

Evaluating EFL Speaking Pedagogy in Goma: Teachers' Strategies, Learners' Perspectives, and the Potential of Drama-Based Instruction

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking pedagogy in Goma's secondary schools, focusing on teachers' instructional strategies, learners' perceptions, and the potential of drama-based instruction to enhance communicative competence. Using a mixed-methods design that integrates surveys, interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, the research uncovers a persistent gap between teachers' stated use of communicative methods and learners' limited opportunities for authentic oral interaction. While teachers acknowledge the value of speaking skills, classroom practices remain shaped by grammar-oriented curricula, exam-driven instruction, and resource constraints. Learners, despite high motivation, face affective barriers such as fear of mistakes and peer mockery. Findings highlight that drama-based instruction, through activities like role-play, improvisation, and storytelling, fosters engagement, confidence, and interaction, making it a promising learner-centered alternative to traditional approaches. The study concludes that integrating drama meaningfully into EFL pedagogy can bridge the gap between curriculum goals and communicative realities, transforming classrooms into spaces of participation and linguistic empowerment.

Keywords

EFL Speaking Pedagogy, Drama-Based Instruction, Instructional Strategies, Learners' Perceptions, Communicative Competence, Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo

1. Introduction

Speaking is a cornerstone element of communicative competence and a primary goal of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction worldwide. It enables learners to participate actively in social, academic, and professional contexts, positioning English as the world's lingua franca (Crystal, 2012). Numerous studies have shown that oral proficiency is not merely an academic skill but a crucial tool for global mobility and intercultural exchange (Richards, 2015). Along with this recognition, however, Goh and Burns (2012) observe that although speaking activities occur frequently in language classrooms, learners seldom have opportunities to learn the skills and strategies to improve their speaking. Likewise, Bygate (2018) points out that speaking remains underemphasized in many classrooms, often overshadowed by grammar and writing.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), English has been compulsory at all levels and fields of study in secondary schools since 1982. The fundamental aim for which English is taught in secondary schools is expressed in the following terms: “L’enseignement de l’Anglais vise en premier lieu à rendre les élèves capables de comprendre, parler, lire et écrire correctement cette langue” (Congo DR. Ministère de l’enseignement primaire, secondaire et professionnel. Direction des programmes scolaires et matériel didactique, 2007: p. 4) (*The main goal of English language teaching is to equip learners with the ability to understand, speak, read, and write English accurately*). Despite this communicative focus, speaking remains the least prioritized skill, with many learners graduating unable to formally engage in basic oral exchanges.

In the fifth and sixth years, this aim is specified through a strong emphasis on communicative competence, focusing on learners’ ability to engage in meaningful spoken interactions. Curriculum designers reinforce this orientation by heightening the increasing importance of English in a globalized world: “L’étude de l’Anglais est d’une importance croissante pour les élèves de l’enseignement secondaire au Congo à une époque où le pays multiplie ses contacts avec les pays d’expressions anglaises... les difficultés de communication dues à l’utilisation des langues étrangères doivent être surmontées” (Congo DR. Ministère de l’enseignement primaire, secondaire et professionnel. Direction des programmes scolaires et matériel didactique, 2007: p. 4) (*Learning English has become increasingly important for secondary school learners in Congo, especially as the country strengthens its relations with English-speaking countries... the communication challenges linked to the use of foreign languages therefore need to be addressed*).

Most importantly, The DRC’s integration into the East African Community (EAC), where English is an official language in most member countries, has intensified the need for effective English communication (Mukule, 2023: p. 1). The curriculum explicitly emphasizes communicative competence in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and discourse management, particularly in the fifth and sixth years, with the objective of equipping learners to “understand, speak, read and write correctly” (Congo DR. Ministère de l’enseignement

primaire, secondaire et professionnel. Direction des programmes scolaires et matériel didactique, 2007: p. 4). Yet, in his portrayal of the current English teaching system in Goma, Habasikiyake (2022) notes that it is heavily examination-oriented and fails to prepare students for authentic communication. He proposes reforms to shift toward communicative and practical approaches. Similarly, highlighting the prevailing situation in Bunia, Malobi (2023), asserts that English teaching remains dominated by rote learning and exam preparation, with little emphasis on communicative competence. The author argues that classroom practices are misaligned with learners' real communicative needs. In practice, speaking remains the least prioritized skill, with learners graduating unable to engage in basic oral exchanges.

