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Research on Multicultural Drama Education Based on  
Self-determination Theory: A Case Study of "Hamlet"

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**Abstract**

*In a multicultural context, drama education, as a distinctive pedagogical paradigm, facilitates the achievement of educational objectives effectively. Compared to traditional classrooms, student-centered instruction based on self-determination theory places greater emphasis on nurturing students' intrinsic motivation for learning. This article uses the high school Chinese literature text "Hamlet" as a case study, applying the perspectives of autonomy, competence, and relatedness—the three psychological needs of self-determination theory—to various aspects of practical teaching. This approach constructs a framework for multicultural drama education.*

**Keywords**

*Self-determination, dramatic pedagogy, multiculturalism, "Hamlet"*

**1. Introduction**

The concept of Drama-in-Education represents a pedagogical paradigm that integrates theatrical elements into the educational framework. Employing drama as both a medium and a tool, it assists students in embodying roles and immersing themselves in dramatic scenarios, thereby achieving the educational goals of knowledge transmission and skill development. The notion of drama in education has historical roots, originating primarily in Western countries such as Europe and America. Rousseau

once advocated "learning through dramatic practice," and Dewey proposed the educational philosophy of "learning by doing." Currently, in nations like the USA, UK, and Australia, there is widespread promotion and notable success in integrating drama with English language education (Zhao, 2020).

Introducing drama into language arts classrooms not only embodies an education philosophy centered on students but also stimulates their initiative and creativity in learning, facilitating the integration and innovation of teaching methods and advancing pedagogical improvements. Furthermore, in today's multicultural world, the coexistence of various cultural backgrounds encompassing knowledge, beliefs, ethics, customs, and skills has become a societal norm. Within this social environment, cultural diversity serves not merely as a social phenomenon but also as a valuable educational resource (Wang, 2024). The concept of multiculturalism emphasizes the diversity of cultures, advocating those individuals, while preserving and developing their own cultures, should understand and appreciate the uniqueness and values of other cultures.

As a significant avenue for accepting cultural values, drama in education must incorporate multicultural factors to ensure that students glean insights from diverse cultures, enhance their comprehensive cultural literacy, and play an irreplaceable role in fostering students' intercultural communication abilities and broadening their global perspectives.

Motivation serves as the internal driving force that compels individuals to engage in specific behaviors and activities, manifesting as the desire to continuously strive towards achieving certain goals. Learning motivation effectively stimulates students' awareness of autonomous learning, encouraging active participation in educational activities, thereby achieving positive learning outcomes. In the 1980s, renowned American psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan introduced the self-determination theory, which elucidates the internal motivational factors of self-motivation and self-determination within a social environment (Edward & Richard, 1985).

Applying the theoretical insights of self-determination theory to educational practices helps educators understand and grasp students' psychological inclinations, thus holding significant importance in stimulating students' internal drive. However, current research on the self-determination theory remains predominantly theoretical in nature, lacking sufficient exploration of its application in specific educational practices. Therefore, this paper constructs a multicultural drama education framework based on the self-determination theory. Using an excerpt from "Hamlet," part of the prescribed curriculum for high school Chinese language arts, it aims to explore approaches and methodologies for applying the self-determination theory in concrete educational practices.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.1 Implications of Self-Determination Theory*

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a motivational process theory regarding human self-determined behavior proposed by American psychologists such as Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan in the 1980s. The core concepts of SDT include autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Wang, Wang, Wang,

Wind & Christopher, 2024). Autonomy refers to an individual's ability to make decisions based on their own values and goals; competence involves an individual's assessment of their abilities and self-confidence; and relatedness pertains to an individual's sense of connection and belonging in society and with others. These concepts collectively form the foundation of the Self-Determination Theory.

Empirical studies of the self-determination theory are primarily concentrated in the domains of education, work, and health. Research findings indicate that when individuals feel autonomous, competent, and have a sense of relatedness, they are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors and attitudes. For instance, students who feel autonomous and competent in learning are more likely to achieve good grades; employees who feel autonomous and competent in their work are more likely to demonstrate high efficiency and creativity; and patients who feel autonomous and competent in treatment are more likely to actively participate in the rehabilitation process.

