



THE EFFECT OF A DRAMA-BASED READING SUPPORT PROGRAM ON THE READING COMPREHENSION, MOTIVATION, AND ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract

Difficulties in reading present a multifaceted challenge that affects not only students' achievement but also their affective growth. This research focuses on evaluating the effect of the Drama-Based Reading Support Program (DBRSP), which possesses a multicomponent structure and was developed for primary school students with reading difficulties. To assess the intervention, a quantitative research approach was utilized, specifically adopting a single-group pre-experimental design with pre- and post-test measures. The study group consists of 8 fourth-grade primary school students who do not have any intellectual disabilities or diagnoses but experience reading difficulties, determined by criterion sampling. The Informal Reading Inventory, Reading Motivation Scale, and Reading Attitude Scale were used for data collection. During the implementation process, a 32-hour (8-week) intervention program integrating drama techniques with reading strategies was applied. Data analysis was performed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The research findings revealed that the DBRSP implementation significantly increased the students' reading comprehension skills and reading motivation levels. Conversely, it was determined that the program did not create a statistically significant difference in the students' attitudes toward reading in the short term. Consequently, these preliminary findings suggest that drama-based activities may serve as a promising intervention tool supporting both the cognitive and motivational development of students with reading difficulties by transforming the reading process from a mechanical act into an experiential one; however, given the single-group design and limited sample size, these results should be interpreted as exploratory, and further research is needed before broader generalizability can be claimed.
Keywords: creative drama, intervention program, reading comprehension, reading difficulty, reading motivation

Introduction

Cultivating qualified individuals capable of meeting 21st-century expectations necessitates the development of fundamental cognitive skills, most notably reading. However, the complex nature of reading as a cognitive process complicates how this skill should be taught and fostered, especially for students experiencing difficulties. Therefore, it is critical to address reading comprehensively during the primary school years. Reading skill, which is the primary indicator of academic achievement in primary school and significantly shapes this concept, also emerges as a determinant competency required in every area of individuals' future lives (Catts & Kamhi, 2017; Snow & Matthews, 2016). Reading should be viewed as a process based on

engagement and experience between the reader and the text (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). Similarly, Pečjak et al. (2011) conceptualized this process as an interactive structure involving the text, prior knowledge (content knowledge, knowledge of text features, experiences), reading context, motivations, and purposes. Contemporary scholarship approaches reading as a transactional experience where the reader constructs meaning in a specific environment for a specific purpose (Akyol, 2020). Ultimately, reading aims to synthesize and derive meaning from a text (Snow, 2002) and to create a mentally integrated representation of the text (Kintsch & Mangalath, 2011).

Despite having no mental or physical impairments, some students may exhibit reading performance differing from their peers and encounter certain difficulties in reading (Akyol & Çoban Sural, 2021; Kunert & Scheepers, 2014; Schiff et al., 2013). NRP (2000) identified the fundamental building blocks of the reading mechanism as encompassing phonological processing, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and text comprehension, positing that insufficiencies in these domains function as the principal markers of reading struggles. Previous studies have reported that students with reading difficulties, despite having age-appropriate intelligence levels and educational opportunities, encounter difficulties specifically in the core dimensions of phonological process, vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Armbruster, 2010; Fletcher et al., 2018; Hulme & Snowling, 2016; Kargin et al., 2023; Knoop-van Campen et al., 2018). Recent research highlights that reading difficulty is a multifaceted phenomenon in which students with reading difficulties may exhibit distinct weaknesses across various domains (Catts & Petscher, 2022; Hulme & Snowling, 2016).

A significant determinant in enhancing reading proficiency of students with reading difficulties is their affective disposition toward reading. Even when viewed through a cognitive lens, incorporating the affective dimensions of reading is essential to fully comprehend the mechanisms of skill acquisition (Monteiro, 2013). Research has revealed that students' reading skills are influenced by affective factors (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Wigfield et al., 2016). Specifically, the motivation and dispositions of students with reading difficulties directly influence their engagement across the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading, significantly affecting the success of the process. Existing literature has highlighted a disparity that students with reading difficulties possess and a significantly diminished drive to read compared to their proficient peers (Jéldrez et al., 2025; Zentall & Lee, 2012; McGeown et al., 2012; Torppa et al., 2020; Zentall & Lee, 2012). Similarly, studies have stated that negative attitudes toward reading are a factor fuelling reading failure, and these students exhibit avoidance behaviours regarding the act of reading (McKenna et al., 2012). Therefore, it can be said that improving the affective characteristics, such as motivation and attitude toward reading, of students with reading difficulties is of critical importance, at least as much as the technical enhancement of their reading skills.

It should be noted that reading motivation and reading attitude are not conceptualized uniformly across the international literature; some frameworks treat motivation as a component nested within a broader construct of reading attitude rather than as an independent variable. It is therefore necessary to clarify how each construct is defined and operationalized in this study. Following Wigfield et al. (2016), reading motivation is defined as the goals, beliefs, and values that energize an individual's engagement in reading, encompassing intrinsic dimensions (e.g., curiosity, involvement) and extrinsic dimensions (e.g., recognition, compliance). Reading attitude, in turn, is defined in line with McKenna and Kear (1990) as a relatively stable system of feelings toward reading that shapes an individual's tendency to approach or avoid reading, spanning both recreational and academic reading contexts. Although the two constructs are conceptually related and, in some models, treated as overlapping, they were assessed as separate variables in the present study, consistent with the distinct, previously validated instruments developed to measure each one.

