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Creative drama in English class: Boosting student self-esteem through innovation

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, the integration of creative drama into the formal curriculum has not been widely or systematically implemented, leaving substantial room for the development of students' emotional aspects, especially self-esteem, as an area of potential that has not been utilized. The purpose of this study is to examine how the addition of creative drama to the school curriculum can improve students' self-esteem in secondary schools. This study employs a qualitative approach using a participatory case study method at SMP PGRI Lembang, with primary informants including seventh and eighth-grade students, the school principal, and two teachers. Data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews with one school principal and two teachers, and documentation of learning activities. Thematic coding-based content analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that the use of structured creative drama significantly improves students' self-confidence, social courage, and self-expression. Activities such as improvisation, role-playing, and group reflection serve as effective means to develop students' affective dimensions, particularly self-esteem. This study concludes that the integration of creative drama and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) principles facilitates collaborative, reflective, and transformative learning experiences and can serve as an innovative learning model aligned with the ideals of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

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ABSTRAK

Di Indonesia, integrasi drama kreatif ke dalam kurikulum formal belum diterapkan secara luas atau sistematis, sehingga menyisakan ruang substansial untuk pengembangan aspek emosional peserta didik terutama harga diri sebagai area potensi yang belum dimanfaatkan. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengkaji bagaimana penambahan drama kreatif dalam kurikulum sekolah dapat meningkatkan harga diri peserta didik di sekolah menengah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus partisipatif di SMP PGRI Lembang, dengan informan utama berupa peserta didik kelas tujuh dan delapan, kepala sekolah, dan dua guru. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam dengan satu kepala sekolah dan dua guru, serta dokumentasi aktivitas belajar. Analisis isi berbasis pengkodean tematik digunakan untuk menganalis data. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan drama kreatif yang terstruktur secara signifikan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri, keberanian sosial, dan ekspresi diri peserta didik. Aktivitas seperti improvisasi, peran-peran, dan refleksi kelompok menjadi sarana efektif untuk mengembangkan dimensi afektif peserta didik, terutama harga diri. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi drama kreatif dan prinsip-prinsip Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek (PjBL) memfasilitasi pengalaman belajar kolaboratif, reflektif, dan transformatif, serta dapat menjadi model pembelajaran inovatif yang selaras dengan idealisme Kurikulum Merdeka.

Keywords: *drama kreatif; pembelajaran berbasis proyek; pendidikan afektif; penghargaan diri.*

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INTRODUCTION

According to data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health, 35% of adolescents in Indonesia have low self-esteem (Qodariyah et al., 2024). In the context of 21st-century education, students' emotional development, including their sense of confidence or self-esteem, is a crucial component in supporting both academic and social success. One promising pedagogical approach to addressing these emotional challenges is creative drama, which can provide an engaging and supportive learning environment that fosters self-esteem among adolescents (Leong, 2022; Stathi & Mastrothanasis, 2025). Creative drama integrates improvisation, role-play, and reflection, and it has been recognized as an effective method for revitalizing the learning process while also promoting personal growth and character development (Eyüp, 2023). Globally, research has consistently shown that drama-based interventions significantly enhance participants' communication skills, creativity, and self-confidence. However, in Indonesia, the integration of creative drama into the formal curriculum has not yet been widely or regularly implemented, leaving the development of students' emotional aspects, particularly self-esteem, as an area of untapped potential (Khiyaroh et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study is grounded in Modern Drama Theory, which posits that dramatic texts and performances can serve as a holistic learning medium simultaneously engaging the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Neelands & O'Holand , 2020). This framework aligns coherently with Project-Based Learning (PjBL) Theory, which emphasizes experiential learning, real world problem solving, collaborative work, and reflective thinking (Hu & Shu, 2025; Wang et al., 2022). Creative drama, as a component of PjBL, enables students to learn through role-play, resolve conflicts within simulated scenarios, and cultivate a sense of agency over their own learning outcomes. Indonesia has not yet systematically incorporated creative drama into the formal curriculum, especially at the junior secondary school level. The use of drama in schools is typically incidental and limited to art classes or festive occasions (Ni'mah & Puspitasari, 2024). The pedagogical potential of creative drama for character development, particularly in building self-confidence, is substantial.