The applications of the self-determination theory are extensive, encompassing fields such as education, management, and mental health. Within the educational domain, educators can promote students' learning motivation and academic achievement by offering opportunities for autonomous learning and supporting students' sense of competence and relatedness. SDT emphasizes the importance of autonomy and intrinsic motivation in individual behaviors and decision-making processes. By understanding the core concepts and applications of the self-determination theory, we can better facilitate individual growth and development and enhance individual self-efficacy.

### *2.2 The Three Basic Psychological Needs of SDT*

Self-Determination Theory emphasizes three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. These needs are crucial factors for individual development and psychological well-being.

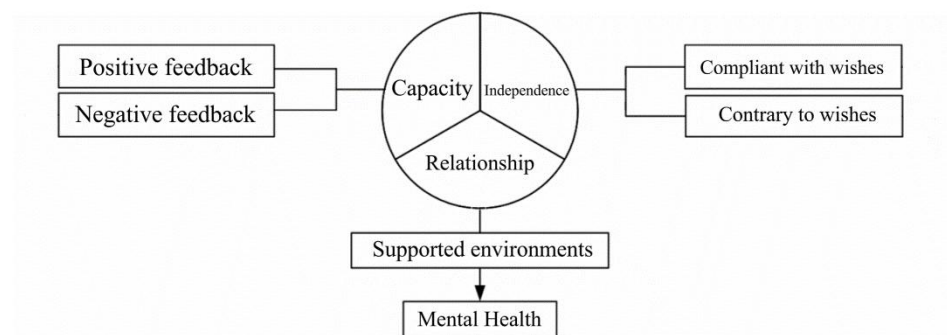
Autonomy refers to the need for individuals to feel in control and autonomous in their actions. It involves the sense of freedom in making choices and decisions based on one's own volition, rather than being coerced or pressured externally. When individuals perceive their actions as stemming from their genuine inner drive and voluntary choice, they are more likely to experience autonomy. Autonomy is a core concept of Self-Determination Theory, a key factor in promoting intrinsic motivation and personal happiness. When individuals feel autonomous in their lives and work, they are more likely to exhibit higher creativity, achieve better learning outcomes, and experience greater job satisfaction.

Relatedness, also known as the need for belonging, refers to the individual's need to establish secure, stable, and intimate connections with others. This involves feeling understood, accepted, and cared for by others, as well as a sense of integration within social groups. Relatedness forms the foundation for social interactions and group participation. Fulfilling the need for relatedness helps individuals develop strong social support networks, crucial for coping with life's challenges and stressors. Moreover, positive social relationships can promote individuals' psychological health and sense of well-being.

Competence refers to the individual's desire to feel effective and capable in interactions with the environment. This includes a sense of mastery over the external environment and confidence in

achieving goals and overcoming challenges. Sense of competence is an important source of individual self-esteem and self-efficacy. Fulfilling the need for competence helps individuals maintain resilience in the face of difficulties and challenges, while enhancing intrinsic motivation to explore new things and learn new skills.

Self-Determination Theory underscores that fulfilling the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence is crucial for enhancing individual intrinsic motivation, psychological well-being, and personal growth. These needs not only independently influence individual behavior and psychological states but also interact with each other, collectively forming a comprehensive framework that supports individual development (Andrew, Gavin, & Dianne, 2024). The three fundamental needs of SDT collectively determine its significant role in educational research.



**Figure 1. The three Basic Needs of Self-determinism**

### 2.3 SDT in Teaching Drama

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) applied in multicultural drama education designs significantly impacts students' learning motivation and creativity. Drama literature, as a comprehensive artistic form, provides a platform for fulfilling these intrinsic needs.

By analyzing the characteristics of drama literature, various methods of integrating SDT into curriculum design have been identified. For instance, activities such as role-playing, and improvisation enhance students' autonomy and sense of competence. Additionally, group collaboration and public performances foster a sense of belonging and social connection.

Drawing upon previous empirical research and case studies, it is evident that SDT's application in drama literature education is effective and adaptable. Literature reviews indicate that SDT-based curriculum designs notably enhance students' interest in learning and creativity (Wen, Song, & Zhang, 2024). Therefore, SDT holds considerable value in the context of drama education design.

In conclusion, SDT offers a fresh perspective and method for drama education practice, stimulating students' intrinsic motivation and improving teaching effectiveness.

