



# Social Constructivism and Visible Thinking in Virtual Drama Classrooms in Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia: Insights from Lecturers

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**Abstract:** The Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (2013-2025) emphasises students' mastery of communication and critical thinking in coping with future demands, aligning with the social constructivist principles in education. This qualitative study explores the manifestation of social constructivism and the Visible Thinking (VT) approach in a Malaysian tertiary drama classroom. It investigated the interactive roles in the drama classroom, the impact of online interactions and the feasibility of applying VT thinking routines from the lecturers' perspective. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the data collection method, followed by verbatim transcription and thematic analysis. The interviewees were two lecturers of Communication Through Drama (EPC522), a compulsory course for the third-semester students of the Bachelor of Applied Language Studies-English for Professional Communication programme at Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. The study was underpinned by Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (1962, 1978) and Ritchhart's VT approach (2006) from Harvard University's Project Zero (PZ). The findings revealed the challenges of conducting drama activities online and demonstrated the potential of implementing VT routines to enhance students' interactive roles. Despite some connectivity and technical hindrances, lecturers embraced this new experience, creating a more interactive and student-centred environment. They also signified their facilitating roles in giving feedback and guiding students throughout the drama exploration (DE) stages. Adhering to the national education policy, the study's findings highlight the potential of virtual drama pedagogy in enhancing interactive roles, improving communication, as well as promoting awareness and applicability of thinking routines.

**Keywords:** drama exploration, interactive roles, social constructivism, thinking routines, virtual drama classrooms, Visible Thinking

## Introduction

At the core of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (1962, 1978) is the understanding that teaching and learning are fundamentally social activities, with learning taking place through interactions. This study is motivated by the recognition of the influential role of drama, particularly in the language classroom, in facilitating interactions. It embodies the principles of social constructivism and the Visible Thinking (VT) approach (Ritchhart, 2006). A study done by the earlier authors in gauging students' responses on the application of the VT approach in the drama classroom found that the VT routines enhanced students' interactive roles and communication skills; they benefited from this more interactive and student-centred environment amidst the challenges (Zaamah Mohd Nor et al., 2024). To see how the same approach in the drama classroom is perceived from the viewpoints of the lecturers, this study focuses on exploring the insights of lecturers teaching the EPC522 course, from which comparisons with students' responses are made on salient points.

The EPC522 course was chosen for this study as it closely corresponds with social constructivist and VT principles. Distinct in its focus on drama as a tool for enhancing communication skills, the course combines language learning and practical classes in voice, sensory awareness, movement, and acting. With its practical approach, the course aims to boost students' confidence and skills in using English creatively, encouraging critical thinking and appreciation of aesthetic values. As Bsharat (2021) aptly stated, learners engaging in drama recognise the importance of communication and concentration, as drama can only be done in a meaningful interactional context, thereby highlighting the power of drama in education.

It is crucial to accentuate that the manifestation of the social constructivist and VT approach emphasises the roles of interaction in any interactional context, whether virtual or physical. For this study, "online" is the medium or tool utilised for the interactive activities due to the context and time the study was embarked on. Since the data were collected based on the course conducted between August 2022 and November 2023, during which time the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode was fully ongoing for most courses in the university, the study sought to discover the virtual environment's impact on interactive roles, teaching and learning experiences. Now that online or hybrid learning (instead of a fully face-to-face method) will likely become the way forward under the embarkation of Education 5.0, the study's revelation would be significant in filling the research gap in this domain and setting the future orientation of tertiary drama classrooms. As outlined in the UiTM ODL 5.0 Action Plan, coordinated with the announcement of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) on 9 February 2022, the basis of the ODL 5.0 Lecture Action Plan consists of five main components, namely:

1. Empowerment of the latest culture and teaching and learning techniques.
2. Lifestyle balance of students and lecturers.
3. Optimisation of existing teaching and learning resources.
4. Self-compliance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
5. Support of the surrounding community.

Following these guidelines, the lecturers' roles and flexibility in choosing suitable methods for their students to fit with the learning outcomes are crucial. In the context of this study, online group interactions will continue to play a significant role in completing the stages of Drama Exploration (DE). Adhering to the hybrid mode and in compliance, especially with components 1, 3, and 4 of the ODL Action Plan, parts of the DE stages will still be done online while conducting face-to-face meetings in small groups for rehearsals and the final drama

production.