Local studies have indicated that role-playing and improvisation can enhance social skills and reduce tendencies to dissociate oneself (Permatasari & Dalimunthe, 2020). Empirical studies that specifically examine the impact of the creative drama method on junior high school students' self-esteem within the context of regular classroom learning remain very limited. International research shows that creative drama is effective in reducing shame, improving mental well-being, and fostering self-esteem among adolescents and young adults (Karatay et al., 2022). Furthermore, other international research shows a significant increase in Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory scores among at-risk adolescents after participating in ten structured creative drama sessions (Fitri et al., 2024). While international evidence highlights the strong potential of creative drama to enhance self-esteem, the limited and incidental application in Indonesian schools reflects a gap between proven global practices and the current national educational context. However, studies focusing on junior high school contexts in Indonesia remain limited, revealing a noticeable gap between the existing theoretical frameworks and the practical needs of secondary-level educational settings.

This study is among the first to investigate the implementation of creative drama within the junior high school curriculum in Indonesia, integrating Modern Drama Theory with Project-Based Learning to address self-esteem development. Despite its proven benefits internationally, the use of creative drama to enhance self-esteem in Indonesian junior high schools remains under-researched, raising the following questions: How does the implementation of creative drama influence changes in junior high school students' self-esteem, and how do students perceive both the process and the outcomes of creative drama pedagogy?. These questions will be addressed through a qualitative study using a case study strategy involving observation, interviews, and documentation. This article offers a dual scientific contribution. First, it

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expands the empirical understanding of the application of creative drama at the junior high school level, addressing a practical research gap within the context of primary and secondary education. Second, at a conceptual level, it examines the implementation of the integration between modern drama theory and PjBL, within the framework of a formal school curriculum.

The aim of this study is to examine how the inclusion of creative drama in the school curriculum can increase the self-esteem of students in the secondary school. The findings of this study are expected to propose an innovative learning model that may be adopted both locally and nationally. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be used as information for teachers to develop learning methods that are not boring for students. The findings of this study are expected to become the basis for policy development and further research in the field of character education and students' psychosocial development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In tracing the relevance and theoretical foundations of this study, the literature review is directed toward two main foci is modern drama theory and creative drama as holistic pedagogical media and the integration of creative drama with the Project Based Learning (PjBL) approach to enhance students' self esteem. Through an exploration of both global and local studies, this section provides a robust conceptual framework and highlights the research gap that forms the basis for this study's contribution within the junior high school context in Indonesia.

Creative Drama as a Holistic Learning Medium

Creative drama is a pedagogical approach that enables students to learn through role exploration, improvisation, and symbolic narration in a collaborative environment (Safinatunnaja & Mawaddah, 2024). Unlike formal theater, creative drama emphasizes the students' creative and reflective processes as the core of the learning experience. Modern Drama Theory considers drama as a plurimedial medium integrating text, body, space, and sound that simultaneously stimulates emotional and intellectual engagement (Neelands & O'Hanlon, 2020). Through drama, students do not merely receive cognitive messages, but actively construct meaning through concrete experiences. For instance, when students portray characters within emotionally charged scenarios, they engage in self-reflection and develop social empathy (Dewi et al., 2023). This approach has been shown to foster self-identity and self-esteem, as students experience active involvement and a sense of control over the narratives they create. Several studies indicate that dramatic interactions such as role play in learning contexts lead to increased learning motivation and self-expression (Hu & Shu, 2025).

The Integration of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in Creative Drama

Project-Based Learning presents a pedagogical approach in which students are engaged in real-world problem-based projects, working collaboratively to design creative solutions and reflect on both the process and the outcomes (Fazarini et al., 2024; Zhang & Ma, 2023). The capacity of PjBL to cultivate 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, aligns effectively with the implementation of creative drama as the core medium of the project (Lamb et al., 2022). When creative drama is positioned as a classroom-based project within the curriculum, students are not only learning the content but also representing it through thematic performances. This process reinforces both individual and group responsibility, while fostering self-confidence through concrete experiences (Markula & Aksela, 2022; Maros et al., 2023). For instance, research found that a PjBL model integrating structured drama exercises led to an increase in self-esteem scores and group cooperation among junior high school

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students in Indonesia (Panjaitan et al., 2025). Emphasized that creative drama, as part of a PjBL approach, supports students in developing soft skills and emotional resilience (Wajdi & Syawal, 2024). This integration creates a learning space that nurtures not only cognitive development but also social and emotional identity. The synergistic impact between PjBL and creative drama reinforces students' roles as both leaders and reflective agents in their own learning processes.