### 3. Activity Design

#### 3.1 *Creating a Situation: Arousing Students' Interest*

##### 3.1.1 Teacher Activity: "Leading to the Time Travel Tunnel"

Preparation: Teachers gather materials related to "Hamlet", including images, audio, video clips such as film segments and theatrical performances, and historical background introductions. They set up a simulated stage scene with curtains and props, tailored to the classroom's needs, and arrange character costumes for the students.

Classroom Setup: Before class, teachers play a compelling dramatic excerpt from "Hamlet" to capture students' attention. Subsequently, through storytelling, teachers immerse students into the era and context of Hamlet: "Class, today we shall journey through time and arrive at the royal palace of Denmark to witness Hamlet's fate. Imagine yourselves amidst that world filled with conspiracy and vengeance..." Simultaneously, teachers supplement the narrative with relevant images and historical context, enabling students to grasp the temporal and societal backdrop of the story more vividly.

##### 3.1.2 Student Activity: "Traveling to Hamlet's World"

Students watch video clips of outstanding performances from "Hamlet", prepare costumes, imitate the actions and lines of the characters in the play, and experience the emotions of the roles. They then write down or verbally share their feelings within the context and their initial thoughts on the story based on their personal interpretations.

##### 3.1.3 Design Intent

The intention of this activity is to leverage videos to stimulate students' interest in learning, create a context suitable for the teaching content, spark students' imagination, ignite their enthusiasm for learning, and enhance their active participation. Teachers can observe students' expressions and engagement to understand their level of interest in the created scenario.

#### 3.2 *Building a Framework: Integrating Learning Resources*

##### 3.2.1 Teacher Activities

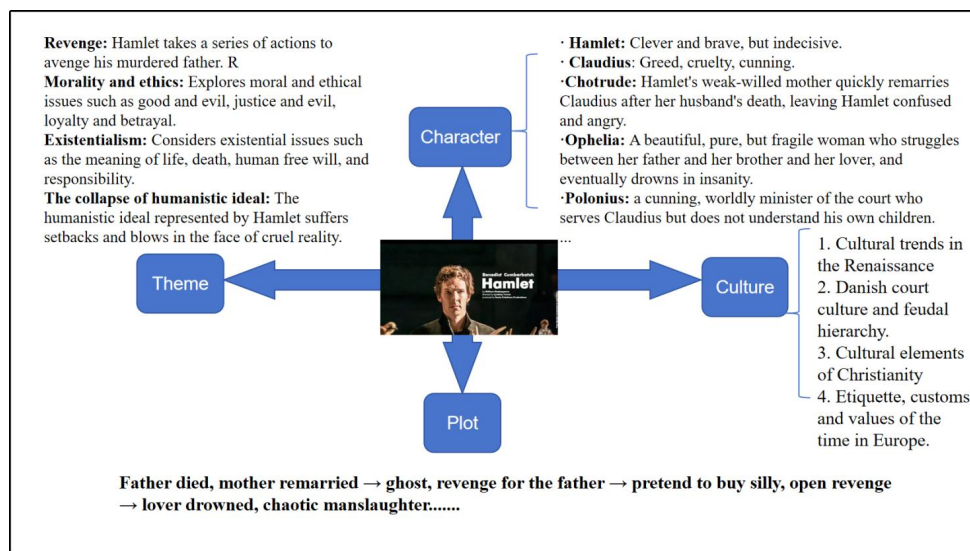
Preparation: Organize key aspects of "Hamlet," including character relationships, plot development, thematic ideas, and cultural background. Gather materials such as large white paper and colored pens.

Group Task Assignment: Begin by dividing students into groups and providing each group with a large sheet of white paper and colored pens. Guide students to construct a knowledge framework centered around "Hamlet." For instance, write "Hamlet" at the center of the paper and encourage students to draw branches around it, depicting aspects such as "characters," "plot," "themes," and "culture" [7]. Evaluate and supplement each group's framework, highlighting strengths and areas needing improvement. Organize peer reviews among groups to foster mutual learning and exchange. Conclude with a brief quiz to assess students' comprehension of "Hamlet" and evaluate the effectiveness of the activity.