The complex nature of reading skill as a cognitive process complicates the answers regarding how to develop this skill in students experiencing reading difficulties. Indeed, although the reading capabilities of students with reading difficulties have been the intense focus of research for many years, uncertainties regarding the teaching and development of this skill persist (Castles et al., 2018). In this context, identifying students exhibiting reading difficulties, determining their needs, and implementing intervention programs accordingly are deemed necessary to remediate reading difficulties and prevent the widening of the academic, social, and affective developmental gap that may arise between these students and their peers. A review of the literature has revealed that various applications (models, strategies, methods, techniques, etc.) and intervention programs are utilized in the remediation of reading difficulties (Yıldız & Aydoğmuş, 2021). Structured intervention programs have been shown to enhance reading skills of both students with reading difficulties and those prone to reading failure (Hall et al., 2023; Koritnik & Aberšek, 2014; Scammacca et al., 2016; Swanson et al., 2017). These intervention programs typically focus on the fundamental elements of reading process such as phonological awareness (Akdağ & Kargın, 2019; Bozdağ & Şahin, 2022; Forné et al., 2022), vocabulary (Benner et al., 2022; Edis & Yılmaz, 2020; McTigue et al., 2020), and reading fluency (Lee & Yoon, 2017; Rasinski et al., 2017; Zimmerman et al., 2021). There also exist intervention programs focusing on comprehension processes, which is the overarching goal of reading (Scammacca et al., 2016). Various research results have indicated that comprehension strategy teaching can be an effective tool in remediating reading difficulties, especially when structured to include skills such as identifying the main idea and self-regulation (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021; Solis et al., 2012). In addition to single-component interventions, it is widely acknowledged within the field that multi-component approaches integrating foundational reading skills with reading comprehension processes also enhance reading comprehension performance (Wanzek et al., 2010). A review of the literature has revealed the presence of multi-component intervention approaches that simultaneously address fundamental literacy competencies and text comprehension (Cockerill et al., 2023; Swanson et al., 2017). Donegan and Wanzek (2021) have drawn attention to the need for comprehensive research in this field by emphasizing the necessity of increasing empirical support for the effect of multicomponent reading intervention approaches.

In the context of the current research, a Drama-Based Reading Support Program (DBRSP) was developed and implemented for students with reading difficulties. DBRSP is designed as multi-component (phonological process, vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, and comprehension) intervention program. The rationale for choosing drama as a pedagogical method in this intervention program is based on its potential to support the reading processes of students with reading difficulties through a holistic approach, both cognitively and affectively. Drama is defined as enacting any subject with a group, utilizing various techniques principally improvisation and role-playing based on the group members' backgrounds and experiences (Adıgüzel, 2006). Any event, phenomenon, abstract or concrete situation, newspaper article, caricature, memory, photograph, lesson topic, or any text can easily constitute the subject matter to be processed in drama. Drama provides an imaginal experience that allows students to actively interact with the text, concretize abstract concepts, and construct meaning in depth by enacting events or characters in the text (Baldwin, 2008; Kelin, 2007; McCaslin, 2005). In this process, students step into characters, confront unknown situations, and discover multiple perspectives. Students experience the events in the text in place of the characters by acting "as if," and this situation helps them analyse and interpret the text more deeply (Medina et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is stated that the safe social space provided by the drama environment reduces the fear of making reading errors and facilitates meaning-making from the text (Nageldinger, 2014). It is emphasized that high-level reading comprehension skills depend on the students' interaction and engagement with the text, and that drama-based teaching ensures

this interaction and engagement by allowing students to enter the story and experience the characters both physically and mentally (Udalla, 2020). In other words, essentially, drama-based teaching effectively reconfigures the reading process from a mechanical act into an experience by enabling students to establish a physical and mental connection with the text. Medina et al. (2021) have examined the intersection points between drama and the reading process within the context of reader-response theory, emphasizing the misconceptions that drama is merely a tool for play or entertainment, and suggested that drama allows for a relational, embodied, and enacted meaning-making process with texts. Previous research has noted that drama assumes a facilitative role in processes critical for students with reading difficulties, such as learning vocabulary within context, supporting reading fluency through improvisations, and discovering implicit meanings within the text through enactments (Wagner, 2002). Drama-based pedagogical approaches utilize active participatory dramatic situations to ensure student engagement in academic, affective, and aesthetic learning processes across the entire spectrum of academic disciplines (Dawson & Lee, 2018). An examination of existing studies has indicated that drama serves as a potent pedagogical tool for enhancing reading performance (Çöklü Özkan, 2018; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2017; Kılınç et al., 2023; Nageldinger, 2014; Podlozny, 2000; Rose et al., 2000; Samuels, 2011; Soyaltın et al., 2021; Udalla, 2020). Additionally, students' attitudes and motivations toward academic and cognitive skills also improve with drama (Erdoğan et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2020). Consequently, the overlap between the layered nature of reading skill and the functioning of the drama process strengthens the idea that this method would be a more effective tool than traditional text-focused methods addressing the specific educational requirements of this learner cohort; furthermore, the limited number of studies in which drama is used as a pedagogical intervention in remediating reading difficulties renders this research significant.

