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Dance Drama As An Aesthetic And Linguistic Literacy Space For Students At ISI Bali

I Gusti Ayu Putu Jesika Devi N 

Undiknas University, Denpasar, Indonesia

jesikasita@undiknas.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Art students often face challenges in mastering foreign languages, especially when learning demands integration between linguistic and aesthetic aspects. This research aims to explore the role of English-language dance drama as an integrative learning medium to develop students' linguistic and aesthetic literacy at Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Bali. This study focuses on the production and performance of a dance drama entitled *The Mercy of Durga Devi*, performed by students of the Faculty of Performing Arts. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and case study method, this research involved students who were active in the creative process of the performance. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The results showed that students' involvement in the creative process encouraged the improvement of prosodic skills, articulation, as well as the contextual use of English. Simultaneously, they demonstrated aesthetic sensitivity through the exploration of movement, body expression, and dramatic understanding. Dance drama proved to be an effective multimodal learning space in developing linguistic and artistic competencies simultaneously. This study is limited to one institution, so further research is needed for cross-context validation. Practically, the results support the development of a dual literacy-based arts curriculum and enrich the study of multimodal literacy in art and language education.

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1. Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become a strategic competency for students across disciplines in contemporary globalized higher education settings. As Yacob et al. (2022) note, globalization demands that students "use the target language to deliver appropriate content for authentic interaction, consequently developing a global self-identity". Similarly, Suwartono (2024) found that Indonesian university students demonstrate a positive attitude toward English learning, recognizing its essential role in enabling academic and professional engagement in international contexts. English not only serves as an international communication tool, but also as a means of access to global knowledge and involvement in international academic and artistic networks (Haryadi & Kumala, 2025; Kurniawan, 2024). In the context of arts education, English language skills are often a challenge. Huang et al. (2022) revealed that students from arts majors experience significant difficulties in listening, speaking, and writing in English. This statement is in line with the findings of Kaoian et al. (2024), who pointed out that arts students face complex linguistic obstacles, mainly due to the dominance of expressive and performative approaches in their learning process. The primary focus on aesthetic aspects and artistic practice leads to a lack

CONTACT Language Assistance  jelpr@balilanguageassistance.com

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of emphasis on foreign language acquisition as a means of academic and professional communication, so arts students tend to experience greater barriers than students from other fields.

This situation becomes even more complex in an art college like Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Bali, which is not only committed to producing talented artists and preserving traditional arts, but also seeks to encourage the globalization of the arts through various forms of collaboration and cultural exchange. Limited English proficiency hinders students' active participation in international forums such as festivals, residencies, and global cultural conferences. This is supported by Mao and Zhou's (2024) assertion in their study that art and design students experience language proficiency gaps in the face of professional as well as academic demands, and by Qiu and Zheng (2023) who revealed that students tend to withdraw from academic discussions due to low linguistic confidence.

Studies that explicitly explore the integration between linguistic and aesthetic aspects through the form of dance drama are still very limited, especially in the context of art colleges in Indonesia. Most studies so far have focused on the use of popular art media such as songs, movies, and digital platforms such as TikTok as a means of linguistic learning (Harsono, 2020; Ramdani et al., 2021; Ariyati & Zaidah, 2022). Studies that explicitly explore the integration between linguistic and aesthetic aspects through the form of dance drama are still very limited, especially in the context of art universities in Indonesia. This is where the novelty of this research lies, namely positioning English-language dance drama as an interdisciplinary learning space that not only supports the development of linguistic skills, but also strengthens students' artistic expression and cultural awareness through a contextualized performative approach. This concept is reflected in the English-language dance drama *The Mercy of Durga Devi*, which was collaboratively performed by ISI Bali students as a learning model integrating aesthetic expression and English language skills.

Figure 1. Student performers from ISI Bali during the staging of *The Mercy of Durga Devi*.