##### 3.2.2 Student Activity: "Mapping Hamlet's Knowledge"

Each group of students fills in further details for each branch. For example, under the "Characters"

branch, list the characters of Hamlet, Ophelia, and Claudius, and briefly describe their character traits and roles in the story. After the groups have finished, each group chooses a representative to come up to the stage to present and explain the knowledge framework they have built Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Example of a Knowledge Map for "Hamlet"**

### 3.2.3 Design Intent

Prior to embarking on the exploration of this question, the students had already acquainted themselves with two Chinese pieces of study, "The Injustice to Dou E" and "Thunderstorm", which formed part of the unit's curriculum. On the one hand, they harbored a foundational knowledge of dramatic forms such as the "three unities of drama" and "the three elements of drama," bestowing upon them a discernible comprehension of the genre's stylistic and structural facets. Grounding the instruction upon the students' preexisting competence, the educator constructively established a framework of questions and methodologies - or "scaffolding" - presenting inquiries and progressively specifying them, delving deeper into the subject matter, and progressively guiding the students in the formulation of a cognitive map for "Hamlet." This approach facilitates the holistic advancement of drama instruction. On the other hand, this process cultivates a multicultural perspective among the students, endeavoring to compare the dissimilarities and similarities between Chinese and Western dramatic works. Through the collaborative efforts of group work, this endeavor aims to enhance self-efficacy.

## 3.3 Self-inquiry: Stimulating Students' Sense of Autonomy

### 3.3.1 Teacher Activities

In the course of self-directed inquiry into "Hamlet", the role of the teacher is pivotal in inspiring exploration. To this end, educators must guide students towards a profound comprehension of the text, delving into its underlying themes and intricate character relationships. Simultaneously, they should craft interactive experiences that ignite intellectual engagement and critical thinking. Lastly, teachers ought to curate supplementary materials to enrich learning beyond the classroom. Through thorough

preparation, educators not only steer students but also cultivate enthusiasm for autonomous exploration within drama studies, fostering a foundation for critical inquiry. By designing activities that promote self-directed research, both teachers and students collaboratively embark on this journey, creating a classroom environment that nurtures autonomous inquiry based on SDT principles.

### 3.3.2 Student Activities

In the process of self-studying "Hamlet," students should initially engage in independent pre-reading to grasp the storyline and major characters. Subsequently, acquiring knowledge of the work's historical context, the life of its author Shakespeare, and its literary significance lays a solid foundation for a profound comprehension of the text. Students are encouraged to autonomously create diagrams depicting character relationships, aiding in visualizing the intricate web of interpersonal connections within the story, thereby understanding the dynamics and conflicts among each character. Reflecting upon and documenting recurrent themes in "Hamlet" is essential, analyzing their impact on the overall plot development. Students should focus particularly on key plot elements such as Hamlet's soliloquies, dialogues with Ophelia, and exchanges with his mother, as these scenes often reveal characters' inner worlds and motivations. Following independent exploration of the text, students are encouraged to actively participate in classroom discussions, sharing their interpretations and questions with peers and teachers. By exchanging diverse viewpoints, students can broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of the text.

### 3.3.3 Design Intent

Students, through autonomous learning, are able to delve more deeply into the multifaceted cultural and contextual implications of texts, such as the complexities inherent in Eastern and Western cultural distinctions. This depth of understanding surpasses what traditional lecture-based teaching methods can achieve. Concurrently, guiding students to independently acquire knowledge and master learning strategies fosters a positive experience when they encounter challenges during activities and ultimately resolve them, leading to a sense of achievement and fulfillment. Such positive experiences greatly enhance self-efficacy. Inevitably, the process of autonomous inquiry presents various challenges, requiring students to seek answers and solutions independently, thereby significantly enhancing their problem-solving abilities. Autonomous learning grounded in Self-Determination Theory markedly boosts students' self-efficacy, instilling in them the belief in their capability to master more complex and challenging knowledge. This approach not only facilitates deeper comprehension of texts but also cultivates students' ability for independent inquiry and overall competence, laying a solid foundation for their future endeavors in multicultural learning and research.

## 3.4 Learning Group Cooperation: Building a Cooperative Communication Context

### 3.4.1 Teacher Activities

Prior to the preparatory phase of the activity sessions, educators should elucidate the specific objectives of collaborative learning exercises, encompassing cognitive goals, proficiency objectives, and affective dispositions. For instance, in the study of "Hamlet," the cognitive objective might be the

comprehension of the principal characters' idiosyncrasies, the proficiency objective the acquisition of the skills to dissect dramatic texts, and the affective disposition the cultivation of a fondness for and appreciation of literature. Teachers should adhere to the principle of "heterogeneity within groups and homogeneity between groups" when forming groups, ensuring an equitable distribution of students of varying aptitudes among the respective clusters. Within each group, members possess diverse strengths and peculiarities, which facilitates mutual learning and enhancement.