Goma, a vibrant and multilingual city due to its geographical position in the Great Lakes Region, is one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in the DRC. Its strategic position of sharing borders with Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya and its location at the foot of the active Nyiragongo volcano offer it the status of a touristic attraction.

Despite the linguistic diversity throughout the country, French and Kiswahili remain the main languages spoken in Goma. This state of affairs gives rise to a low coverage of the English language, which seems to belong to a portion of the local population. Consequently, despite the fact that the desire for English is felt keenly, the few people that may wish to learn the English language do not have much space and opportunity to put the language in operation. Therefore, the city serves as a chief example of the gap between curriculum goals and the actual communicative skills of the learners. While learners are fully aware that proficiency in English can open doors to employment and global opportunities, the majority still struggle to develop their speaking abilities (Mukule, 2023: p. 4). EFL teaching in local schools often leans heavily towards grammar and exam preparation, which has overshadowed the importance of practical language use. Throughout the lessons, the EFL teachers' language is too bookish and thoroughly controlled and little, if any, room is given to the complexity of unpredictable situations in real-life (Mukule, 2023: p. 5). Moreover, oral assessments are absent from national examinations, which emphasize multiple-choice items and rote learning. Connected to this, Katabe and Tibategeza (2023) pinpointing challenges of EFL teaching in the Kalemi region, point out that structural challenges such as inadequate textbooks, limited in-service training, discomfort with the medium of instruction, and insufficient supervisory support further hinder speaking instruction. As a result, speaking skills are rarely taught systematically, leaving learners unprepared for authentic conversations, hindering their ability to engage in oral performance. Bridging this gap is crucial for creating a more interactive and supportive EFL learning environment that meets the needs of Goma's learners.

This study is guided by a central question: How effective are current EFL instructional strategies in fostering speaking skills in Goma secondary schools, and how can drama-based instruction serve as a transformative alternative? Specifically, it seeks to 1) analyze the integration of speaking skills into classroom practices, 2) identify the methods most frequently employed, 3) investigate learners'

perceptions of EFL speaking instruction, and 4) assess the potential of drama-based instruction for improving communicative competence.

Research in EFL pedagogy emphasizes that oral proficiency requires both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence (Cunningham, 1999; David & Pearse, 2000). The former is related to their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, whereas the later refers to their ability to understand when, why and in what ways to produce the language. Similarly, Widdowson (1978: p. 3), speaks of two levels of linguistic knowledge: the level of *usage* and the level of *use*. In his understanding, while *usage* refers to knowledge of linguistic rules, *use* entails knowing how to use these rules for effective communication.

With regard to this, oral proficiency is not only an essential component of communicative competence but also a crucial tool for learners' participation in academic, professional, and social life. This might have urged Hornby (1995) to define speaking as using words in a normal voice, offering words, knowing language and being able to express oneself through words and speech. This definition agrees with (Hadi & Ismiati, 2023), who points out that speaking ability is that capacity to show knowledge of language in real communication to find out what situations exist in the world by talking to other people. Equipping learners with speaking skills promotes learner-centred education, enabling them to question, express opinions, report, perform, and self-assess. Nunan (1995) and Richards (2008) both affirm that the effectiveness of English courses is often judged by learners' improvement in speaking.