Research Problem and Questions

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of multicomponent interventions that address both the cognitive and affective dimensions of reading. Therefore, there is a clear need for holistic programs that actively engage students in the reading process while integrating various reading sub-skills. The DBRSP, which addresses various reading sub-skills interactively, was developed as an intervention to respond to this need. Accordingly, the main purpose of this research was to evaluate the effect of the DBRSP developed for students with reading difficulties. In line with this purpose, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Does DBRSP affect the reading comprehension skill levels of primary school students with reading difficulties?
2. Does DBRSP affect the reading motivation levels of primary school students with reading difficulties?
3. Does DBRSP have an effect on the reading attitude levels of primary school students with reading difficulties?

Research Methodology

General Background

To evaluate the effect of the DBRSP on the reading comprehension performance, motivation, and attitude of students with reading difficulties, the study employed a single-group pretest-posttest design. Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that the implementation of a one-group experimental design is appropriate in terms of the effectiveness of the intervention in

studies where a new educational method or model is applied. In this design, the level of change was determined by measuring the dependent variables (reading comprehension achievement, reading motivation, and reading attitude) before and after the independent variable (drama-based reading support program) was implemented (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013). According to Gay et al. (2011), the primary objective in such designs is to demonstrate the effect of the intervention within a single-group design. In this research, a control group was not formed since the primary aim was to test the effect of DBRSP, which the researcher developed.

Study Group

The research participants consisted of eight fourth-grade students with reading difficulties attending a public primary school in Gaziantep, Türkiye. Of the students, 5 were female and 3 were male. To determine the participants, the researchers employed criterion sampling, purposive sampling method. The fundamental understanding behind using the criterion sampling technique is the establishment of certain criteria in the selection of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The primary criterion for forming the study group was determined as students who do not have a diagnosis of specific learning disability but experience reading difficulties. The purpose of establishing this criterion was to ensure the examination of the effect and experiential reflections of the drama-based reading support program on the student profile directly in need. The “Reading Difficulty Teacher Identification Form” developed by Sirem and Baş (2021) and the “Informal Reading Inventory” prepared by Karasu et al. (2013) were used in forming the study group. In the first stage of the research, the “Reading Difficulty Teacher Identification Form” was distributed to classroom teachers teaching at the fourth-grade level, and they were requested to fill out the relevant form for students they considered to have reading difficulties. Based on the forms obtained from the teachers, a total of 18 students determined to have reading difficulties were listed as candidates to be included in the study group. Out of the 18 students, 7 candidates were removed from the list because 5 were of Syrian nationality and 2 had specific learning disabilities. In the second stage, the error analysis form and reading comprehension questions contained in the Informal Reading Inventory were administered to the remaining 11 students. The students’ reading scores and errors were evaluated according to the criteria in the inventory. Ultimately, based on the scoring of the reading comprehension questions and the results of the error analysis, 8 students who were at the instructional and frustration levels were included in the study group. It was ascertained that the participants did not have any prior experience with drama. Information regarding the students’ reading comprehension and reading errors is presented in Table 1. To ensure participants’ anonymity and confidentiality, each student was designated by a code starting with the letter “S” (representing “Student”) followed by a sequence number (e.g., S1, S2).

An analysis of the figures presented in Table 1 reveals that students’ reading performances are clustered into two groups: instructional and frustration levels. Of the total eight students, five were at the instructional level, while three were at the frustration level. This situation indicated that the study group had not attained the independent reading level, required instructional support, and experienced reading difficulties.

Table 1
Students' Reading Comprehension and Reading Errors

Student Code	Gender	Reading Comprehension Score	Level	Syntax Acceptability (%)	Meaning Acceptability (%)	Change in Meaning (%)	Letter-Sound Similarity	Read Errors
S5	F	70	Transitional Instructional	82	80	0	0	2
S4	M	67	Transitional Instructional	80	77	0	0	3
S1	M	62	Transitional Instructional	74	73	3.8% (partial)	High (100%) in 1 error	6
S8	F	60	Transitional Instructional	72	72	3.8% (partial)	High (100%) in 1 error	7
S2	F	56	Transitional Instructional	69	67	3.8% (partial)	0	5
S3	M	48	Frustration	65	56	7.6% (changes)	High (100%) in 4 errors	11
S6	F	45	Frustration	56	50	11.5% (partial)	High (100%) in 6 errors	13
S7	F	35	Frustration	48	46	11.5% (changes) / 11.5% (partial)	High (100%) in 4 errors	17

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Four different data collection tools were utilized to obtain the quantitative data of the research, aimed at identifying students with reading difficulties, determining their reading comprehension levels, and measuring two distinct affective characteristics: reading motivation and reading attitude. In this study, data regarding student identification and reading levels were gathered using the Reading Difficulty Teacher Identification Form (Sirem & Baş, 2021) and the Informal Reading Inventory (Karasu et al., 2013). Furthermore, to assess affective characteristics, the Turkish adaptations of the Reading Motivation Scale (Wang & Guthrie, 2004; adapted by Yıldız, 2010) and the Reading Attitude Scale (McKenna & Kear, 1990; adapted by Kocaarslan, 2016) were employed. Detailed specifics regarding the data collection instruments are presented under the following headings.

In the study, the “Reading Difficulty Teacher Identification Form” developed by Sirem and Baş (2021) was utilized to identify students with reading difficulties and to form the study group. This form consists of 4 sub-dimensions: neurological, behavioural, affective, and reading behaviours. The form consists of 21 items distributed across four sub-dimensions: neurological (3 items), behavioural (4 items), affective (3 items), and reading behaviours (11 items). The primary purpose of using this form is to evaluate students experiencing reading difficulties according to the dimensions included in the form based on teacher observations and opinions, and to refer these students to the researcher.

