

## An Analysis of Students' Linguistic and Performance Challenges in Performing *Under the Gaslight* by Augustine Daly

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Received : January 29<sup>th</sup> , 2026    Accepted : February 16<sup>th</sup> , 2026    Published : February 17<sup>th</sup> , 2026

### Abstract

This study investigate the Drama is as an effective pedagogical approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) due to its potential to promote communicative competence, learner engagement, and expressive skills. However, the use of classical English drama, particularly nineteenth-century texts, may pose significant challenges for EFL learners. This study aims to analyze the linguistic and performance-related difficulties experienced by 23 fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian in performing *Under the Gaslight* by Augustine Daly. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation during rehearsal and performance sessions. The findings reveal that students encountered major difficulties involving both language and performance demands, including archaic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, pronunciation problems, stage fright, limited voice projection, inadequate body movement, and weak emotional delivery. These challenges were closely interconnected, with language barriers contributing to psychological anxiety and subsequently affecting overall performance quality. The study concludes that while drama remains a valuable instructional tool in ELT, the use of classical drama requires careful pedagogical mediation, including linguistic scaffolding, cultural contextualization, and systematic performance training. The findings are expected to contribute to the improvement of drama instruction, text selection, and teaching strategies in English teacher education programs, particularly in equipping prospective English teachers with the competence to implement drama-based learning effectively in future classrooms

**Keywords:** Students' Difficulties, Drama, Performance

### INTRODUCTION

Drama has long been recognized as an effective pedagogical tool in English Language Teaching (ELT) due to its potential to create an interactive, meaningful, and communicative learning environment (Yalew et al., 2025). Through role-play, dialogue

performance, and character interaction, drama encourages learners to use language authentically and contextually, thereby supporting the development of communicative competence. In addition, drama allows students to engage emotionally and creatively, which can enhance motivation, learner autonomy, and active participation in language learning (Mastrothanasis & Kladaki, 2025)

Beyond its linguistic benefits, drama also contributes significantly to students' psychological development, particularly in building self-confidence and reducing speaking anxiety. Many EFL learners experience fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, and reluctance to speak English in front of others (Bárkányi & Brash, 2025; Qizi & Gayratovna, 2021). Drama activities provide a supportive space in which students perform through fictional characters, helping to lower affective filters and encourage risk-taking (Krashen, 1985). Rehearsal and performance practices further assist students in improving pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and voice projection, which are essential skills for prospective English teachers (Altun, 2019; Baños et al., 2019)

However, the effectiveness of drama-based learning is highly dependent on the choice of dramatic texts and instructional scaffolding. Classical English dramas, particularly those written in the nineteenth century, often present serious challenges for Indonesian EFL students. *Under the Gaslight* by Augustine Daly, for instance, is characterized by archaic vocabulary, complex syntactic patterns, and idiomatic expressions that differ significantly from contemporary English usage. These linguistic features frequently hinder students' comprehension of the script, pronunciation accuracy, and fluency during performance (Fry, 2024; Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015; Rahimpour, 2020)

In addition to linguistic complexity, the cultural and historical contexts embedded in nineteenth-century drama further complicate students' performance. Social norms, moral values, gender roles, and theatrical conventions portrayed in *Under the Gaslight* may be unfamiliar to Indonesian students, leading to difficulties in interpreting characters' motivations, emotions, and interpersonal relationships (Eripuddin et al., 2023). As a result, students often struggle with character immersion, emotional expression, and natural stage performance, which may increase performance anxiety and reduce self-confidence (Eripuddin et al., 2024)

Previous studies on drama in ELT have demonstrated that drama can enhance communicative competence, pronunciation, and learner engagement; however, they also report persistent linguistic difficulties such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors, and grammatical inaccuracy, as well as psychological barriers including anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Altun, 2019; Arda Tuncdemir, 2025; Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015). These challenges tend to intensify when learners are required to perform classical drama texts written in archaic English. Despite these findings, most existing studies focus on modern plays, role-play activities, or short dramatic improvisations, rather than full-length classical drama performances.

Therefore, a clear research gap exists in the limited empirical investigation of how nineteenth-century English drama simultaneously affects linguistic performance and stage performance skills in EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesian higher education. Research that integrates linguistic barriers (such as archaic vocabulary and complex sentence structures) with performance-related challenges (such as voice projection, intonation, body movement, and emotional delivery) remains scarce. Moreover, few studies have explored