Nevertheless, despite decades of pedagogical reform, speaking-focused instruction has not consistently bridged the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication. Factors such as limited authentic practice and learner anxiety continue to impede oral proficiency (Al-Tamimi, 2020). Traditional teacher-centred strategies like grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods persist, promoting passive learning rather than active interaction (Tularam, 2018). Yet, effective EFL teaching depends largely on the instructional strategies teachers employ (William & Burden, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Hayati et al., 2021).

Further to this challenge of speaking skills in EFL teaching, this study sustains that instructional strategies remain at the heart of effective EFL teaching. Espmaker & Tedenby, (2020), defines instructional strategies as approaches or methods that teachers use to facilitate learning and help students achieve their learning objectives. With reference to this, it is worthwhile to evaluate and grasp how teachers design and implement instructional strategies. As a matter of fact, the choice of instructional strategies significantly shapes their pedagogical decisions and classroom behaviours. Therefore, EFL teachers should be innovative in choosing appropriate strategies that align with not only the learners' needs, but also influence their confidence, engagement, and ultimate proficiency. In this respect, William and Burden (2003) point out that strategies used by teachers are the factor of success in language learning. To say it otherwise, teaching strategies are very essential to determine the success of the teaching process. Emphasizing

the role of instructional strategies, Hayati et al. (2021), highlights that teaching strategies can help students learn by doing, preventing boredom and contributing to their learning goals' success. In the same view, Hattie (2009), sustains that teacher-student relationships, feedback, and the clarity of instructional goals are among the highest impact factors on student learning outcomes.

Obviously, there is no consensus on what the best instructional strategy or method is in teaching and learning process. It is up to the individual teacher, in his/her respective class, to implement a diverse range of strategies that may be tailored to accommodate the specific needs and learning styles of individual students or groups. If the assigned goal is successfully achieved, the instructional strategy employed can be deemed appropriate for the given context (Mukule, 2023: p. 36).

Understanding instructional strategies also involves careful attention to learners' perspectives. This focus highlights ongoing challenges such as low proficiency, grammar-heavy instruction, limited opportunities for practice, and reduced motivation (Chen, 2007; Khan, 2011). The beliefs that learners hold about their language learning journey play a crucial role in their success (Rifkin, 2000). As Savignon (1991) and Cray & Currie (1996) emphasize, teachers should work *with* rather than *for* their learners. This means that EFL educators should engage with learners as partners in the learning process, rather than adopting a purely directive approach. However, insufficient attention to learners' perspectives often hinders the development of communicative competence. This study therefore posits that integrating learners' viewpoints with innovative teaching methods is a key to improving speaking outcomes and creating a more dynamic and supportive learning environment.

With respect to the fact that most studies on ELT speaking have been descriptive in nature, the present research not only evaluates existing instructional strategies but also explores the potential of drama-based instruction to overcome persistent teaching and learning challenges. Scrivener (2005) defines drama-based instruction as the use of communicative activities such as role-play, games, simulations, and guided improvisations. As a teaching method, the concept of drama is understood from an educational perspective. Its modus operandi focuses on doing, not presentation. In other terms, the aim is not to teach acting and performance skills, but more specifically, as argued by Bessadet (2022: p. 532), drama, puts learners inside authentic situations which unveil their hidden creativity and allow them to transcend their fears of expressing themselves in front of others. Therefore, instead of viewing drama solely as a performative art form intended for stage presentation and audience engagement, this study aims to examine the integration of drama as a methodological approach to enhance learners' proficiency.

According to Wessels (1987: p. 7), drama in education uses the same tools employed by actors in theatre. However, the difference is that with theatre everything is contrived for the benefit of the audience and in classroom drama everything is contrived for the benefit of the learners. In other terms, theatre, on the one hand, whether it is presented in form of comedy, tragedy, storytelling, fully staged shows and performances, is purposely designed to bring entertainment for the audience.

