al., 2020). Therefore, the quasi-experimental research design with the recruitment of intact classes was adopted to overcome this enrollment limitation. The quasi-experimental design exhibits some intrinsic limitations relative to a true experiment, primarily due to the non-random assignment of participants (Handley et al., 2018).

First, the initial target population comprised students from two campuses of P University. Consequently, the study's findings may differ if the target population is expanded in future research. Second, the reduced control over independent variables made it challenging to establish a definitive cause-and-effect relationship between the independent variable and the observed outcomes. Third, given the content of the designed module, the intervention was conducted for eight weeks. Extending this duration may potentially lead to different outcomes. Lastly, students had unrestricted access to a wide range of learning resources and facilities, which may have introduced additional variables that could influence the research outcomes.

## **1.9 Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations refer to the boundaries or parameters that the researcher intentionally establishes for the study to ensure its aims and objectives remain achievable (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study also has a few delimitations.

Firstly, the researcher selected research sites specifically within Pingdingshan City, Henan Province, which delimited the generalizability of the study. Consequently, the findings may not be directly applicable to other Chinese universities. Secondly, this research targeted AMU sophomores from specific art majors while excluding other academic grades and majors. Sophomores were chosen because of their familiarity with university learning methods, established English language foundation, and high level of initiative. Thirdly, the sample size consisted of 70 students from two intact classes, as this study employed a quasi-experimental design in an educational setting and utilized purposive sampling. Lastly, this module focused on three dimensions of English-speaking vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. However, it may overlook other dimensions like accuracy, grammar, and syntactic complexity, because these problems are more prominent among Chinese AMUs, and it is impossible to include all dimensions in a limited study.

### **1.10 Operational Definitions**

Within the context of this study, certain terms are employed, and their meanings are defined as follows:

#### **a. Drama Techniques**

Drama techniques, also referred to as drama strategies or conventions, provide students with opportunities to utilize their personalities to create material that forms a component of the language class (Maley & Duff, 1982). In this study, drama techniques refer to incorporating dramatic elements and methods into the educational process to engage students more dynamically and interactively, including storytelling, choral speaking, role play, simulation, and other drama activities, fostering an immersive and experiential learning environment.