The Impact of Creative Drama on Self-Esteem and the Research Gap in the Indonesian Context

Self-esteem, or the evaluation of one's own abilities and self worth, plays a critical role in shaping students' motivation, academic achievement, and mental well-being. A number of international studies have demonstrated the positive effects of creative drama interventions in improving self-esteem. In a quasi-experimental study involving midwifery students, significant improvements in Coopersmith Self Esteem scores and speaking ability were found after participating in a creative drama program (Uçtu & Karahan, 2021). Nursing students showed an increase in self-confidence (Kesim & Tekin, 2025). Meanwhile, in a systematic review, it was found that creative drama is effective in improving public speaking and communication skills (Kumar et al., 2022). However, most studies focused on higher education or clinical settings, not on junior high school students.

In Indonesia, the implementation of creative drama within the formal junior high school context remains highly limited. Local studies such as have primarily explored the use of drama in Indonesian language or arts instruction, without directly linking it to the measurement of students' self esteem as a learning outcome (Asimidou et al., 2021). One of the few studies that empirically examined the integration of creative drama into the junior high school curriculum with a focus on measuring self-esteem, though it remains in its early stages and is methodologically limited (Panjaitan et al., 2025). This condition highlights the significance of the present study: a qualitative case study approach offers an indepth perspective on students' emotional dynamics throughout the drama-based pedagogical process, addressing the lack of documented empirical research at the junior high school level in the Indonesian context.

This study offers a novel approach by integrating the method of creative drama with the PjBL approach to enhance the self-esteem of junior high school students. This research uses a qualitative case study approach in the context of primary-secondary education in Indonesia, which differs from previous studies that are mainly quantitative and focused on higher education levels. Its key contributions lie in the combination of modern drama theory and PjBL principles as a holistic and reflective conceptual framework, the application of art-based creative learning methods in formal classroom settings, which are rarely documented in junior high school curricula, and an explicit focus on students' emotional transformation through experiential and collaborative pedagogical practices. Thus, this study broadens the scope of local literature and provides an empirical foundation for developing a more humanistic and character-oriented curriculum.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study approach aimed at gaining an in depth understanding of the integration process of the creative drama method in learning to enhance junior high school students' self-esteem. The qualitative case study design was chosen because it enables a holistic exploration of the phenomenon within its natural context, while also uncovering the subjective meanings constructed by the participants involved. This approach was chosen as a transformative approach to character and socio-emotional education, which was also developed in a global context through arts-based learning projects, so that this study not only captured the transformation of students' behavior and emotions, but also

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revealed the potential of integrating drama as a pedagogical strategy in local learning. The case study approach covered the stages of data collection, data processing, and data analysis.

The research location was selected at SMP PGRI Lembang, which is located in a cool mountainous environment and serves students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, the majority of whom come from low to middle-income families. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to choose participants according to the criteria, namely participants who applied the learning model and those who actively participated in the learning process. Therefore, the participants included 24 seventh and eighth-grade students divided into three groups. In addition to the students, 1 school principal and 2 teachers served as key informants through in-depth interviews. All participants were sufficient for the case study research because they were selected from various components of the school, enabling triangulation.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation over a period of 1 month. Six drama learning sessions were observed in class, and each scene's reactions, teamwork, and facial expressions were noted. The principal of the school, subject teachers, and a few chosen students were interviewed to find out how they felt about the shift in self-esteem. Coopersmith's self-esteem parameters served as the basis for the design of the interview and observation tools whose approach has been updated as well as modification of the PjBL model for the arts. Although PjBL models generally involve completing project assignments, this study modifies creative drama as a project that students must participate in collaboratively, communicatively, creatively, and critically (Zhang & Ma, 2023). In the learning process through creative drama, students are divided into three groups to play characters in the story, creating a collaborative, communicative, and creative atmosphere in acting. Coopersmith's parameters are closely related to acceptance of changes in self-esteem, which encompasses the aspects of significance, virtue, power, and competence (Rokhmatika, 2024).