Drama, on the other hand, using the tools of theatre, goes beyond the purpose of entertaining an audience. Its underlying purpose in education is to change the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of participants. Emphasizing its role in language education, Demircioğlu (2015), muts that, with its mimetic and dialogic nature, drama mirrors real-life communication, reducing anxiety and fostering confidence. In such a context, the teacher is granted the role of supporter, while the learners take a more dominant role to allow them to explore the language activities. That is to say, drama gives room to the student-centred classroom, which highly recommends every student be an asset or a potential teacher for the group.

2. Methodology

2.1. Design, Participants, Instruments, Data Collection, and Analysis

The study is built on a mixed sampling design that follows standard quantitative practice and combines different methods to ensure fair and balanced representation. To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, data were triangulated from multiple sources, including questionnaires, classroom observations, drama-based activities, and focus group discussions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Two complementary samples were involved: a quantitative sample of 386 learners who completed the questionnaire survey, and a purposively selected qualitative subsample of 135 learners who took part in classroom observations and interactive drama activities. This distinction between the two groups allows the study to capture both broad learning patterns and learners' lived speaking experiences in the classroom.

To obtain these samples, the study adopted a four-stage sampling strategy that reflects the structure and diversity of secondary education in Goma. First, the city's 272 secondary schools were grouped into three educational pools based on administrative boundaries: Goma (96 schools), Karisimbi 1 (80 schools), and Karisimbi 2 (96 schools). Ten schools were then randomly selected in proportion to the size of each pool. Within each selected school, 3rd- and 4th-year classes were chosen, as learners at these levels are expected to follow classroom instructions, ask questions, express opinions, and participate meaningfully in speaking-focused activities. Finally, students were randomly selected from these classes, resulting in a qualitative sample of 135 learners and 10 EFL teachers. This layered approach makes it possible to reflect the complexity and variation of Goma's secondary school context while maintaining methodological coherence. The formula below illustrates the size sample:

$$n_i = \frac{N_i}{NT} \times n$$

n_i = the number of learners selected from each educational pool;

N_i = the total learner population within that educational pool;

NT = the total learner population across all selected schools;

n = the desired overall learner sample size for the quantitative phase of the study.

Two validated questionnaires were developed, one for teachers, consisting of 23 items, and one for learners, comprising 16 items. These questionnaires included a mix of closed-ended items, Likert-scale, and open-ended items, allowing for both quantitative analysis of trends and qualitative insights into participants' perspectives. To complement these instruments, semi-structured interviews with five teachers and focus group discussions with 10 learners provided deeper insights into their experiences and viewpoints. Additionally, non-participant classroom observations were conducted to cross-check discrepancies between reported practices and actual classroom interactions. Each instrument played its role in addressing the research questions:

First, as far as classroom observations were concerned, particular attention was given to the evaluation of learners' oral production, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence to capture the extent to which speaking skills were fostered during instructional practices. The classroom observations showed that learners spoke with greater ease when drama activities were part of the lesson. Fluency improved most during role-plays and dialogues, where students relied less on their mother tongue. Pronunciation, though still shaped by first-language influence, became clearer as learners rehearsed lines and supported one another. Vocabulary use also expanded through dramatic scenarios that provided meaningful opportunities for learners to retrieve and experiment with new words in authentic communicative settings.

Indeed, grammatical accuracy remained uneven, but learners were more willing to take risks and communicate despite mistakes. What stood out most was their interactional competence: they listened, responded, and took turns more naturally during dramatized exchanges. Overall, drama-based instruction not only boosted participation but also enriched the quality of spoken English, offering a practical and engaging way to address the gap in systematic speaking instruction.

Second, before the survey, drama-based instruction was explained to learners so they understood it as more than entertainment. Teachers described it as using role-play, short scenes, and improvisation to practice English in interactive, realistic ways. Simple demonstrations, like acting out a market exchange or rehearsing short dialogues, helped students see DBI as a structured method to strengthen speaking skills. After this orientation, learners were asked specific survey questions: **Q7**: "Does your teacher organize group work followed by classroom presentations?"; **Q9**: "Do you think these group work activities and presentations are useful for learning English?"; **Q10**: "Does your teacher use role-play, theatre, or improvisation (drama) activities to teach English?"; **Q11**: "If yes, how do you find these activities?"; and **Q12**: "If no, would you like your teacher to introduce theatrical activities?" Their positive responses therefore reflected an informed view of DBI as a purposeful teaching strategy.