these issues from the perspective of English education students who are being prepared as future teachers.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the linguistic and performance-related difficulties experienced by fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian in performing *Under the Gaslight* by Augustine Daly. This research focuses on linguistic barriers, including archaic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and pronunciation, as well as performance challenges related to voice projection, intonation, body movement, facial expression, and emotional delivery. Employing a descriptive qualitative method through classroom observation, interviews, and documentation, this study seeks to provide in-depth insights into the factors that hinder effective drama performance in an EFL context.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the improvement of drama instruction, the selection of appropriate dramatic texts, and the development of instructional strategies in English Education programs, particularly those integrating classical literature into performance-based language learning. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the major linguistic difficulties encountered by students in performing classical English drama; (2) to examine the performance-related challenges experienced during rehearsal and stage presentation.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the linguistic and performance-related difficulties experienced by EFL students in performing nineteenth-century English drama. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges in a natural classroom setting (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative methods such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were not deemed suitable for this study, as the research did not aim to test causal relationships or measure variables statistically, but rather to capture the complexity and contextual nature of students' linguistic and theatrical experiences. The study focused on analyzing both linguistic barriers—including archaic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and pronunciation difficulties—and performance challenges, such as voice projection, intonation, body movement, facial expression, and emotional delivery during the performance of *Under the Gaslight* by Augustine Daly.

### Participants

The participants of this study were fifth-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Indonesia, who were taking a drama course as part of their curriculum. A total of 23 participated in the study and were selected using purposive sampling, as they were directly involved in performing the selected drama text. These students were prospective English teachers and had previously completed foundational courses in speaking, pronunciation, and literature, making them suitable subjects for investigating both linguistic competence and performance skills in drama-based learning.

The participants were assigned roles in the drama performance based on their interests and abilities, and all students were involved in rehearsal and stage performance

activities. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms in reporting the findings.

### **Instruments**

To obtain comprehensive data, this study employed multiple qualitative instruments, including classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis.

#### **1. Classroom Observation**

Classroom observations were conducted during rehearsal and performance sessions to examine students' linguistic and theatrical performance. An observation checklist and field notes were used to record indicators such as pronunciation accuracy, fluency, intonation, voice projection, body movement, facial expression, and emotional delivery. Observations also focused on students' interactions, participation levels, and responses to linguistic difficulties in the script.

#### **2. Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their perceptions of the difficulties encountered while performing *Under the Gaslight*. Interview questions addressed students' experiences with archaic vocabulary, comprehension of the script, pronunciation challenges, confidence levels, anxiety during performance, and strategies used to overcome these difficulties. The flexible interview format allowed for probing questions to obtain deeper insights into students' thoughts and feelings.

#### **3. Documentation**

Documentation included students' drama scripts, rehearsal notes, video recordings of performances, and reflective journals. These documents were analyzed to identify recurring linguistic errors, performance issues, and patterns of improvement throughout the rehearsal process. Video recordings were particularly useful for analyzing non-verbal aspects of performance, such as gestures, posture, and facial expressions.

### **Research Procedure**

The research procedure consisted of several stages:

#### **1. Preparation Stage**

The researcher selected *Under the Gaslight* by Augustine Daly as the drama text and obtained permission from the institution and participants. Observation instruments and interview guidelines were developed and validated by expert judgment. Students were introduced to the drama project and briefed on the objectives of the study.

#### **2. Implementation Stage**

Students participated in a series of drama-based learning activities over several weeks. These activities included script reading, vocabulary analysis, pronunciation practice, character interpretation, and rehearsal sessions. The researcher conducted classroom observations during these activities to identify linguistic and performance-related difficulties. Students performed selected scenes from the play as part of their course assessment.

## Data Collection Stage

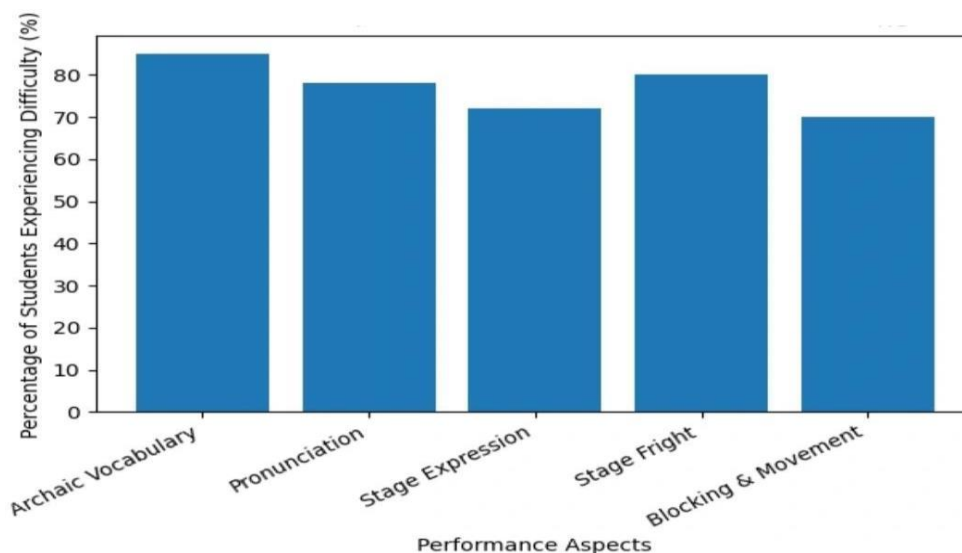
Data were collected through continuous observation, interviews conducted after rehearsal and performance sessions, and documentation review. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

## Data Analysis Stage

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The researcher coded the data to identify themes related to linguistic difficulties and performance challenges. Triangulation of data sources was applied to enhance the credibility of the findings.

## FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study derived from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis conducted during the rehearsal and performance of *Under the Gaslight* by Augustine Daly. The findings focus on identifying the linguistic and performance-related difficulties experienced by fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Pasir Pengaraian. Specifically, the results highlight challenges related to archaic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, pronunciation, and fluency, as well as performance aspects such as voice projection, intonation, body movement, facial expression, and emotional delivery. The data are organized thematically to reflect recurring patterns observed across data sources, providing a comprehensive description of the factors that hinder students' effective drama performance in an EFL context such as the following chart.



**Figure 1: Percentage of students' difficulties in drama performance**

Based on the data illustrated in the figure, students experienced multiple interrelated difficulties in performing the drama *Under the Gaslight*, encompassing both linguistic and performance aspects.

The most prominent difficulty faced by students was archaic vocabulary, with approximately 85% of students reporting challenges in understanding and using outdated

words and expressions found in the nineteenth-century script. This difficulty affected not only their comprehension of the dialogue but also their ability to deliver lines naturally and confidently. Limited familiarity with archaic terms often caused hesitation during performance, disrupted fluency, and increased dependence on memorization rather than meaningful interpretation of the text.

Stage fright emerged as another major challenge, affecting around 80% of the students. Many participants reported feelings of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety when performing in front of an audience. This psychological barrier negatively influenced voice projection, emotional expression, and overall stage presence. The pressure to perform accurately in a foreign language, combined with the complexity of the script, intensified students' performance anxiety.

In terms of pronunciation, nearly 78% of students experienced difficulty pronouncing unfamiliar words and maintaining accurate stress and intonation patterns. The presence of archaic vocabulary and complex sentence structures increased the likelihood of mispronunciation, which in turn reduced students' confidence and fluency during performance. Pronunciation problems were particularly evident during fast-paced dialogues and emotionally intense scenes.

Difficulties related to stage expression, reported by approximately 72% of students, were associated with limited emotional delivery, facial expression, and character immersion. Many students struggled to convey appropriate emotions due to insufficient understanding of the characters' psychological depth and the cultural context of the play. This resulted in performances that appeared rigid or monotonous rather than expressive and natural.

Finally, about 70% of students encountered challenges in blocking and movement, including coordinating gestures, positioning on stage, and synchronizing body movement with dialogue. These difficulties were often linked to a lack of theatrical experience and uncertainty about how to physically embody characters while simultaneously focusing on language accuracy.

Overall, the findings indicate that students' difficulties in drama performance were not isolated but interconnected. Linguistic challenges, particularly archaic vocabulary and pronunciation, contributed to psychological barriers such as stage fright, which then affected performance elements like expression, movement, and emotional delivery. These results suggest that performing classical English drama in an EFL context requires substantial linguistic scaffolding and performance guidance to support students' successful engagement.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that students experienced substantial linguistic and performance-related difficulties when performing *Under the Gaslight*, a nineteenth-century English drama. These difficulties are consistent with previous research emphasizing that while drama is a powerful pedagogical tool in ELT, its effectiveness is highly dependent on text accessibility, linguistic complexity, and students' psychological readiness (Fry, 2024; Rahimipour, 2020). The prominence of archaic vocabulary as the most significant challenge confirms earlier assertions that classical literary texts often exceed the linguistic competence of EFL learners, particularly in non-native English contexts ((Lehtonen et al., 2016a; Speers, 2020)

The high percentage of students struggling with archaic vocabulary aligns with studies indicating that unfamiliar lexical items disrupt comprehension, reduce fluency, and shift learners' attention from meaning-making to mere memorization (Angelianawati, 2019; Lehtonen et al., 2016b). In drama performance, this lexical burden becomes more pronounced because students are required not only to understand the text but also to deliver it spontaneously and expressively (Alshraideh & Alahmdi, 2020; Goksel, 2019). Similar findings were reported by Crystal (2003), who argue that historical English poses phonological, semantic, and pragmatic challenges that modern EFL learners are rarely trained to manage (Eripuddin et al., 2022).