Data processing was carried out using manual thematic coding-based content analysis techniques with an inductive approach to reveal patterns and meanings from student narratives and classroom observations. Thematic coding was performed by grouping the interview results into two themes, namely creative drama and student self-esteem. Data analysis used source triangulation following contemporary qualitative research standards to ensure data validity and credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classroom Dynamics in the Implementation of Creative Drama

The implementation of the creative drama method at SMP PGRI Lembang has shown that the learning environment is dynamic and participatory. Students in seventh and eighth grades engaged in a learning process that involved emotional and social dimensions. Each group was given a script based on real-life situations around them, such as bullying, family, and friendship. The learning process took place over three weeks and included stages of script reading, character exploration, role playing practice, and a mini performance. Participatory observation revealed that although some students initially appeared awkward and shy, they gradually showed increased engagement week by week. Improvisation activities served as a catalyst for students to courageously express their ideas and emotions.

The creative drama method implemented at SMP PGRI Lembang began by dividing seventh and eighth-grade students into three groups, each receiving one drama script based on Islamic values and historical narratives namely “Nuaiman’s Gift and Ali, Aisyah, and its Simplicity of Love”. These scripts were selected for their strong elements of role modeling, emotional depth, and spiritual meaning, aligning with the characteristics of modern drama as an educational medium that engages cognitive, affective, and social dimensions (Oates et al., 2021). Students participated in scene improvisation, dialogue practice, and

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character exploration over the course of the three-week program. Under the direction of the researcher and the teacher, these exercises were completed in a relaxed classroom environment. Students' enthusiasm for performing, teamwork, and expressive confidence all showed notable improvements.

Figure 1*.The activities where seventh-grade students are practicing roles*
Source: Researcher's Documentation

The **Figure 1** above shows a view. Students can express themselves without fear of being directly judged through improvisation and performance activities. This creative stimulation creates a space for self-reflection and social empathy, which in turn enhances self-esteem. Observations indicated that peer-to-peer interactions and teacher support strengthened an inclusive classroom climate, a crucial factor in fostering school belonging. Interviews with the principal revealed strong support for the use of creative drama as part of character education innovation. The principal stated,

> *"We realize that academic learning alone is not enough to shape students' personalities. Methods like drama are very important to provide space for self-expression and empathy." (W.KS./24-07-2025).*

Two teachers involved in the interviews stated that the activity had a positive impact on student-to-student interaction. The Indonesian language teacher said,

> *"Some students who were usually passive are now more active in asking questions and expressing their opinions in class. This is no small improvement." (W. Gr.IND/ 24-07-2025).*

The guidance and counseling teacher stated,

> *"I observed a significant change in the attitudes of students involved in this program. Some of the students I had previously worked with had low self-esteem; they often felt incapable, shy, and as if they had no voice within the group. After participating in the series of creative drama activities, they began to show the courage to perform even voluntarily. This indicates that an approach involving direct experience and pressure-free self-expression actually fosters a sense of being 'valued' and 'recognized' within them. I see drama not only as a tool for expression, but also as a safe space to build a positive identity."* (W.BK/24-07-2025).

Both sources' narratives imply that this approach merits recognition as a significant teaching innovation, especially in terms of encouraging teamwork, bravery, and introspection.

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Shifts in Students' Self-Esteem

The observed improvement in students' self-esteem emerged as a significant indicator of the effectiveness of creative drama within the learning process. In the context of lower secondary education, self-esteem understood as a psychosocial construct shapes students' participation in both academic and social experiences. The qualitative results indicate that most students experienced significant improvements in several key aspects of self-esteem, namely: self-confidence, courage to express opinions, feeling valued within the group, and a sense of pride in themselves. These findings are supported by data narratives from teachers and the principal who directly observed changes in student behavior in class. The principal stated,

> *"We truly appreciate the implementation of this creative drama-based learning program. At first, we had some doubts about whether an arts-based approach could genuinely make a significant impact on students' character. However, after witnessing the process and the results firsthand, we believe this is a highly appropriate approach. Many students who were previously passive—even tended to avoid speaking in front of the class—have now shown remarkable courage." (W.KS/24-07-2025*).