### **Research Objectives**

The study was motivated by the scarcity of research on drama classrooms, particularly in promoting thinking skills to adhere to future demands and the impact of ODL interactions in the scope of Malaysian tertiary drama classrooms. Thus, the study attempted to see the lecturers' views to address these research questions:

1. What interactive roles are manifested in the drama classroom?
2. How does virtual interaction impact the drama classroom experiences?
3. How applicable are social constructivism and Visible Thinking in Malaysian tertiary drama education?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Challenges in ODL Drama Classrooms**

According to Karaosmanoğlu et al. (2022), as a result of the pandemic, there has been a pressing need for drama educators and students to adapt their methods, prompting a shift towards digital resources for drama interactions. This transition required not only mastering digital teaching tools but also rethinking how technology could be effectively integrated to enhance the educational value of drama. . Another driving factor was the generally negative experiences of ODL among Malaysian tertiary students during the pandemic, where issues of interaction and connectivity were central. Choong (2020) highlights that students from less privileged backgrounds face additional challenges, such as limited internet access, inadequate study space, and lack of necessary facilities like computers. Berg (2020) points out that these limitations in ODL interactions often stem from technological challenges (e.g., poor internet connectivity) rather than issues with content, lecturers, or peers. Online learning reduces students' focus and attention due to distractions from gadgets and social media, which hinders their motivation to learn (Frigillano, 2023). Scholars also emphasised that providing students with similar interaction opportunities as face-to-face sessions is crucial for student satisfaction and the successful implementation of ODL (Berg, 2020).

While generally negative feedback on ODL was reported, studies by Ali (2021) and Nadarajan et al. (2023) found that university students had moderate to positive perceptions of online drama classes despite connectivity issues. They also viewed online tools and materials positively, though class participation was perceived neutrally. On another positive note, Kulprasit (2024) states that online courses consist of both synchronous meetings via online platforms and asynchronous discussions. Owing to technological advancements, many courses can now be conducted online using high-tech gadgets and the latest software applications, marking the beginning of the digital learning era (Kulprasit, 2024). Research on drama classrooms in Malaysian tertiary settings, be it online or face-to-face, is under-explored despite the potential of drama activities to promote learner interaction. Therefore, on the part of the lecturers, interactive roles in drama classroom settings should be optimised and enhanced through effective classroom practices, such as incorporating VT thinking routines.

#### **Project Zero and the Visible Thinking Approach**

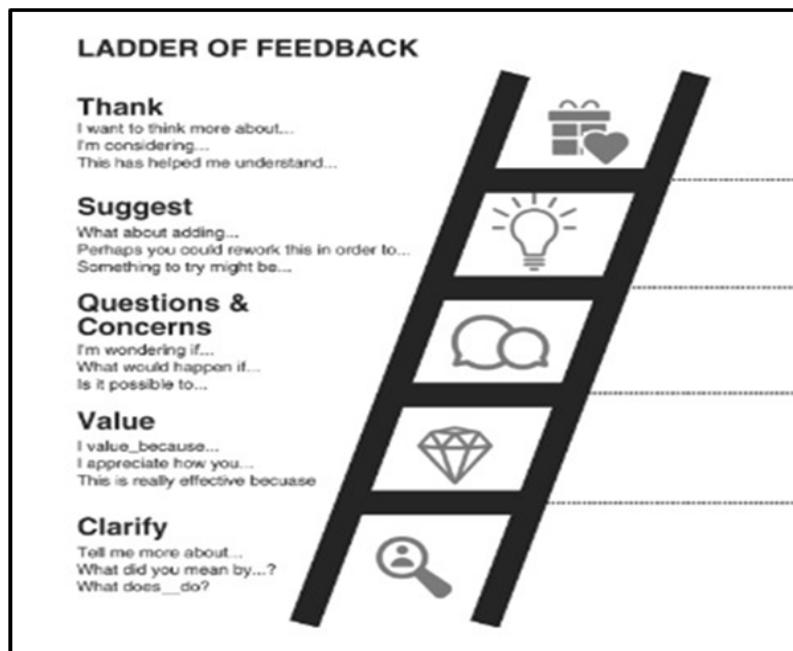
Visible Thinking (VT), developed by Harvard University academics and teachers globally, is part of Project Zero (PZ) established by Nelson Goodman in 1967 to improve education. VT, a core PZ project by Ron Richhart (2006), integrates students' thinking development with content