Next, questionnaire data provided responses from both teachers and learners. These responses were thematically coded and entered into a spreadsheet for analysis to identify trends in instructional practices, learner perceptions, and attitudes

toward drama-based activities. Moreover, interview and focus group data were documented and subjected to thematic analysis.

Then, findings from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations were triangulated to enhance validity and reliability. Quantitative trends were compared with qualitative themes to confirm consistencies or highlight discrepancies. For example, learners' self-reported anxiety was cross-checked against observed hesitation in classroom speaking activities, and teachers' claims about the use of drama were compared with actual classroom practices.

2.2. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the data collection process, with strict adherence to principles of voluntary participation and confidentiality. A piloting team of education specialists reviewed the instruments to enhance their reliability and validity. The questionnaires for learners were formulated in French, recognizing that the majority of secondary schools in Goma are more proficient in this language, which minimized the risk of misinterpretation and allowed for clearer expression of their perceptions. This approach not only respected the sociolinguistic context of the participants but also aligned with ethical principles of inclusivity and fairness in educational research, thereby ensuring the credibility and reliability of the data collected.

3. Results and Discussions

The analysis of this study not only discusses current teachers' instructional strategies and learners' perceptions with regard to learners' speaking development but also examines the potential of drama-based instruction in offering a more engaged and effective approach to improving communicative competence.

3.1. Teachers' Demographic and Professional Profile

Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the demographic and professional characteristics of the ten teachers who participated in this study. The sample comprises a strong majority of male teachers (90%) compared to female teachers (10%), with a median of 4.5 years of teaching. Regarding institutional affiliation, half of the respondents (50%) teach in confessional schools, followed by 30% in public schools and 20% in private institutions. In terms of academic qualification, most teachers hold graduate degrees (80%), whereas 20% are undergraduates.

The demographic profile of the teachers reveals a workforce that is predominantly male (90%) and relatively young in professional experience, with a median of 4.5 years of teaching. The increased number may be attributed to the composition of English departments in local teacher training colleges, where male enrollment tends to be significantly higher. This imbalance, while not unique to Goma, raises questions about gendered access to language education careers and its potential influence on classroom dynamics. Regarding qualifications, the majority of teachers hold graduate degrees (80%), suggesting that Goma's teaching workforce

is academically equipped to support learners' progress in English speaking skills. However, while formal qualifications provide a foundation, they do not automatically translate into effective pedagogy; teaching excellence also depends on classroom experience, reflective practice, and ongoing professional development. The presence of undergraduate-qualified teachers (20%), mostly concentrated in private institutions, may reflect a cost-saving strategy by school managers, who often base salaries on academic credentials. This hiring practice, though economically motivated, risks compromising instructional quality and underscores the need for policy attention to recruitment standards in the private education sector.

Table 1. Teachers' demographic and professional profile.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	9	90%
	Female	1	10%
Type of school	Confessional	5	50%
	Official	3	30%
	Private	2	20%
Qualification	Graduate	8	80%
	Undergraduate	2	20%
Median teaching experience	4.5 years		

Note: Data reflects teacher demographics across proportionally sampled schools in Goma.

3.2. Distribution of Student Respondents by Educational Pool

To ensure that the findings truly reflected the diversity of Goma's secondary schools, learners were sampled proportionally from the city's three educational pools. As shown in **Table 2**, the distribution was well balanced, with 35% of respondents coming from the Goma pool, 30% from Karisimbi 1, and another 35% from Karisimbi 2. This careful proportionality meant that no single pool overshadowed the others, allowing the study to capture a fuller picture of the local educational landscape, which lends the research both fairness and inclusivity.