In the study, the “Informal Reading Inventory” developed by Karasu et al. (2013) was utilized to analyse students’ reading errors and evaluate their reading performance levels. Being an effective tool in evaluating the structure of the reading process, the Informal Reading Inventory provides a holistic analysis of reading by addressing reading fluency, which expresses word recognition accuracy and speed, together with comprehension skills, which express the grasping of text content. This inventory is designed as a measurement tool allowing for individual assessment based on the student’s reading performance. It contains narrative and informative texts appropriate for various grade and difficulty levels. The inventory consists of four different forms: the error analysis form, retelling form, question answering form, and cloze test form.

To obtain the data regarding students’ reading comprehension, the narrative text titled “Ömer and Pigeon” included in the inventory and the question answering form related to this text were used. The form comprises 10 open-ended questions pertaining to the text, with each item allocated a maximum of 10 points. The questions were classified as 4 textually explicit questions, 4 implicit questions, and 2 knowledge-experience-based questions. A rubric regarding the scoring of the questions was provided in the inventory, and student answers were scored in accordance with this rubric. In the question answering form, reading performance below 51 indicates the frustration level, while the ranges of 51–74 and 75–89 correspond to the transitional and definite instructional levels, respectively. Scores of 90 and above designate the independent level. These performance categories reflect a classification framework widely used in Informal Reading Inventories internationally, based on word recognition accuracy and comprehension: the independent level indicates that a student can read and comprehend a text accurately and fluently without assistance; the instructional level (encompassing the transitional and definite sub-levels used in this study) indicates that the text is appropriately challenging for the students’ current skill level and is best addressed through teacher-guided instruction; and the frustration level indicates that the text exceeds the student’s current reading capacity, typically evidenced by a high rate of decoding errors and a substantial breakdown in comprehension even with support (Woods & Moe, 2007). Validity and reliability studies regarding the readability levels of the texts in the inventory were determined by evaluating vocabulary diversity, syntactic complexity analyses, and inter-rater reliability rates together. In this context, the

validity study of readability was conducted by calculating the word variation score as a factor increasing text difficulty; this was calculated by the ratio of the number of different words in the text to the square root of twice the total number of words (Girgin, 2006; Woods & Moe, 2007). Syntactic complexity was examined through the mean length of T-units (total words/T-unit) and the subordinate clause index (total clauses/T-unit). As a result of the analyses, an increase in vocabulary diversity and a deviation from the base value of 1.0 in T-unit analysis indicate an increase in the text difficulty level (Hughes et al., 1997). The text titled “Ömer and Pigeon” consists of 174 words and 26 T-units. The mean length of syntactic complexity was calculated as 6.69, the subordinate clause index as 2.03, and the word variation score as 6.32. The text’s suitability in terms of structure, culture, age, and grade level was examined in line with expert opinions; following assessment, the text was deemed appropriate for the third-grade level. Additionally, the inter-rater agreement regarding the readability analyses of the text was calculated as 100%.

The reading motivation scale, constructed with a two-dimensional structure comprising intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, consists of 22 items. The construct validity of the scale was examined, and the obtained goodness-of-fit indices demonstrated that the two-dimensional structure provided a good fit with the data. Reliability analyses yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .86 for the overall scale, while the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation subscales produced coefficients of .68 and .82, respectively.

In the research, the reading attitude scale was utilized to determine students’ attitudes toward reading. The linguistic equivalence of the 20-item scale, possessing a two-factor structure comprising “Recreational Reading” and “Academic Reading,” was established through the opinions of field experts. Subsequent validity testing with a sample of 289 primary school students (grades 1-5) demonstrated that the scale’s original factor structure remained intact. Reliability analysis for the entire scale yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of .88.

The DBRSP workshops applied in the quasi-experimental process of the research were prepared as a capstone project within the scope of the 320-hour Creative Drama Instructor/Leader Certificate Program conducted within the Contemporary Drama Association. In experimental research processes, the competencies and roles of the researchers regarding the subject are crucial for the sound execution of the research process. In this context, both researchers conducting the study are experts who have carried out academic studies at the graduate level in the field of drama and have successfully completed drama education processes. The researchers possess experience in planning and implementing drama-based teaching processes. The researcher, who assumed the participant-researcher role during the implementation process, holds a drama leadership certificate and personally conducted the workshops. The second researcher guided the process as a field expert in areas such as developing the program, selecting drama techniques appropriate for the purpose, and monitoring the process. These theoretical and applied backgrounds of the researchers in the field of drama are considered one of the fundamental elements increasing the effect of the intervention program (DBRSP).

The implementation of the intervention program and all corresponding data collection procedures were carried out during the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The workshops were conducted in a vacant classroom within the school, which was rearranged to be physically and pedagogically suitable for the implementation of drama activities (warm-up/preparation, enactment, and evaluation), allowing students to move freely and remain isolated from external stimuli. Before the implementation procedure of the research, expert opinion was sought, and a preliminary study was undertaken to evaluate the functionality of the program and the suitability of the activities in terms of duration, content, materials, and student profile/level. Following the pilot study and expert opinions, the main implementation process was initiated in line with the revisions made. The question-answering form in the Informal Reading Inventory, used to determine the participant, also served as the pre-test data. Additionally, the Reading

Motivation Scale and the Reading Attitude Scale were administered as pre-tests one week before the implementation of the program. Following the pre-tests, the DBRSP was structured into block workshops of two (45' + 45') or three (45' + 45' + 45') lesson hours, carried out on a twice-weekly schedule. During the implementation process, the researcher assumed the role of the drama leader and personally conducted the workshops. Table 2 outlines the implementation process and content of the DBRSP.