This observation was also supported by other teachers, including the Indonesian language teacher, who noted several changes in students after the method was implemented. The teacher stated,

> "*Creative drama helps students become more expressive in conveying their ideas. Many of those who used to be silent are now able to speak in front of others with confidence. This has had a positive impact on their communication skills in the classroom." (W. Gr.IND/ 24-07-2025).*

The Guidance and Counseling teacher shared a similar perspective, stating:

> *"I observed a noticeable change in students' self-esteem. They began to feel valued, more willing to express their opinions, and less afraid of making mistakes. Drama provides a safe space for emotional and social growth." (W. BK./ 24-07-2025).*

Therefore, the statements from the principal, subject teacher, and guidance counselor consistently indicated a positive transformation among students following their involvement in creative drama activities. All three affirmed that students became more confident, expressive, and felt more valued in the learning environment. The experience of performing, collaborating in groups, and having a pressure-free space for expression were key elements that contributed to the improvement of their self-esteem. The results of interviews with students also showed that most students experienced increased self-confidence, a greater desire to achieve, and a stronger sense of being valued among their peers.

Discussion

The Role of Creative Drama in Emotional and Social Development

The findings of this study demonstrate that creative drama has a significant positive impact on the emotional and social development of junior high school students, particularly in enhancing self-confidence, collaboration skills, and self-expression. These results align with the theoretical framework of Modern Drama Theory, which positions drama as a plurimedial medium integrating text, body, space, and sound that simultaneously stimulates emotional and intellectual engagement (Neelands & O'Hanlon, 2020). Students who were initially shy became more confident in performing, expressing themselves, and collaborating in groups, supporting the assertion that creative drama enables students to learn through role exploration, improvisation, and symbolic narration in a collaborative environment (Safinatunnaja & Mawaddah, 2024).

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The observed improvements in students' social engagement are consistent with international research indicating that role-playing and improvisation can enhance social skills and reduce tendencies to dissociate oneself (Permatasari & Dalimunthe, 2020). Educational drama supports the development of 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking through activities such as role-playing and script interpretation (Hu & Jack, 2025; Wang et al., 2022). Which aligns with the PjBL framework's capacity to cultivate these essential skills (Lamb et al., 2022). Furthermore, dramatic narration enhances students' motivation and reduces public speaking anxiety, as learners feel safer when performing as another character (Wirag, 2024). Supporting the theoretical premise that drama provides a safe space for self-expression without rigid judgment.

The integration of creative drama with Project-Based Learning created a synergistic effect that positioned students as active participants in real-world projects, thereby enhancing their sense of achievement and self-confidence. This finding reinforces the theoretical foundation that PjBL engages students in real-world problem-based projects, working collaboratively to design creative solutions while reflecting on both the process and outcomes (Zhang & Ma, 2023). The steadily increasing levels of engagement from week to week empirically demonstrated how this integration fosters individual and group responsibility while building self-confidence through concrete experiences (Markula & Aksela, 2022; Maros et al., 2023).

This study supports the use of creative theater as one of the main factors in improving students' self-esteem. This result is consistent with previous research that highlights how active engagement in positive social settings and success stories can boost students' self-esteem (Asimidou et al., 2021). Consistent with studies emphasizing that teachers' and school leadership's roles serve as catalysts for curriculum innovation, support from teachers and the school is essential to the successful implementation of this approach (Meyer et al., 2023). The significant increase in students' positive self-perception after participating in drama activities can be attributed to the success of performance, social support from peers and teachers, as well as the opportunity to express themselves without rigid judgment, which play important roles in fostering self-esteem (Purba et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, PjBL theory reinforces these findings by positioning students as active participants in real-world projects, thereby enhancing their sense of achievement and self-confidence that was empirically demonstrated in this context through the steadily increasing levels of engagement from week to week (Zhao & Wang, 2022). Students can express a range of emotions and viewpoints through improvised performances and activities without worrying about being judged directly. Self-esteem is raised by this creative stimulation because it makes room for introspection and social empathy. Peer-to-peer interaction and teacher support were found to promote an inclusive classroom environment, which is crucial for creating a sense of school belonging and is also positively connected with students' psychosocial well-being and self-esteem (Purba et al., 2024).