learning across subjects. Ritchhart and Church (2020) identify six-way thinking routine practices that transform classrooms: fostering deep learning, engaging students, changing student and teacher roles, enhancing formative assessment, improving learning, and developing thinking dispositions. PZ has created numerous thinking routines, each with various activities for educators worldwide. Currently, 83 Visible Thinking routines are available for educators, allowing them to maintain professional autonomy and tailor them to fit their students' needs and educational environments.

The Ladder of Feedback (LoF) routine guides interactive discussions by proposing specific language functions (Perkins, 2003). This routine (Figure 1) was introduced and described to the lecturers interviewed in this study. Since VT promotes making the thinking process "visible" by documenting the results of thinking, it can be likened to students' group interactive activities in preparing and presenting the storyboard, i.e. Stage 1 of the Drama Exploration (DE) in the EPC522 syllabus (Figure 2). Here, the results of group brainstorming are documented and made visible by presenting the storyboards for the movie adaptation in the form of PowerPoint presentations. The study attempted to gauge the lecturers' views on making thinking a conscious routine among learners by explicitly instructing the students to apply the LoF routine in their interactive group activities in completing the DE tasks.

**Figure 1**

*The Ladder of Feedback VT routine, adapted from Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education*



**Figure 2***The Drama Exploration (DE) Stages (based on EPC522 Syllabus)*

Stages	Proposed Interactive Group Activities
1	<b>Planning and Outlining</b> (Adapting an existing script for classroom dramatisation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting movie/drama for script adaptation</li> <li>• Justifying the choice</li> <li>• Discussing the adapted version</li> <li>• Completing the storyboard</li> <li>• Presenting the storyboard</li> <li>• Getting approval</li> </ul>
2	<b>Playing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing of the material to be dramatised (reading/telling/choral reading)</li> <li>- Trying-on (brief encounter of life as the character and finding elements of voice and body that work in portraying the character)</li> <li>- Dramatisation (developing the theme through dramatic actions)</li> <li>• Preparing adapted script</li> <li>• Writing the script</li> <li>• Casting/Delegating roles</li> <li>• Discussing the characters</li> <li>• Arrangement of scenes/acts/climax/plot twist</li> </ul>
3	<b>Evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflective analysis of learning experience (discussion of personal reactions, the content and theme, and how to extend experience/skills to other real-world situations and circumstances)</li> <li>- Discussion and evaluation of initial dramatisation of an adapted script in Stage 2</li> </ul> <b>Workshop (Rehearsal)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramatisation of play based on an adapted script</li> <li>• Critique session, discussion and evaluation of performances.</li> </ul>
4	<b>Replay</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continuous enactment from previous stages.</li> <li>- Students incorporate new materials or changes in acts/scenes (if any) obtained from further reading, observation or new ideas.</li> <li>- Discussion of play based on an adapted script.</li> <li>• Rehearsing the script</li> <li>• Reading aloud (verbal and non-verbal expressions)</li> <li>• Discussing props, costumes, music</li> <li>• Discussing technical aspects of shooting for final drama production.</li> </ul>

## Social Constructivism in Education

Dagar and Yadav (2016) describe constructivist pedagogy as an approach where students engage in meaningful activities, encouraging reflection, initiative, and creativity. Miller-First and Ballard (2017) outline five core principles of constructivism: learning as an active, meaning-making process from experiences and interactions; cognitive conflict through problem-solving; social and collaborative learning; embedded assessment and reflection; and learner responsibility. Social constructivism is a teaching method that focuses on student engagement, discussion, and sharing. This approach incorporates various group formats and interactive strategies, including whole-class discussions, small-group dialogues, and pair work. Through these activities, students exchange ideas and brainstorm to identify cause-and-effect relationships, solve problems, or expand their existing knowledge (Al-Qaysi et al., 2021).