Table 2. Educational pool in Goma's school landscape.

Educational Pool	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Goma pool	135	35%
Karisimbi 1 Pool	116	30%
Karisimbi 2 Pool	135	35%
Total	386	100%

With nearly 400 learners from 3rd and 4th forms sampled across Goma's three school pools, the results offer a well-rounded view of how speaking is taught and experienced. This balanced distribution gives confidence that the findings reflect

the broader reality of secondary education in the city.

3.3. Teachers' Instructional Priorities and Learners' Opportunities to Speak

When looking at how teachers approach speaking instruction and how learners experience it, a clear gap becomes visible. Teachers often believe they are creating opportunities for oral practice, yet many learners feel those opportunities are limited. This contrast points to a deeper challenge in Goma's classrooms: while the atmosphere may appear supportive, students are not always given the space to actively engage in meaningful speaking. As a result, speaking lessons risk remaining teacher-centred, leaving learners more as listeners than participants, and weakening the communicative goals set out in the curriculum (Table 3).

Table 3. Teachers' instructional priorities and learners' opportunities to speak.

Variable	Category	Frequency/%
Skills prioritized (Teachers)	Speaking	20.0 %
	Speaking + Reading + Listening	10.0 %
	Speaking + Writing + Reading + Listening	70.0 %
Classroom mood during speaking	Positive	70.0%
	Very Positive	30.0%
Integration of speaking activities (Teachers)	Often	30.0 %
	Very often	70.0 %
Learners' opportunities to speak	never	2%
	Rarely	51%
	Sometimes	24%
	Often	14%
	Very often	9%

Although 70% of teachers reported prioritizing all four language skills and frequently integrating speaking activities, student feedback tells a different story. More than half of the learners, randomly selected across Goma's three educational pools, said they "rarely" get the chance to speak, with only 23% reporting frequent or very frequent speaking opportunities. Most teachers also described their classrooms as having a positive or very positive mood, suggesting a generally supportive environment. However, this perception contrasts sharply with the limited speaking engagement reported by students. As *Lyster and Ranta (2013)* point out, a "positive" classroom mood alone is not enough to ensure genuine participation if learners remain largely passive during speaking tasks. The findings reveal a noticeable gap between what teachers report and what learners actually experience in the classroom. Such a discrepancy between what is said and actually experienced in class, points out a persistent challenge in Goma's secondary schools: Speaking instruction remains largely teacher-centered, leaving learners with lim-

ited opportunities to actively engage.

It is obvious that teachers genuinely believe they are fostering speaking skills, yet learners often remain passive recipients. This highlights the need to move beyond atmosphere and focus on active, learner-centered speaking opportunities, an objective clearly outlined in this research. Drama-based instruction, which places learners at the heart of communicative scenarios, emerges as a compelling alternative. It not only encourages spontaneous speech but also helps reduce anxiety and build confidence, two affective barriers frequently mentioned in learner focus groups.

3.4. Teachers' Instructional Strategies

Table 4 offers a snapshot of how EFL teachers in Goma approach speaking instruction in their classrooms. Based on responses from 10 teachers across proportionally sampled schools, the data highlight their preferred teaching methods, the role of drama in their practice, and the challenges they face. It also sheds light on the kinds of in-service trainings they attended and how these experiences shape their instructional choices.

Table 4. Teachers' instructional strategies.