Pronunciation difficulties identified in this study further corroborate previous research showing that complex vocabulary and unfamiliar spelling-sound correspondences negatively affect oral performance (Münevver SUBAŞI\*, Süleyman AYDIN\*\*, 2016; Refa, 2017). Then, drama-based pronunciation practice is effective only when linguistic input is sufficiently comprehensible (Butler, 2017). In the present study, however, archaic forms limited students' ability to internalize accurate pronunciation patterns, supporting findings by Eripuddin et al. (2023) and Fraser (2001) that intelligibility suffers when learners lack lexical familiarity.

Psychological factors, particularly stage fright, emerged as a major obstacle, affecting students' confidence, voice projection, and emotional delivery. This finding strongly supports Kartal (2020) theory of foreign language anxiety, which posits that speaking in a second language—especially in public—heightens learners' fear of negative evaluation. Similar results have been reported in drama-based ELT studies, where performance anxiety persists despite the use of fictional roles (Cobongela, 2025; Idogho, 2018; Özek, 2016). While drama is often assumed to reduce anxiety, this study suggests that classical texts may counteract this benefit due to their linguistic and cultural distance.

The difficulty students experienced in stage expression and emotional delivery is also consistent with sociocultural perspectives on drama pedagogy. Vygotskian theory emphasizes that meaningful performance requires cultural and contextual understanding (Maolida & Savitri, 2017). When students lack familiarity with the historical and social contexts of a play, their ability to interpret character motivation and emotion is limited (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). This supports Ustuk & Inan (2017) argument that literary competence must precede literary performance, particularly in foreign language settings.

Furthermore, challenges related to blocking and movement highlight the dual cognitive load faced by EFL learners in drama performance. Students must simultaneously manage linguistic accuracy and physical expression, which often overwhelms their processing capacity (Gül, 2017). Similar findings were noted by (Briones et al., 2022a) and (Briones et al., 2022b), who observed that novice performers tend to prioritize memorization over natural movement, resulting in rigid and unnatural performances.

The interconnected nature of linguistic and performance difficulties observed in this study reinforces integrative models of drama pedagogy. Research suggests that linguistic inadequacy often triggers psychological barriers, which then manifest as poor performance skills (Eripuddin et al., 2024; Gray & Lambert, 2020; Mavroudis & Bournelli, 2019). In line with Anzar et al. (2018), the present findings demonstrate that drama does not automatically guarantee communicative success; rather, it requires careful scaffolding, linguistic adaptation, and gradual performance training.

Compared to studies focusing on modern drama or improvisational activities (Mastrothanasis & Kladaki, 2025; Nguyen, 2023), this study provides evidence that classical drama presents a qualitatively different level of difficulty. Modern texts tend to use familiar language and relatable contexts, allowing students to focus on expression and interaction (Altun, 2019; Arda Tuncdemir, 2025; Baños et al., 2019). In contrast, nineteenth-century drama demands advanced linguistic, cultural, and interpretive skills that many undergraduate EFL learners have not yet developed.

Overall, the discussion supports previous scholarship while extending it by demonstrating that linguistic complexity, cultural distance, and performance anxiety intersect more intensely in classical English drama. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the need for pedagogical reconsideration in drama-based ELT, particularly in teacher education programs. Without adequate linguistic scaffolding, cultural contextualization, and performance training, classical drama may hinder rather than enhance students' communicative development (Fry, 2024; Speers, 2020)

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that the challenges encountered by students in performing nineteenth-century English drama are the result of a complex interaction between linguistic limitations, cultural unfamiliarity, and psychological factors. While drama remains a valuable pedagogical approach in ELT, this study underscores that its effectiveness is not inherent but contingent upon appropriate text selection, linguistic scaffolding, and performance-oriented support. Classical drama, when introduced without sufficient adaptation, may intensify learners' cognitive and affective burdens, thereby constraining communicative expression rather than facilitating it. Therefore, drama instruction in English education programs must be pedagogically mediated, culturally contextualized, and strategically aligned with students' linguistic proficiency to ensure that drama functions as an empowering rather than inhibiting tool in EFL learning contexts

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the performance of nineteenth-century English drama in an EFL context involves interconnected linguistic and theatrical challenges that significantly shape students' confidence and delivery. A key contribution of this research is its integrative analysis of how archaic language difficulties and performance constraints jointly influence learners' stage interpretation, rather than treating these issues as separate domains. This perspective provides a deeper understanding of the specific demands classical drama places on EFL students within teacher education.

The findings offer practical implications for English Education programs by underscoring the importance of combining linguistic scaffolding, cultural contextualization, and structured performance training when implementing classical drama. Prospective English teachers, in particular, benefit from pedagogical support that strengthens both language competence and dramatic expression. Future studies are encouraged to examine instructional interventions and comparative text selection strategies to further enhance drama-based learning outcomes in EFL settings.

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