Table 2
Implementation Process and Content of Drama-Based Reading Support Program

Session Title	Duration	Number of Activities	Drama Techniques	Reading Strategies	Learning Outcomes	Reading Texts
Session One: Phonological Awareness	6 Lesson Hours	Warm-up: 4 Enactment: 3 Evaluation: 1	Improvisation, role-playing, still image	-	• Orders letters alphabetically • Creates words from given letters. • Realizes that other words can be formed when letters in a word are rearranged, removed, or added. • Distinguishes which letter words start and end with. • Substitutes initial/medial/final letters in a given word with other letters. • Knows that sentences are composed of words.	
Session Two: Alphabetic Relations	6 Lesson Hours	Warm-up: 5 Enactment: 2 Evaluation: 1	Simultaneous improvisation, role-playing, role card, dramatization	-	• Finds out how many letters a given word consists of. • Identifies letters they have difficulty reading. • Identifies words they have difficulty reading. • Separates given words into syllables. • Forms sentences from given words.	
Session Three: Reading Fluency	4 Lesson Hours	Warm-up: 2 Enactment: 3 Evaluation: 1	Simultaneous improvisation, role-playing, holding a meeting, role card	Paired reading, Repeated reading, Reading aloud, Silent reading, Choral reading	• Reads the given text paying attention to punctuation marks. • Performs reading aloud. • Performs silent reading. • Reads the text accurately. • Reads the text at an appropriate speed • Reads the text paying attention to stress, intonation, and pronunciation.	The Importance of Language (Informative Text)

Session Four: Vocabulary	4 Lesson Hours	Warm-up: 3 Enactment: 3 Evaluation: 2	Improvisation, role-playing, role card, pantomime, leader-in-role	Paired reading, Repeated reading, Reading aloud, Silent reading, Word box	• Reads paying attention to key words • Identifies words appropriate to the flow of the text. • Determines the meanings of unknown words with the help of a dictionary. • Distinguishes synonyms. • Distinguishes antonyms.	Ants (Informative Text)
Session Five: Reading Comprehension	6 Lesson Hours	Warm-up: 2 Enactment: 4 Evaluation: 2	Role-playing, improvisation, still image, dramatization, moment of truth	Paired reading, Reading aloud, Silent reading, Story map, Maze task, Main idea organizer	• Determines the topic of the read text. • Determines the main idea of the read text. • Retells the read text. • Determines a title/titles for the read text. • Reads based on visuals. • Relates the content of the read text with visuals. • Answers questions related to the visuals provided in the text. • Orders given visuals according to the sequence of events.	İpek in the Forest (Narrative Text)
Session Six: Reading Comprehension	6 Lesson Hours	Warm-up: 2 Enactment: 4 Evaluation: 2	Role-playing, improvisation, simultaneous improvisation, still image, narration	Paired reading, Reading aloud, Silent reading, Story map, Character pyramid, Main idea organizer	• Determines the topic of the read text. • Determines the main idea of the read text. • Determines a title/titles for the read text. • Reads based on visuals. • Relates the content of the read text with visuals. • Answers questions related to the visuals provided in the text. • Orders given visuals according to the sequence of events. • Summarizes the read text. • Constructs meaning from the read text.	Striped (Narrative Text)

Table 2 outlines the general structure of the DBRSP, revealing that reading skills are addressed in a hierarchical and spiral structure. The reading support program, consisting of a total of six sessions, was designed to address phonological awareness, alphabetic relations, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Each session is designed in a structure that systematically follows the stages of drama: warm-up/preparation, enactment, and evaluation processes. The durations of the sessions vary between four and six lesson hours depending on the scope and intensity of the subject addressed. The implementation of the program was completed in a total of thirty-two lesson hours. When the learning outcomes of DBRSP are examined, the outcomes of the first and second sessions focus on the decoding mechanism and lower-order cognitive skills such as “distinguishing letters”, “syllabication”, and “phonological awareness”, aimed at remedying the fundamental deficiencies of students. The outcomes of the third and fourth sessions target skills related to reading fluency and vocabulary that enable the transition from decoding to meaning-making. The outcomes of the fifth and sixth sessions, which constitute the final stage of the program, encompass cognitive skills related to reading comprehension such as “determining the main idea”, “making inferences”, “summarizing”, and “relating text with visuals”, which require students to establish deep interaction with the text. In this context, the learning outcomes target the holistic development of core reading competencies, specifically vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, phonological awareness, and alphabetic relations.

In DBRSP, drama techniques (improvisation, role-playing, still image, holding a meeting, etc.) and reading strategies (paired reading, repeated reading, story map, summarizing, etc.) were integrated, enabling students to interact deeply with and experience the texts and reading activities. As seen in Table 2, while no direct reading text was utilized in the phonological awareness and alphabetic relations sessions, both narrative and informative texts were included in the other sessions. In the selection of the texts used in DBRSP, the suitability of the texts for drama techniques, the text genres, and the text lengths were taken into consideration. The word counts of the texts increased gradually in each session. In this context, while the text “Importance of Language” used in the initial sessions consists of 124 words, the text “Ants” consists of 157 words, the text “İpek in The Forest” consists of 237 words, and the text “Striped” consists of 272 words. Care was taken to establish a pedagogical link between the text genres and the drama techniques. Narrative texts (İpek in The Forest; Striped) allowed students to immerse themselves in the text using “role-playing” and “improvisation” techniques due to their strong plots, inclusion of conflict elements, and variety of characters. The dramatic structure in these texts enabled students to empathize with the characters and fill the gaps in the text (predicting) through drama. Informative texts (Ants; Importance of Language), on the other hand, were processed using techniques such as “pantomime” (bodily expression of the life cycle) and “holding a meeting” (discussion of ideas), which allow for the concretization of the conceptual knowledge they contain. Consequently, the texts were approached and selected as dynamic tools to be interpreted through the drama method.