Variable (Teachers' Strategies)	Category/Response	Frequency
Main instructional approach	CLT	9
	DBI	1
Frequency of oral evaluation	Often (once a week)	4
	Very often (every lesson)	6
Training in ELT	Yes	6
	No	4
Perception of DBI	Appropriate	9
	Not appropriate	1
Current use of drama activities	Yes	9
	No	1
Types of drama activities used	Role play	9
	Storytelling	9
	Improvisation	2
	Mime	2
	Others (simulation, skits, frozen images...) communicative activities	0 - 1

From the data in **Table 4**, 9 out of 10 teachers reveal that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is their main instructional approach, with only one identifying Drama-Based Instruction (DBI) as central to their practice. While CLT is widely accepted for promoting interaction, its implementation in Goma appears

limited to basic techniques like role play and storytelling. Teachers explained that both of these techniques are easier to prepare, less time-consuming, and more adaptable to large class sizes and limited resources. These preferences reflect practical realities but also suggest missed opportunities for deeper learner involvement. It is clear that more dynamic techniques such as simulation, improvisation, and skits were rarely employed. This suggests that while the door to drama-based pedagogy is open, it has yet to be fully explored.

With regard to professional development, teachers reported having attended in-service training sessions organized by the Provincial Education Inspectorate between 2021 and 2023. However, none of these sessions focused specifically on speaking pedagogy or drama-based instruction. This gap in training content may explain why teachers rely on familiar strategies and hesitate to experiment with more dynamic methods. They lack a clearly defined methodological framework of integrating drama activities in language classrooms. To this end, the findings of this study point to a pressing need for targeted workshops that will equip EFL teachers with practical tools for improving speaking pedagogy, one of the core concerns driving this research.

In quest for the reasons for low proficiency among the learners, the results in Table 4 highlight that although teachers value communicative approaches, their practices are shaped by several constraints that impede their implementation. First, English teaching in most secondary schools remains largely text-based, as teachers are expected to follow the national textbook closely. These textbooks are often lengthy and content-heavy, containing extended reading passages and numerous grammar-focused exercises. Teachers therefore spend considerable time “covering the syllabus,” which leaves little space for extended oral or drama-based activities, despite their recognized value (Littlewood, 2014).

Second, teachers’ instructional choices are shaped not only by personal beliefs but also by systemic pressures, particularly the national examination system. In RDC, state exams in English focus heavily on reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary; while speaking skills are notably absent from the assessment criteria. As a result, teachers tend to prioritize what is tested, even if they recognize the value of oral communication. As Shohamy (2001) and Cheng (2005) suggest, when assessment systems overlook key competencies, they inadvertently narrow the scope of classroom practice, limiting opportunities for learners to develop essential speaking skills.

Finally, infrastructure limitations across many secondary schools in Goma present significant barriers to the implementation of interactive pedagogical approaches. Overcrowded classrooms, the absence of language laboratories, and restricted physical space constrain what teachers can realistically achieve during lessons. Drama-based instruction, which often requires movement, spatial flexibility, and group performance, becomes particularly challenging under such conditions. Consequently, teachers adapt their strategies to align with the physical realities of their environment, opting for methods that are feasible within limited resources.

3.5. Learners' Perceptions

Learners' perceptions play a vital role in shaping the EFL teaching and learning experience. Understanding how learners feel about their learning experiences enables teachers to adjust their methods to better meet individual needs. Such a connection helps create a supportive classroom where learners feel valued in their learning process (Table 5).

Table 5. Learners' perceptions.

Variable/Item	Category	% or Frequency
Reasons for Not Speaking	Too much grammar, little practice	23%
	Fear of mistakes	24%
	Mockery	8%
	Language too difficult	42%
	Other	3%
Frequency of Speaking	Never	2%
	Rarely	51%
	Sometimes	24%
	Often	14%
	Very Often	9%
Group Work Frequency	Rarely	24%
	Often	63%
	Very Rarely	9%
	Very Often	5%
Usefulness of Group Work	Not useful	7%
	Slightly useful	10%
	Useful	26%
	Very useful	59%
Students Want Drama	No	12%
	Yes	88%
Feelings When Speaking	Confident	15%
	Shy	46%
	Fear of Errors	34%
	Indifferent	4%
Main Obstacles	Teacher correction	2%
	Peer mockery	39%
	Lack of vocabulary	50%
	Lack of preparation	9%