Meaningful learning arises from social interactions, where students work together to construct knowledge. Teachers support this process by employing instructional strategies that facilitate student engagement and knowledge development, foster critical thinking, and promote autonomy among learners. Consequently, students transition from passive listeners to active participants and co-creators of knowledge, sharing the responsibility for learning with their teachers (Saleem et al., 2021).

## Application of the Social Constructivist and VT Approach in the Drama Classroom

Incorporating drama in language classrooms has a long history, with Maley and Duff (1982) highlighting its benefits for vocabulary learning, confidence-building, motivation, and shifting focus from the teacher to students. Zakhareuski (2018, as cited in Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020) argues that drama enhances learners' self-confidence and self-esteem and reduces speaking anxiety. Vygotsky's social constructivism perceives learning as a lifelong process dependent on social interaction and social learning. This theory provides opportunities for students to

collaborate with teachers and peers in constructing knowledge and understanding. This is particularly relevant to drama education because learning in drama is 'based on process' (Wright, 2017). In addition, Gholam (2018) found that VT thinking routines in higher education promote cooperation, communication, higher-order thinking, and student participation. These exercises facilitate reflection and learning from peers. The approach emphasised three core practices: thinking routines, the documentation of student thinking, and reflective professional practice. However, many VT studies were conducted on early childhood and secondary education; some studies focused on how thinking routines enhance thinking skills, including critical thinking skills in elementary school (Mala Rejeki Manurung et al., 2022). Thus, more research studies are needed on under-explored areas, such as the impact of thinking routines on students of higher education contexts, particularly in communicative drama classrooms, both in physical and online contexts. This study adopts social constructivism and Visible Thinking as foundational concepts, emphasising interaction, thinking, learner-centredness, empowerment, and autonomy, aligning with the country's English language policy demands.

### Methodology

The study is qualitative in design, employing qualitative data collection methods and analysis. The semi-structured interviews with Lecturer A (LA) and Lecturer B (LB) were conducted one-on-one with the researcher via Webex video conferences. The two interviews were completed in November 2023, having the participants reflect their teaching experiences using the ODL mode from 2020 onwards and discussing the feasibility of applying the LoF VT routine in the drama exploration (DE) stages. The routine was introduced and described clearly before the interview. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Two lecturers were chosen for the interview by purposeful sampling and considered sufficient for three reasons: 1. In qualitative research, the concept of purposeful sampling enables the researcher to select individuals who can contribute to an understanding of the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2014), 2. This course only has three to four lecturers per semester, and 3. An in-depth analysis of the interviews was employed to address the research questions. Zaamah, include a line from the literature on qualitative data collection which focuses on the depth of info rather than the number. >> Included: The study provides an in-depth description of this specific group and setting to meet its objectives rather than aiming for generalisation to a larger population. As emphasised by Patton (2015), qualitative data collection prioritises the depth and richness of information over the number of participants, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study. Table 1 displays the profile of the two interviewed lecturers.

**Table 1**  
*Profile of the Interviewees*

Details	Lecturer A (LA)	Lecturer B (LB)
Age	48	59
Gender	Female	Female
Position	Senior Lecturer	Associate Professor
Academic Qualification	MA in Social Sciences	PhD in Education
Years of teaching experience	18	35
Years of teaching EPC522	1	6

The main criterion for selection was their over 15 years of experience as academicians (both are senior lecturers), teaching various codes of English in the university; both have taught EPC522 using the fully ODL mode for six semesters (2020-2022) and mixed-mode afterwards, yet with an apparent difference in terms of years of experience in teaching EPC522. It would

be interesting to see if this affects their views on the matters discussed. The questions constructed for the semi-structured interviews were validated by three experts in the field with 20 years of teaching experience. Experts can provide feedback on whether the questions adequately capture the concepts being investigated (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The instruments (interview questions) designed and addressed to gain their insights were:

1. What interactive roles should students take in completing the DE stages?
2. What challenges did your students face interacting with each other in the ODL mode?
3. What challenges did you, as the lecturer, face in interacting with students online?
4. How do you describe your interactive roles, particularly in online drama classrooms? Is there any difference between them and your roles in physical classrooms?
5. Do your current/recent semester students still use online interactive group discussions to complete the DE, particularly for the first two stages?
6. Given a choice, which method would you prefer for the current/future EPC522 classrooms? (50% online + 50% F2F, 30% Online+70% F2F, or 100% F2F?). Please give reasons for your preference.
7. How do you encourage students to “think aloud” in your EPC522 classrooms?
8. In your opinion, does the students' creation of the storyboard and script and later finalisation of the dramatisation require much thinking?
9. How do you expect their thinking to be displayed and documented during the group discussions?
10. Have you heard or read about VT or PZ before?
11. Did your students apply all or parts of the proposed steps of the LoF VT routine (in their group discussions, even without specific instructions?)
12. What is your view regarding consciously practising certain thinking routines throughout the DE stages? Will it enhance students' interactive roles in completing the tasks?
13. Would you like to learn more about other VT routines applicable in the drama classroom?
14. What is your overall view regarding the feasibility of applying the VT thinking routines in the EPC522 classrooms?

## Findings

### The Interview Responses

Salient points raised by the two interviewees were recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically. Eight themes, closely referring to the research questions, were derived from the interview responses. They are summarised and presented in Table 2 below. The subsequent discussion compares and contrasts both viewpoints, relates them to students' responses and addresses the research questions by referring to relevant literature.

**Table 2**  
*Summary of the Semi-structured Interview Responses*

Themes	Lecturer A (LA)	Lecturer B (LB)
<b>1. Interactive Roles of Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the drama classroom, students should take interactive roles that involve understanding and expressing emotions and messages effectively through non-verbal and verbal communication.</li> <li>• They must comprehend the importance of body language, voice modulation, and effective communication to convey emotions and messages.</li> <li>• They should engage in brainstorming, teamwork, and quick responses, especially during improvisation assessments.</li> <li>• Critical thinking, creative thinking, and adapting and modifying existing content are vital skills required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students must engage in group discussions, brainstorming sessions, and idea sharing.</li> <li>• The interactive roles involve contributing to planning, application, and other aspects of the drama exploration process.</li> <li>• LB stresses the importance of students being creative and positive in their interactive roles.</li> <li>• Creativity is particularly crucial in adapting and creating stories within the given themes, as seen in the drama class.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Interactive Roles of Lecturers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA primarily plays a facilitator role, offering students guidance, suggestions, and consultations.</li> <li>• While some instructional elements are provided, the focus is on facilitating students' creative and critical thinking.</li> <li>• The lecturer's feedback is crucial to guide students' development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LB describes her role as more of a facilitator in the drama classroom.</li> <li>• She provides instructions and facilitates the learning process, allowing students to generate ideas and be creative.</li> <li>• Immediate feedback is given during and after activities, with reflection sessions at the end of each lesson.</li> <li>• Feedback is provided both to the entire group and individually, fostering a collaborative learning environment.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Challenges in ODL Drama Classrooms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The online learning mode presented challenges in building strong team dynamics and group interactions.</li> <li>• Connectivity issues and communication difficulties, such as understanding non-verbal cues and maintaining eye contact, affected the quality of interactions.</li> <li>• Students found conveying emotions and maintaining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connectivity issues were the main challenge for students, especially those in Sabah and Sarawak.</li> <li>• Despite these constraints, they managed to overcome them, often resorting to alternative communication platforms like WhatsApp when facing problems with online tools such as Google Meet.</li> </ul>