Following the completion of the implementation of DBRSP, employed as the independent variable in the research, post-test data collection tools were administered to determine the program’s effect on the dependent variables. Post-tests were administered within one week of completing the intervention, in the same physical environment where the pre-tests were administered, and under the same standard conditions. Accordingly, the question-answering forms included in the Informal Reading Inventory, the Reading Motivation Scale, and the Reading Attitude Scale were re-administered as post-tests. Finally, the obtained data were described and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Pre- and post-experiment measurements were conducted to examine the effect of DBRSP on students' reading comprehension, reading motivation, and reading attitude levels. In the analysis of the data, the sample size, a prerequisite for parametric tests, was taken into consideration. The literature indicates that in cases where the sample size is below 30, deviations from the normality of the distribution may occur, and the use of non-parametric tests yields more reliable results in such small groups (Büyükoztürk, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2012; Pallant, 2020). Due to the small sample size ($n < 30$) and the non-normal distribution of the data, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was employed as a non-parametric alternative to the paired samples t-test. Statistical calculations were performed utilizing SPSS (Version 27).

Research Results

Reading Comprehension

In the research, statistical results regarding the scores obtained by students with reading difficulties from the DBRSP pre-test and post-test reading comprehension levels are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Distribution of Pre-test and Post-test Reading Comprehension Scores and Levels by Student

Student Code	Reading Comprehension Level Pre-test (%)		Reading Comprehension Level Post-test (%)	
	Score	Level	Score	Level
S-1	62	Transitional Instructional	70	Transitional Instructional
S-2	56	Transitional Instructional	65	Transitional Instructional
S-3	48	Frustration	60	Transitional Instructional
S-4	67	Transitional Instructional	75	Definite Instructional
S-5	70	Transitional Instructional	90	Independent
S-6	45	Frustration	50	Transitional Instructional
S-7	35	Frustration	45	Frustration
S-8	60	Transitional Instructional	75	Definite Instructional

Table 3 illustrates a consistent improvement in the post-test scores of every participant. While S3 and S6 were at the frustration level of reading comprehension in the pre-test, they progressed to the transitional instructional level in the post-test. Similarly, S4 and S8 advanced from the transitional instructional level to the definite instructional level. Furthermore, S5 significantly increased their reading comprehension score and rose to the independent level. It is observed that although S1, S2, and S7 increased their reading comprehension scores from pre-test to post-test, they remained at the same level.

Addressing the first research question regarding the effect of the DBRSP intervention on reading comprehension, the students' pre- and post-test scores were analysed. Table 4 summarizes the results obtained from the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test.

Table 4
Comparison of Pre-intervention and Post-intervention Reading Comprehension Scores

Pre-test - Post-test	<i>n</i>	$\bar{R}$	ΣR	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Negative Ranks	0 ^a	.00	.00		
Positive Ranks	8 ^b	4.50	36.00	-2.524 ^b	.01
Ties	0 ^c	-	-		
Total	8				

Note. Based on negative ranks.

The results in Table 4 reveal a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores in favour of the post-test ($z = -2.524$; $p < .05$). Considering the mean ranks and sums of ranks, it can be stated that this difference is in favour of positive ranks, that is, the post-test. As seen in Table 4, an increase was observed in the scores of all 8 students, and there were no students whose scores decreased or remained unchanged.

Reading Motivation

Addressing the research question regarding the effect of DBRSP on reading motivation, the students' pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed. The results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test regarding the pre-test and post-test comparison are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5
Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Reading Motivation Scores

Pre-test - Post-test	<i>n</i>	$\bar{R}$	ΣR	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Negative Ranks	1 ^a	1.50	1.50		
Positive Ranks	6 ^b	4.42	26.50	-2.117 ^b	.03
Ties	1 ^c	-	-		
Total	8				

Note. Based on negative ranks.

Upon examining Table 5, the data indicated a statistically significant difference in reading motivation levels ($z = -2.117$; $p < .05$). An evaluation of the mean ranks and sum of ranks indicates that the observed difference is in favor of the post-test scores. According to the analysis results, it was observed that the post-test score of 1 student decreased compared to the pre-test score; there was no difference between the post-test and pre-test scores of 1 student, and the post-test scores of 6 students increased. This finding indicates that the implemented DBRSP is an effective method for increasing the reading motivation levels of students with reading difficulties.

Reading Attitude

Addressing the research question regarding the effect of DBRSP on reading attitudes, Table 6 details the analysis of pre-test and post-test scores for students with reading difficulties.

Table 6
Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Reading Attitude Scores

Pre-test - Post-test	<i>n</i>	$\bar{R}$	ΣR	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Negative Ranks	2 ^a	5.00	10.00	-1.137 ^b	.25
Positive Ranks	6 ^b	4.33	26.00		
Ties	0 ^c	-	-		
Total	8				

Note. Based on negative ranks.