This research offers an innovative approach through the utilization of English dance drama as an interdisciplinary learning model that is collaborative and multimodal. This model integrates foreign language pronunciation and articulation training with body expression, dance movement, and dramatic appreciation in one performative activity. This approach is in line with the findings of Salamanti et al. (2023) who showed that collaborative and multimodal learning strategies significantly improved English language competence among ESL/EFL learners. In addition, a study by Yulianti and Dewi (2024) confirmed that the use of dance drama media in English language teaching is effective in improving communication skills while building students' appreciation of

artistic values and local culture. Thus, learning English dance drama not only develops linguistic competence, but also forms students' symbolic and reflective awareness through contextual and artistic learning experiences.

Based on the conceptual framework, this study aims to analyze how the involvement of ISI Bali students in the production and performance of English-language dance dramas contributes to the development of linguistic and aesthetic literacy simultaneously.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Arts-based Language Learning

The integration of arts in language learning offers a contextual approach that can strengthen absorption and appreciation of meaning, in line with the embodied learning approach that emphasizes the role of the body and emotions in formation (Harsono, 2020; Ramdani et al., 2021; Ariyati & Zaidah, 2022). Drama, as a form of performing arts, is considered effective in developing communication skills because it involves narration, emotion, and body expression in an integrated manner. Yulianti and Dewi (2024) proved that English-language dance dramas improve students' articulation, fluency, and confidence. Other studies show that traditional arts such as wayang (Yulianti & Marhaeni, 2021) and religious literary texts (Yulianti & Jayantini, 2023) also contribute to language learning through symbolic and reflective approaches. Thus, art is not only an aesthetic medium, but also a pedagogical strategy that strengthens linguistic competence.

2.2. Multimodality in Language Education

The concept of multimodal literacy emphasizes the importance of using various modes such as verbal, visual, gestural, and auditory in the learning process (Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024; Permatasari, 2024). In art education, this approach is particularly relevant as students are accustomed to expressing meaning through various creative forms. The study by Salamanti et al. (2023) showed that multimodal teaching strategies were effective in increasing EFL learners' engagement and comprehension. The English dance drama model reflects multimodal practices comprehensively by integrating language, movement and visual symbols in a unified performance. Although this approach is aligned with contemporary pedagogical trends, its application in the context of arts higher education in Indonesia has rarely been systematically explored.

2.3. Aesthetic and Linguistic Literacy

The concept of literacy is now experiencing an expansion of meaning, no longer limited to reading and writing skills, but includes the practice of producing and interpreting texts in complex social and cultural contexts (Anggraeni et al., 2020; Yulia et al., 2021). In arts education, aesthetic literacy includes sensitivity to artistic symbols and expressions, while linguistic literacy relates to language skills in academic communicative situations. The studies of Huang et al. (2022) and Kaoian et al. (2024) show that art students often experience linguistic literacy gaps due to the dominance of performative practices in the learning process. Therefore, there is a need for an approach that is able to integrate both forms of literacy simultaneously. The practice of English-language dance drama offers strategic potential in integrating aesthetic expression and verbal skills in one contextualized creative platform.

3. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze how the involvement of ISI Bali students in the production and performance of English-language dance dramas contributes to the development of linguistic and aesthetic literacy simultaneously. The main focus is directed at the process of student participation in the creative and performative process, from script exploration, rehearsal, to performance. This approach was chosen to capture the complexity of students' experiences in integrating language skills and artistic expression in the context of performance practice.

The research subjects were determined through purposive sampling technique, namely students of the Faculty of Performing Arts, ISI Bali who were actively involved in the process of creating and

performing English-language dance dramas. Data were collected through participatory observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during a series of rehearsals and performances, focusing on linguistic engagement (e.g. pronunciation, intonation, sentence structure), as well as aesthetic expression (such as symbolic movement, dramatic gesture, and narrative meaning). In this observation process, the author also played a direct role as a narrator in the performance of the dance drama *The Mercy of Durga Devi*. This involvement provides an internal perspective on the dynamics of practice, artistic exploration, and language performativity undertaken by students. The author's position as a participant-observer allows observation to take place in depth without disturbing the creative process.

Figure 2. The researcher acted as the narrator in the dance drama *The Mercy of Durga Devi* at ISI Bali.