These findings on the learners' perceptions highlight that 42% of students per-

ceive English as “too difficult”, while another 24% fear mistakes, and 8% mention mockery as reasons for not speaking. These perceptions translate into feelings of shyness (46%) and fear of errors (34%), with only a small minority (15%) reporting confidence. The main obstacles, lack of vocabulary (50%) and peer mockery (39%), suggest that speaking is overshadowed by anxiety rather than lack of interest. Related to this obstacle, [Muyaya & Tembue \(2024\)](#) argue that Congolese learners’ full linguistic repertoires are often ignored, yet translanguaging could “enhance the teaching-learning process” by reducing fear and validating students’ confidence. In this light, the silence observed is less a personal failure than a pedagogical gap, where grammar-heavy instruction leaves little room for authentic practice and emotional safety.

The overwhelming 88% of students expressing a desire for drama-based instruction pinpoint the necessity of a participatory learning process that prioritizes the recognition of learners’ needs, experiences, and perspectives in the educational framework. Related to this, [Shang, Duan, & Xu \(2024\)](#) observe that Drama in language teaching “*helps develop learners’ communicative skills by giving them opportunities to interact cooperatively and practice real communication in a simulated social environment*”. This resonates with the Goma learners’ desire for a shift from correction-centered teaching to participatory, expressive learning. Thus, integrating drama is not a luxury but a necessity, a gateway to circumvent the obstacles of fear, mockery, and poor vocabulary encountered by learners, and to foster a classroom environment in which verbal expression is both achievable and valued.

4. Conclusion

In light of the research questions guiding this study, namely, how effectively current EFL instructional strategies foster speaking skills in Goma’s secondary schools, and how drama-based instruction might serve as a transformative alternative, the findings reveal a complex but hopeful landscape. While teachers express strong commitment to communicative goals and report frequent use of speaking activities, learners’ experiences suggest that oral interaction remains limited, often constrained by structural challenges and affective barriers. The study highlights a clear disconnect between pedagogical intent and classroom reality, underscoring the need for more learner-centered approaches. Drama-based instruction emerges as a promising strategy, not only for enhancing communicative competence but also for creating inclusive spaces where learners feel confident to speak, explore, and grow. By integrating drama meaningfully into EFL pedagogy, and by listening more closely to learners’ voices, educators in Goma can begin to bridge the gap between curriculum and lived experience, making speaking instruction not just a goal, but a shared and empowering journey.

5. Recommendations

To improve EFL speaking pedagogy in Goma’s secondary schools, speaking must

be repositioned as a core instructional focus through structured integration into lesson planning and consistent oral practice. Teachers should foster inclusive environments that reduce affective barriers like shyness and fear of errors by encouraging peer support and normalizing mistakes. Drama-based activities, when thoughtfully applied, can build learner confidence and promote meaningful interaction. Policymakers should consider incorporating speaking components into national assessments to reinforce the value of oral proficiency. For drama-based instruction to thrive, institutional support is essential; schools must provide manageable class sizes, flexible timetables, and adequate resources. Ultimately, enhancing speaking instruction requires a shift from teacher-centered delivery to learner-centered engagement, where drama serves as a transformative tool for communicative competence.

6. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into teachers' instructional strategies, learners' perceptions, and the potential of drama-based instruction in enhancing EFL speaking skills in Goma, it does not extend to the practical implementation of such an approach. Specifically, the research did not outline or test explicit procedures for integrating drama-based pedagogy into the classroom, such as lesson planning frameworks, activity sequencing, or assessment techniques tailored to drama-oriented speaking instruction. Consequently, the findings remain largely evaluative and perceptual rather than experimental or intervention-based. Future research should therefore focus on designing, implementing, and evaluating structured drama-based lesson models to empirically assess their impact on learners' fluency, confidence, and communicative competence across diverse educational contexts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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