Themes	Lecturer A (LA)	Lecturer B (LB)
	<p>engagement challenging when not physically present with their peers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LA observed that virtual teaching was less effective than face-to-face interactions, especially when building rapport and teamwork in drama classes.</li> <li>Students were quieter and less responsive during online sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>However, LB mentioned that students generally did not encounter problems with laptops or phones; most had access to such devices. The main hurdle was the reliability of internet connections, especially for those in remote areas.</li> <li>LB faced challenges with online interaction, especially with students in remote areas like Sabah, Sarawak, and some parts of Peninsular</li> </ul>
<b>4. Practised and Preferred Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The drama classroom has a blended approach, with both online and face-to-face elements.</li> <li>While some aspects, such as theoretical content, are suitable for online learning, practical activities benefit from in-person interactions.</li> <li>LA prefers a balanced approach with 50% online and 50% face-to-face teaching.</li> <li>Face-to-face interactions are essential for certain aspects of drama learning, particularly for practice and assessment purposes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students continued to practice online interactive discussions. Even after the formal class hours, students engaged in discussions through WhatsApp.</li> <li>They maintained communication and collaborative activities, sometimes meeting during weekends or nights to discuss various aspects of their coursework and drama activities.</li> <li>LB prefers 100% face-to-face interaction in the drama classroom.</li> <li>She believes that the nuances of body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice are crucial in a drama class and are better conveyed in face-to-face settings.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Encouraging Critical and Creative Thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are encouraged to think critically and creatively through activities like analysing visual content and using stimuli like pictures and movies to inspire reflection.</li> <li>Students are encouraged to "think aloud" when they engage in discussions and make their thought processes transparent to their peers.</li> <li>Creating storyboards and scripts for drama performances requires substantial creative and critical thinking from the students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LB encourages students to think in the EPC522 classrooms by presenting them with specific situations or scenarios. She prompts them to relate these situations to their everyday lives, drawing on their personal experiences and observations.</li> <li>The encouragement to "think aloud" is evident in the group discussions, where students openly share their thoughts and ideas. This process involves students applying the situation to their lives and friends' experiences.</li> </ul>

Themes	Lecturer A (LA)	Lecturer B (LB)
<b>6. Awareness of Visible Thinking and Project Zero</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LA has not heard of Visible Thinking and Project Zero before the interview.</li> <li>LA expresses interest in learning more about other VT routines, even though it may be challenging due to time constraints.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students play an active role in developing scripts, storyboards, and final dramatisations.</li> <li>Students display and document their thinking during group discussions by putting their thoughts on paper (to jot down ideas, notes, and roles for the drama activities).</li> </ul>
<b>7. Student Application of Thinking Routines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students naturally apply some thinking routines without explicit instructions, integrated into their discussions and problem-solving in completing the DE stages.</li> <li>Explicit instructions for students to apply the VT routine may be helpful, especially for less participative students.</li> <li>LA is open to introducing the conscious practice of thinking routines to enhance students' interaction in the drama classroom, especially for less proactive students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students naturally engage in the thinking routine, even without explicit instructions, performing the process unconsciously.</li> <li>When students are placed in a group and given a thematic scenario for their final drama project, they instinctively go through the stages of the thinking routine. This includes making suggestions, voicing concerns, expressing values, and seeking clarification.</li> <li>However, LB believes that making students aware of these routines could enhance their effectiveness.</li> <li>LB expresses positivity about the application of VT routines.</li> </ul>
<b>8. Feasibility of Applying VT Routines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LA thinks introducing VT routines in the drama classroom is feasible, provided they are done naturally to support students' interaction and thinking processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LB finds VT routines feasible in the drama classroom.</li> <li>LB suggests applicability to other ELC courses, such as EPC510 (culture class).</li> </ul>

### Comparative Analysis of the Interview Responses

Table 2 shows that both lecturers shared some similar views regarding interactive roles in the drama classroom, the impact of virtual learning mode, and the applicability of VT routines in drama classrooms, described as follows:

### **Interactive Roles**

LA emphasised that students in the drama classroom should effectively convey emotions and messages using non-verbal and verbal communication. Active participation in brainstorming sessions, teamwork, and quick responses during improvisation assessments were also highlighted. In developing critical and creative thinking, the participant stressed that students should adapt and modify existing content, showcasing their critical and creative thinking skills. LB similarly stressed the role of students in engaging in group discussions and brainstorming. They must actively participate in group discussions, brainstorming sessions, and idea-sharing activities. Their roles involve contributing to the planning and application aspects of drama exploration. LB also stressed the importance of creativity and positivity in students' interactive roles, particularly in adapting and creating stories within given themes.

Both lecturers agreed on the importance of active engagement and creativity in the drama classroom. However, LA emphasised the technical aspects of communication, such as body language and voice modulation. At the same time, LB focused more on the overall contribution to planning and maintaining a positive and creative attitude.

LA and LB described their roles in the drama classroom primarily as facilitators. They provided guidance, instructions, and constructive feedback, emphasising the facilitation of students' creative and critical thinking in the drama adaptation tasks, as stated by LA:

*I think I'm more of a facilitator, I would say, you know, instructor not so, except when I'm giving instructions because I need to make sure that they're clear about every assessment, so I'm an instructor in that sense. But when they are working on their assessment, I would be a facilitator whereby I would encourage them and give some ideas if they're stuck. They need guidance, so consultation for every assessment is needed, especially when they're working on the drama because it's a longer process.*

### **Importance of Creativity**

Both lecturers stressed the importance of creativity in students' roles. They encouraged students to adapt creatively and create stories within given themes, highlighting their significance in the DE stages.