Interviews were conducted with the supervisor and artistic director of the dance drama to explore their perspectives on the process of integrating language and art, as well as their observations of student development during the production process. Documentation focused on the use of dance drama scripts as the main source, which were analyzed to identify linguistic structures, language styles, vocabulary, and narrative elements that support learning. In addition, visual documentation in the form of photos of the rehearsal and performance process was used to observe students' prosodic expressions, artistic gestures, and performative interactions, while supporting data validity through visual triangulation.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, including data reduction, categorization based on linguistic and aesthetic themes, and contextual interpretation. Cook's (2003) theoretical framework of applied linguistics, which views language as a social and cultural practice, was used to interpret students' engagement in dance drama practice as a form of integrative multimodal literacy. Thus, this method can provide an in-depth understanding of the contribution of English-language dance drama as a pedagogical medium in developing ISI Bali students' linguistic and aesthetic literacy simultaneously.

4. Discussion

This section describes the research results obtained through observation, documentation, and interviews. The results show that students' involvement in English-language dance dramas contributes to the development of linguistic literacy, aesthetic literacy, and the integration of both in the creative process. The results are presented in the following three subsections.

4.1. Linguistic Literacy Development through Dance Drama

Students' involvement in the production and performance of English-language dance drama shows a significant contribution to the development of their linguistic literacy. Linguistic literacy in this context does not only include articulation and pronunciation skills, but also includes mastery of prosody such as intonation, word stress, speech rhythm, as well as understanding of narrative structure and pragmatic functions in English. This is in line with Cook's (2003) view that language must be understood as a meaningful and contextual social practice, not just a set of grammatical rules.

In the context of English-language dance drama at ISI Bali, the use of language has a dual function: as a means of verbal communication and as a medium of emotional and symbolic expression fused with elements of movement and aesthetics. The intensive rehearsal process facilitates the internalization of the pragmatic function of language, including how emotions are built through tone of voice, emotional stress, and diction selection. This is in line with the findings of Kao & O'Neill (1998), who state that drama activities in language learning trigger significant improvements in pragmatic understanding, contextual diction, and interpersonal interaction. As a concrete example, in the play *The Mercy of Durga Devi* (2023), there is an excerpt of an emotional dialogue between the characters Devaki and Kamsa that became the main training material for students:

"My dear brother, by the influence of destiny you have already killed many babies, each of them as bright and beautiful as fire. But kindly spare this daughter. Give her to me as your gift".

The dialog contains high emotional intensity, with sentence structures that imply despair and hope at the same time. From a linguistic perspective, students need to understand that the use of phrases such as "as bright and beautiful as fire" requires special emphasis in pronunciation and intonation to express the character's persuasion and affection. In terms of pragmatics, the position of this utterance should be interpreted as an attempt at symbolic negotiation between two characters with unequal power relations, namely a woman who begs for protection from a man who holds absolute power.

Aesthetically, students are also required to harmonize these verbal expressions with body gestures, facial expressions, and stage positions that support dramatic meaning. The pronunciation of pleading sentences in a downcast body position, downcast eyes, or pleading hand movements, is part of the aesthetic literacy that strengthens the linguistic message. This is in line with the view of Kress (2009) who asserts that multimodal literacy places communication as the result of interactions between various semiotic modes such as verbal, visual, gestural and spatial that together construct meaning in a social and cultural context.

4.2. Aesthetic Literacy in Dance Drama

Student involvement in the production and performance of English-language dance dramas contributes significantly to the development of aesthetic literacy, namely the ability to understand, interpret, and actualize artistic and symbolic values through performance media. Aesthetic literacy in this context includes sensitivity to visual symbols, body expressions, and emotional dimensions in artworks that act as performative narratives. Rasul (2018) asserts that body poses in artistic expressions work as an emotional stimulus that creates a nonverbal dialog between the artist and the public, allowing the audience to feel and interpret the messages and values contained in the work.