Exploring the Impact of Drama-Based Intervention on the Self-Esteem of Junior High School Students

Self-esteem consistently rises when students' post-drama reflections are examined, especially when it comes to traits like self-confidence, the courage to voice one's opinions, and pride in oneself. Based on interview data, students said they felt more confident speaking in front of the class, valued in their group, and they were more inclined to voice their opinions. Following the introduction of project-based drama activities in English language classes, university students' self-confidence increased, reflecting a positive stimulation that is consistent with established findings (Amarullah, 2020). A study demonstrated that the implementation of mini-dramas based on PjBL in secondary school students significantly enhanced learning motivation, language communication skills, and self-confidence (Farisya, 2024). These findings

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further support the synergy between the arts and collaborative pedagogy, emphasizing how creative drama can serve as an effective educational tool for holistic student development.

The consistent increase in students' self-esteem observed in this study validates international research demonstrating the effectiveness of creative drama in improving mental well-being and fostering self-esteem among adolescents (Karatay et al., 2022). Post-drama reflections revealed significant improvements in self-confidence, courage to voice opinions, and personal pride, mirroring the significant increase in Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory scores found among at-risk adolescents after participating in structured creative drama sessions (Fitri et al., 2024). Students reported feeling more confident speaking in front of the class, valued in their group, and more inclined to voice their opinions, supporting the theoretical understanding that self-esteem represents the evaluation of one's own abilities and self-worth (Uçtu & Karahan, 2021).

Additionally, a study found that social interaction levels in elementary schools increased from 67.9% to 82.15%, on average, in students who participated in drama-based learning (Susanti et al., 2023). This measurable improvement shows a qualitative shift in group dynamics and reinforces the role of drama as a social development tool for students (Hermanto & Yusuf, 2021). The positive correlation between student involvement in drama and self-esteem is supported by existing literature, which suggests that project-based learning experiences that allow students to present their work can enhance self-efficacy, self-esteem, and intrinsic motivation (Zhao & Wang, 2022). Therefore, a structured implementation of creative drama may significantly contribute to the psychosocial development of junior high school students.

Drama-based learning methods create a safe space for students to explore their identity and emotions, significantly boosting their self-confidence and sense of self-worth (Haris et al., 2024; Panjaitan et al., 2025). This finding addresses the identified gap in local Indonesian research, where studies focusing on junior high school contexts remained limited (Panjaitan et al., 2025). The use of creative project-based approaches in schools with limited facilities can foster students' spirit of collaboration and resilience (Asmara et al., 2025). This demonstrates that the quality of the learning process is not solely determined by the sophistication of infrastructure, but rather by the creativity and willingness of educational institutions to adopt approaches that align with students' local contexts. These results align with studies highlighting how the learning-by-doing method in theater fosters students' emotional involvement, which in turn raises their sense of self-worth and confidence (Susanti et al., 2023). Students seemed "more enthusiastic than usual" and "seemed unpressured even when performing in front of their peers," according to the teachers who led the activity.

Art-based learning interventions, which have been proven effective in improving students' self-esteem, are more likely to be supported by schools that maintain inclusive and participatory cultural support systems. This supports the Modern Drama Theory assertion that students do not merely receive cognitive messages but actively construct meaning through concrete experiences (Dewi et al., 2023). When students portray characters within emotionally charged scenarios, they engage in self-reflection and develop social empathy, fostering self-identity and self-esteem through active involvement and control over the narratives they create.

The Synergy Between Educational Drama and Project-Based Learning

Thematic analysis identified three main categories of student change: self-expression, social courage, and personal reflection. These elements reflect the synergy between modern drama theory which emphasizes expressive and reflective experiences and the PjBL framework, which emphasizes learning through contextual and collaborative projects. Drama-based learning as a project (mini-drama) successfully strengthened aspects of communication, creativity, collaboration, and motivation, which ultimately led to an increase in students' self-esteem (Hastuti, 2023). PjBL creates a learning structure that allows students

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to be meaningfully involved in every stage of the project process from script exploration to performance and reflective evaluation fostering a sense of responsibility and the courage to finally perform. Similarly, Indicated that students expressed positive perceptions toward the implementation of drama as PjBL, as this method increased their sense of ownership in the learning process and strengthened their interpersonal skills (Anggraini, 2022).