### **Challenges of Online Learning**

LA and LB acknowledged challenges in online learning, mainly related to connectivity issues. They noted the impact on group dynamics, interactions, and the overall quality of the learning experience.

### **Preference for Face-to-Face Interaction**

Both lecturers expressed a preference for face-to-face interaction in the drama classroom. They believed that certain aspects of drama, such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, are better conveyed in person.

### **Encouragement of Critical and Creative Thinking**

LA and LB actively encouraged students to think critically and creatively. They used various activities, discussions, and reflections to prompt students engagement in critical thinking processes. When asked how thinking aloud was encouraged in her classroom, LB encouraged students to think in the EPC522 classrooms by presenting them with specific situations or scenarios. The encouragement to "think aloud" was evident in the group discussions where students openly shared their thoughts and ideas while in groups. LB highlighted that the process involves students applying the given situation to their own lives, experiences, and those of their friends. This collaborative thinking and sharing contribute to the creative and critical thinking required in the drama classroom:

*"I would give them a situation. They need to think about it in a group, you know, they usually sit in a group and think about it. They will have to apply it to their everyday life, okay, or the things that they have seen and experienced before. That is very important, and then they will then somehow, you know, be very creative, yeah, that's how I encourage them to think about themselves, think about others and how they have experienced it, they have seen it or, you know, things like that or the friends that have experienced it. That's how I encourage them to think and reflect."*

LB prompted them to relate these situations to their everyday lives, drawing on their experiences and observations. The encouragement to "think aloud" was evident in the group discussions where students openly shared their thoughts and ideas while in groups. LB highlighted that the process involves students applying the given situation to their own lives, experiences, and those of their friends. This collaborative thinking and sharing contribute to the creative and critical thinking required in the drama classroom.

While there were similarities between the two lecturers in their views regarding the matters discussed, some **differences** were noted, such as follows:

#### **Role Emphasis**

LA leaned more toward a balanced approach, providing some instructional elements but focusing on facilitating students' thinking. Meanwhile, LB placed a stronger emphasis on her role as a facilitator, providing instructions and fostering a collaborative learning environment.

#### **Feedback Approach**

LA mentioned the importance of feedback but did not delve into the specifics of immediate feedback or reflection sessions after each lesson. LB, on the other hand, explicitly mentioned providing immediate feedback and reflection sessions, highlighting a more structured feedback approach.

#### **Preferred Approach**

LA found a blended approach with both online and face-to-face elements favourable, emphasising the suitability of online learning for theoretical content. LB preferred 100% face-to-face interaction in the drama classroom, indicating a stronger preference for physical, verbal and nonverbal communication, which are best for drama activities.

### ***Thinking Aloud Approach***

While both lecturers encouraged students to think aloud, LB provided more specific details about how she prompted students to relate situations to their everyday lives and encouraged an open sharing of thoughts in group discussions.

### ***Awareness Of Project Zero's Visible Thinking***

Unlike LA, who had not heard of VT routines before, LB had heard of thinking routines. Neither, however, was aware of Project Zero before the interview. Despite not knowing about PZ previously, both lecturers expressed interests in learning more about PZ and VT routines, indicating a willingness to explore and potentially incorporate them into their teaching.

### ***Student Application of Thinking Routines***

LA mentioned that students naturally apply some thinking routines without explicit instructions. She emphasised that this subconscious engagement in the thinking routine is a testament to the students' inherent ability to think critically and collaboratively when working on creative projects in the drama classroom. LB noted that students needed to actively engage in thinking to complete the DE stages but saw potential benefits in making them more aware of their thinking ability by consciously applying VT routines like the Ladder of Feedback.