According to the analysis results presented in Table 6, it is understood that there is no statistically significant difference between the post-test and pre-test scores regarding the reading attitudes of students with reading difficulties ($z = -1.137$; $p > .05$). The analysis of the rank sums revealed six positive ranks (indicating increased scores) and two negative ranks (indicating decreased scores). Although the number of students showing an increase is higher, this difference failed to achieve statistical significance due to the presence of negative ranks and the small size of the sample group.

Discussion

Present research investigated the effect of DBRSP on both reading comprehension and reading related affective traits of students with reading difficulties. As a result of this research, it was revealed that DBRSP increased the reading comprehension and reading motivation levels of students with reading difficulties but did not affect their reading attitudes. The research findings support the growing body of relevant literature on reading difficulties and drama. Specifically, the significant improvement provided by the reading program enriched with drama on the reading comprehension and reading motivation of students with reading difficulties highlights the potential of drama as a promising educational tool in literacy development, warranting further investigation.

Following the DBRSP intervention, it was observed that the reading comprehension levels of students with reading difficulties increased. This finding aligns with studies in national literature and reinforces prior evidence regarding this phenomenon. For instance, Soyaltın et al. (2021) investigated the effect of drama-based teaching on the reading performance outcomes of learners with mild intellectual disabilities. The findings reveal that participants in the intervention group answered comprehension questions largely independently compared to students in the program implemented with the traditional method, and their reading comprehension achievements increased. Similarly, in their research examining the effect of drama on developing the literacy skills of students diagnosed with dyslexia, Çolak (2019) revealed that the drama method made a beneficial effect on the retention of knowledge acquired by students through activities. In a study conducted by Kırmızı (2008), the effect of drama on reading comprehension skills in Turkish teaching was examined; it was stated that learning based on the drama method revealed significant differences in developing the use of reading comprehension strategies, and that more effective programs for reading education should be prepared by combining reading comprehension strategy training with drama. In a similar vein, Çöklü Özkan (2018) concluded that the drama method increased the reading achievement of fourth-grade primary school students in Turkish lessons. Significantly, domestic research regarding drama has predominantly targeted the broad comprehension proficiency of typically

developing students or those with specific diagnoses like dyslexia and intellectual disabilities. Conversely, there is a marked scarcity of drama-based interventions specifically designed to bolster the reading skills of students facing reading difficulties. The findings of this study contribute to addressing this existing limitation by suggesting that drama may be a promising method for enhancing the reading outcomes of students with reading difficulties, although this preliminary evidence would benefit from replication using more controlled designs.

This finding also aligns with current theoretical approaches in international literature. For instance, Medina et al. (2021) state that drama transforms reading from a passive decoding act into an active “meaning construction” process where the student establishes relational and embodied connections with the text. In this context, the score increase in the experimental group can be explained by the students internalizing the text not only cognitively but also by experiencing it through enactments. Samuels (2011) also emphasized in his research that the drama method helps primary school students with reading difficulties use comprehension strategies and activate their schemas by establishing conscious or unconscious connections with the text. Additionally, he stated that students showed improvement in the strategy of finding the main idea in non-fiction texts through improvisations. Rose et al. (2000) investigated the effect of a drama-based reading program on the comprehension proficiency of fourth-grade students, grounding their study in mental imagery theory. The findings of the research revealed, with experimental evidence, that drama is an effective teaching method in increasing reading comprehension achievement by enabling students to mentally visualize, segment into semantic units, and reconstruct the text. Similarly, Brown (2017) emphasizes that the academic achievement rates of children at the primary school level increase when they experience drama-based teaching.

Another significant finding of this research is that DBRSP has a positive effect on the reading motivation levels of students, extending beyond their cognitive skills. This suggests a reciprocal relationship where engaging drama-based reading activities cultivate both satisfaction and proficiency, a combination that thereby propels further student engagement. This finding also aligns with the results of comprehensive analyses in the literature. Lee et al. (2020), as a result of a comprehensive meta-analysis study they conducted, reported that drama-based pedagogical approaches had a statistically positive effect on students’ motivation. The researchers emphasize that drama is an important source of motivation in literacy processes by increasing students’ engagement and willingness. Similarly, in their research, Erdoğan et al. (2018) found that drama activities positively affected the reading motivations of primary school students. It is observed that drama-based practices support motivation at different stages of the reading process. For instance, Murray (2020), in research conducted at the primary school level, utilized the process drama approach specifically in pre-reading activities. The researcher concluded that these activities aroused students’ interest in the text, enabled them to establish meaningful connections between their own worlds and the text, and ultimately increased their reading motivation. In an action research study conducted by Lam (2014), the effects of the “hot seating” technique, one of the drama techniques integrated into language lessons, were examined. The research findings showed that students enjoyed the drama-oriented lessons and their reading motivation increased. This result demonstrates that drama makes the reading process more engaging by offering students the opportunity to analyse and discuss the text from different perspectives.