Furthermore, the practice of storytelling using the scripts Nuaiman's Gift and Ali, Aisyah, and Its Simplicity of Love used in this study stimulated students' reflection on spiritual and social values. Value-oriented stories functioned not only as content but also as a medium for self-interpretation and character identification, strengthening the affective learning process and character formation in alignment with the spirit of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. This study enriches the local Indonesian literature with new empirical data on the implementation of creative drama in the context of formal junior high schools, a space that has been significantly underexplored in previous research. Local studies such as those by remain limited in scope; this study addresses that gap through a qualitative approach and an in-depth case study design (Aji et al., 2025; Asimidou et al., 2021; Panjaitan et al., 2025; Zubaidah et al., 2023).

Moreover, these findings provide a practical model which can be replicated and adapted by other teachers and school leaders in Indonesia, in particular when it comes to the implementation of character and social-emotional learning. The synergies between PjBL and drama provide a pedagogical model that not only emphasises mastery of content but also reinforces self-confidence and promotes an inclusives learning environment. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding that creative and arts-based pedagogy is not only relevant in higher education or extracurricular settings but can also be systematically integrated into the formal junior high school curriculum. The practice of drama storytelling as a project deserves to be part of a humanistic and contextual strategy for strengthening students' character and social-emotional development.

The findings of this study reinforce the connection between modern drama theory and the PjBL approach in shaping students' character and self-esteem. In this study, the process of creating and performing drama served as a collaborative project that fostered responsibility, empathy, and a sense of accomplishment. These two approaches complement each other and align with the values of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, particularly in the dimensions of "faith and noble character," "independence," and "creativity". In practice, this study offers a creative learning model that can be adopted and further developed by other educational institutions in Indonesia, particularly in supporting the Kurikulum Merdeka. This study also fills a gap in the local literature on the application of creative drama at the junior high school level through a contextual qualitative approach. Therefore, it is recommended that curriculum development at the elementary and junior high school levels be more open to integrating arts-based methods into regular learning, especially to support students' psychosocial aspects, which are often overlooked.

This study is still limited to one research site and only examines the effect of creative drama on students' self-esteem. Meanwhile, previous theories suggest that drama can stimulate emotional involvement, not only self-esteem but also students' intellectual abilities, including critical thinking skills (Neelands & O'Hanlon, 2020). Additionally, this study does not examine the impact of drama on students' active engagement in learning and their motivation to participate in learning. Previous studies have shown that the use of drama in learning significantly influences students' motivation and self-expression, thereby supporting their active participation in the classroom (Hu & Shu, 2025).

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CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the inclusion of creative drama in the curriculum of secondary schools has a significant positive effect on improving the self-esteem of students. Through participative project-based learning (PjBL), students not only learn to understand the subject, but also gain the opportunity to express themselves, work together as a team and reflect deeply on their values and emotions. I Simplicity of Love has demonstrated the usefulness of drama as a holistic teaching tool that can integrate cognitive, affective and social dimensions simultaneously. Results of research show that students have seen significant improvements in their confidence in public speaking, self-esteem and ability to develop relationships. This shows that during the learning process using the creative drama approach, students' perceptions of public speaking changed. At the end of the learning activity, students showed improving their speaking skills. Support from school leaders and teachers has also been identified as a key factor in successful implementation of the method, showing that curricular innovation depends not only on teaching techniques but also on school culture and openness to change.

Theoretically, the study strengthens the synergy between modern drama theory and PjBL principles as a conceptual framework for learning in the 21st century, emphasising the importance of authentic, collaborative and reflective experiences. The results of this study answer the research objective of improving students' self-esteem through the application of creative drama via PjBL, so that this learning model can be used in other schools. Future studies could expand the participants to include various school contexts, including those with limited resources, to examine differences in the acceptance and impact of creative drama in PjBL. Longitudinal research is also recommended to assess the sustainability of improvements in students' self-esteem over time after drama interventions. Moreover, applying this method to other subjects or educational levels could provide broader insights into the generalizability of the proposed learning model.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author confirms that the data and content of the article are free from plagiarism.

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