## **Discussion**

Both lecturers highlighted the significance of interactive roles in the drama classroom.. LA and LB observed that while students naturally engaged in thought-provoking activities, making them explicit as learning routines could further enhance their learning effectiveness. This aligns with Ritchhart and Church's (2020) findings on the transformative impact of thinking routines on classroom environments. It also corresponds with students' recognition of the benefits of interactive activities during the DE stages, as gathered by Zaamah Mohd Nor et al. (2024). In developing and presenting the storyboard, for instance, students were developing their thinking skills consciously and visually "documenting" the results of their thinking. As asserted by Project Zero's Cultures of Thinking, the only way we can get to know what our students are learning and how they learn is by making thinking visible. Using structures, routine, inquiry and documentation can improve the visibility of students' ideas to encourage an increased level of understanding and learning (Ritchhart, 2015).

The constructivist principles outlined by Dagar and Yadav (2016) and Schreiber and Valle (2013) were evident in the lecturers' emphasis on student-centred learning and the facilitation role of the instructor. One of the core constructs of Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasises the role of the instructor in an individual's learning (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Both lecturers described their roles as facilitators, providing guidance and feedback rather than direct instruction, consistent with the constructivist approach to education outlined by Saleem et al. (2021). Students similarly regarded interactive roles in ODL drama classrooms as highly significant, aligning with the principles of the social constructivist approach to education. The application of the LoF routine across the four stages of DE supported this active student participation while maintaining the lecturer's essential roles in instruction, guidance, facilitation, and feedback (Zaamah Mohd Nor et al., 2024).

LA and LB noted that online learning posed significant challenges, particularly in managing connectivity and technical hiccups, which Berg (2020) and Choong (2020) also identified as

central issues in ODL. These challenges, nonetheless, were manageable and not perceived as hindrances despite the lecturers' preferences for face-to-face drama education. This aligns with students' reflections regarding the impact of ODL drama classrooms as discovered by Zaamah Mohd Nor et al. (2024). The responses were predominantly positive, with 34 references highlighting benefits compared to only five mentioning difficulties. Key positive outcomes included the development of critical and creative thinking, social and problem-solving skills as well as improved communication. The primary challenge identified by the students was the difficulty in synchronising non-verbal communication during online drama activities, paralleled with LA's note on the difficulties in understanding non-verbal cues and maintaining eye contact. The other benefits, however, subdued these challenges.

Overall, the findings supported the applicability of the social constructivist and VT approaches in drama education (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020; Gholam (2018); Wright, 2017; Maley & Duff, 1982). The lecturers stressed the importance of collaborative learning and developing critical and creative thinking skills, which are central to these educational theories. According to Akpan et al. (2020), social constructivism emphasises learning as a collaborative social process, where students engage in meaningful learning through group activities. This approach shifts the responsibility for acquiring knowledge from the teacher to the student, transforming learners from passive listeners into active participants and co-constructors of knowledge alongside their peers.

### Conclusion

Essentially, the research objectives were addressed through the insights gained from the lecturers' experiences in exploring the interactive roles of students and lecturers, the impact of virtual interactions, and the applicability of the social constructivist and VT approach in the Malaysian tertiary drama classroom, aligning with the interactive roles as perceived by students in a related study. The findings revealed that both lecturers perceived their roles as facilitators, emphasising the importance of student-centred learning and interactive roles in the drama classroom. They shared a common ground in emphasising creativity, critical thinking, student engagement, and the potential benefits of incorporating VT routines despite facing challenges in online learning and preferring face-to-face interaction. Differences in executing their facilitator roles, feedback methods, and interaction preferences highlight the diversity of teaching styles, potentially influenced by age or years of teaching experience.

These findings have significant implications for the future orientation of drama pedagogy. The study then suggests fostering a more interactive and student-centred environment through the explicit application of thinking routines to enhance drama classrooms' teaching and learning experiences amidst challenges due to the ODL mode. Considering the limited scope of this study which focused on one drama course in one university and applying one VT routine, it could serve as a preliminary for further related research addressing a broader scope. For future research, perceived insights regarding interactive roles and the impact of virtual drama classrooms applying the VT approach can involve more lecturers of a larger number of students, applying other VT routines. These perceived insights from the two main players can also be compared against and complemented with empirical evidence from classroom observations employing other suitable qualitative and quantitative methods in a broader context. Workshops, seminars, and professional development courses for educators can create awareness about VT and demonstrate its applicability in various educational contexts within and beyond drama education.

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