Another finding of the research reveals that while DBRSP significantly increased the reading scores of students, this increase was not reflected in their reading attitudes. This situation can be explained within the framework of the “Temporal Interaction Approach.” Kush et al. (2005) stated that there is no significant correlation between reading attitude and reading comprehension achievement at the primary school level (2nd and 3rd grades), meaning that these two variables operate independently at this level; however, they also revealed that these

variables strongly explain each other in the long term (at the 7th-grade level). In other words, for an increase in academic achievement to transform into an attitudinal change, the student requires a prolonged experience of this sense of competence. This finding of the research diverges from various research findings in literature. Lee et al. (2020) found that drama-based pedagogies have a moderate positive effect on attitude. Conversely, Erdoğan et al. (2018) and Kırmızı (2008) found that drama activities in primary school did not have a significant positive effect on students' reading attitudes. It is thought that the primary reason for this situation is the duration of the implementation and interaction. Attitude appears as an affective construct that takes longer to change compared to cognitive skills and is more resistant to change. The absence of a significant difference in short-term experimental implementations is a situation frequently encountered in literature. Indeed, Udalla (2020) emphasizes that a variable like attitude develops as a result of the student's deep and long-term interaction with the text. Consequently, it is thought that the duration of implementation and interaction in current research may not have been sufficient to transform deep-rooted reading attitudes. Furthermore, according to Schiefele et al. (2012), reading attitude involves many variables such as values, intrinsic motivation, beliefs, goals, perspective, ambition, curiosity, and engagement. It is anticipated that the reading attitude variable may also have been influenced by such factors.

Although this research presents promising preliminary findings regarding the effects of DBRSP, developed for students with reading difficulties, it also entails certain limitations. The primary limitation is the utilization of the single-group pretest-posttest design and the absence of a control group. This situation resulted in the inability to fully control the effects of extraneous factors other than DBRSP (maturation, teacher dynamics, other in-school learning, etc.) on the students' development. This circumstance may have introduced potential biases and influenced the results. In addition, the reliance on a modest cohort recruited via purposive sampling from a solitary educational setting places constraints on the external validity of the results regarding the wider population of students with reading difficulties. Furthermore, the implementation period of DBRSP can be stated as another limitation. The fact that the implementation in this research lasted for 8 weeks (32 hours) and that no follow-up measurements were conducted precludes making interpretations regarding the persistence of the observed gains throughout the academic year and their retention. Finally, although the implementation being conducted personally by the researcher provided an advantage in terms of the accurate application of the drama method and activities requiring expertise, it emerges as a limitation in terms of the practitioner effect. This raises the critical question of whether the program's success could be replicated by a regular classroom teacher with less specialized drama expertise. These limitations point to the importance of expanding longitudinal studies in which drama is integrated as a method into reading activities conducted by teachers themselves in classroom settings. The current study is significantly constrained by its methodological framework. The absence of a control group, coupled with a highly restricted sample size, dictates that the observed outcomes, while theoretically and practically promising, must be interpreted as strictly preliminary. Consequently, establishing definitive conclusions necessitates the replication of these initial findings through more rigorous and robust experimental designs.

Overall, this study offers preliminary evidence that drama, when structured in a multi-component (phonological awareness, vocabulary, reading fluency, and comprehension) and high-quality manner, may serve as a promising intervention approach for supporting both the cognitive and motivational development of students with reading difficulties. The obtained findings demonstrate that DBRSP holds effective potential in addressing deep-rooted difficulties frequently encountered in this group, such as resistance to the act of reading, low motivation, and comprehension deficits. Furthermore, the results emphasize the importance of employing pedagogy-focused and interactive designs in remedying reading difficulties, moving beyond a sole focus on technical skills. This research extends the existing body of literature by

contributing to the evolving understanding of the role of drama in literacy development and provides critical insights into how multi-component and linguistically responsive approaches can be integrated into the educational programs of students confronting reading difficulties, as well as those at risk of developing them.

Conclusions and Implications

The present research provides preliminary evidence that the multi-component DBRSP, developed for students with reading difficulties, may contribute to improvements in students' reading skills. The primary outcome of the research is that the program increased the students' reading comprehension skills at a statistically significant level. DBRSP transformed the reading process from a mechanical state into an interactive structure offering experiential learning. These findings suggest that reading comprehension processes may be effectively concretized through drama, and that at least some students with reading difficulties can progress toward the independent reading level with this type of support. Furthermore, drama-based reading activities were associated with a positive change in students' reading motivation levels. This result suggests that drama may serve as a valuable motivational method in supporting reading development, a possibility that warrants further investigation with larger, controlled samples. Conversely, the analysis indicated that the intervention elicited no statistically significant shifts in reading attitude over the brief application period. The fact that attitude remained stable despite the increase in skills and motivation confirms that attitude is an affective construct that is more resistant to change compared to cognitive skills and requires long-term reinforcement. This points to the necessity of prolonged processes for the establishment of reading culture and habits, alongside skill teaching, in interventions for reading difficulties. Overall, when considered together, these preliminary findings suggest that DBRSP may serve as a holistic intervention approach for supporting meaning-making, the ultimate goal of reading, as well as the affective skills that underpin this process. Furthermore, DBRSP appears to be a promising alternative to the traditional methods and activities used in developing the reading skills of students.

In line with these preliminary findings, several cautious recommendations can be offered for practitioners and future research. Primary school teachers might consider incorporating drama-based activities as a supplementary tool when working with students experiencing reading difficulties. However, before wide-scale implementation can be recommended, it would be beneficial to provide teachers with practical training to see how drama pedagogy functions in real classroom settings. Furthermore, integrating multi-component tools like DBRSP into existing remedial frameworks such as the Remedial Education Program in Primary Schools (REPPS) in Türkiye could be explored as an alternative approach. It must be reiterated, however, that the potential of DBRSP is currently exploratory. The lack of a control group and the small sample size strictly limit the practical implications of this study. Therefore, extensive future research utilizing robust experimental designs, larger samples, and longitudinal follow-ups is absolutely necessary to validate these initial findings and establish the generalizability of the program.

Ethical Statement

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee, as well as with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Gaziantep University under protocol number 301047, dated March 02, 2023. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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