Hand movements, rhythmic patterns, and facial expressions are used by students as visual symbols to convey spiritual and dramatic values. This is in line with Rodero (2022) who points out that body gestures and variations in tone of voice can trigger emotional responses and increase the effectiveness of performative communication. In addition, a study of drama performance aesthetics by Yulianti (2024) confirms that body gesturality not only functions as an artistic expression, but also as a symbolic articulation and a profound symbolic-aesthetic medium in building visual and emotional narratives on stage.

Figure 3. Students performing dramatic expressions through body gestures and facial expressions in the English dance drama *The Mercy Durga Devi*.



In addition to the body and voice aspects, other visual elements such as lighting, costumes, and stage layout also strengthen the construction of meaning in the performance. According to Abdullah et al. (2020), students' involvement in the exploration of stage artistic design, including visual elements and scenography technical strategies, gives them a deep understanding of the principles of production aesthetics, visual narrative building, and performative cohesion in a performance. This process encourages students not only as performers, but also as creative actors who are able to synthesize aesthetics and techniques in building a complete work. The visual elements explored by students are clearly reflected in the staging of *The Mercy of Durga Devi*, as seen in the following documentation.

Figure 4. Stage, costume, and scenographic composition in the performance of *The Mercy of Durga Devi*, illustrating students' understanding of aesthetic and symbolic design.



Furthermore, the integration between linguistic and aesthetic aspects makes students more aware of the importance of voice intonation, rhythm of movement, and emotional dynamics in building artistic communication. Yulia et al. (2021) stated that aesthetic literacy is not only related to technical ability, but also to the reflective capacity of cultural and dramatic values embodied in performance. Thus, the experience of processing in English-language dance dramas enriches students' aesthetic insights while strengthening their awareness of art as a medium of expression and cross-cultural communication.

4.3. Integration of Multiple Literacies in the Creative Process of Dance Drama

The results of this study confirm that the practice of English-language dance drama serves as a learning space that realizes the real integration of linguistic and aesthetic literacies simultaneously. Students not only understand language structures, but are also able to reflect them through contextualized and meaningful creative expressions. This finding is in line with the concept of

multimodal literacy proposed by Rahmanu and Molnár (2024), as well as Cook's (2003) theory of applied linguistics that places language as a social practice tied to cultural and emotional contexts. Overall, the results show that dance drama is not merely a form of entertainment or artistic expression, but an innovative learning vehicle that is able to stimulate students' cognitive, affective, and aesthetic development holistically.

5. Conclusion

Based on the presentation in discussion section above, it can be concluded that students' involvement in the practice of English dance drama significantly encourages the development of linguistic and aesthetic literacy in an integrated manner. From the linguistic aspect, students improved their mastery of prosody, understanding of narrative structure, and pragmatic functions of English in the performative context. Meanwhile, from the aesthetic aspect, students showed sensitivity to visual symbols, body expressions, and dramatic emotions manifested through gestures, artistic arrangements, and symbolic explorations in the performance.

Furthermore, the integration of linguistic and aesthetic literacy in the creative process of dance drama forms a multimodal and holistic learning experience. Dance drama is not only a medium of artistic expression, but also an innovative learning vehicle that touches the cognitive, affective, and social aspects of students. Thus, English-language dance drama in the arts education environment can be optimized as a pedagogical strategy that strengthens language skills, art appreciation, and cultural awareness simultaneously.

6. Future Research

This study was limited to a single institutional context involving performing arts students at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Bali. Future research is needed to examine the applicability and effectiveness of integrating linguistic and aesthetic literacies through English-language dance drama in broader educational settings, including other art institutions and non-arts-based programs. Comparative studies across different disciplines could reveal variations in pedagogical approaches, learning outcomes, and implementation challenges.

Moreover, future research could explore the integration of digital technologies in the production and performance process, such as the use of virtual media, augmented reality, or online platforms to enhance accessibility and pedagogical impact. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to investigate the long-term effects of student engagement in dance drama activities on their linguistic competencies, cultural awareness, and artistic identity development.

These future directions may contribute to strengthening the theoretical and methodological foundations of multimodal literacy-based arts curricula that are adaptive, innovative, and interdisciplinary in nature.

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