#### 3.4.2 Student Activities

Utilizing the dramatic pedagogy of "situational method" for role-playing and simulated debates, we delve into character analysis and plot progression within Shakespeare's "Hamlet." Students engage by reading assigned chapters, identifying both perplexing passages and intriguing characters. In one group, a member assumes the role of Hamlet, examining from his perspective the hesitancy in Act III and the delay in seeking vengeance. Students reference specific lines such as "To be or not to be, that is the question" to illuminate Hamlet's inner turmoil and philosophical contemplation. Another group selects the scene between Hamlet and Ophelia for their role-play enactment. Here, students articulate Hamlet's conflicting emotions towards Ophelia, along with his concealment of the revenge plot and the resultant anguish. During simulated debates, participants adopt various character viewpoints to discuss the justifiability of revenge actions and the psychological impacts on dramatic roles Figure 3.

	<b>Role play</b>	<b>Simulated debate</b>
<b>Students</b>	Enhancing self-efficacy	Emphasize the concept of capacity growth
<b>Teacher</b>	Role of guide	Moderator
<b>Atmosphere</b>	Animated	Rational

**Figure 3. Role-playing and Simulated Debates in the Perspective of Learning Motivation**

#### 3.4.3 Design Intent

Through collaborative inquiry activities based on SDT, students gain a profound understanding of the multicultural significance of the play "Hamlet," while also enhancing their communication, expression, and critical abilities within group settings. Furthermore, role-playing and simulated debates foster an increase in competence-building goals and motivation for learning [9], thereby stimulating students' interest in cross-cultural communication and fostering their awareness of multiculturalism, laying a foundation for future multicultural learning and intercultural communication.

### 3.5 Teacher Guidance: Promoting Students' Perceived Competence

#### 3.5.1 Teacher Activities

Teacher's guidance should be carried out throughout the teaching process, first of all, the teacher expresses his/her expectations to the students through the established teaching objectives. Through role-playing, teachers hope that students can understand the character traits of Hamlet and other



characters from the perspective of knowledge and ability, and improve their ability to appreciate characters; from the perspective of process and methodology, they can be brought into the role, immersed in the performance, and master the skills of theater; from the cultivation of values, they can cultivate the habit of thinking well, and have a pair of eyes to discover the truth, goodness and beauty. And use supportive teaching words to help students gain confidence and provide them with necessary guidance when they are exploring and communicating cooperatively. For example, "Teacher believes in everyone!", "Let's solve this problem together", "X student, vivid performance!", "Well done, the action is on point", "Students, when you say your lines, you must combine the background of the character's appearance and", "At this moment, what is in Hamlet's mind? Show it through gestures" .....

### 3.5.2 Student Activities

The students, according to the teacher's directives, engaged in a process of exploring the personalities of each character in "Hamlet" while reading the script in their textbooks. Hamlet emerges as courageous and astute yet indecisive; Claudius, as greedy and cunning, willing to resort to any means to achieve his ends; Ophelia appears beautiful, pure, yet fragile... They grasped the techniques of dramatic performance through dialogue, gestures, and facial expressions. Speech was articulate with distinct intonation, actions appropriately exaggerated to suit character states, and facial expressions modulated to evoke audience emotions. Guided and encouraged by the teacher's words, the students further deepened their understanding of the text.

### 3.5.3 Design Intent

Positive guidance and supportive pedagogical discourse from teachers can significantly bolster and encourage students' theatrical performances, effectively regulating classroom instruction as a whole. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), providing students with multifaceted support and guidance in methods, emotions, and language meets their competence needs, fostering confidence in their abilities and encouraging them to explore, thus promoting student development.

## 3.6 Post-lesson Reflection: Rethinking Teaching Practice

### 3.6.1 Degree of Achievement of Teaching Objectives

The aim of this educational endeavor is to operationalize the "self-determination theory," fostering students' comprehension and perceptual abilities of drama within the multicultural framework of Western theater. During the phase of autonomous exploration, teachers orchestrate activities and allocate tasks, thereby igniting students' sense of ownership, achieving objectives aligned with SDT's autonomy needs. Through collaborative learning in group exchanges, students learn from each other, collectively progressing, thereby enhancing their abilities in expression, creativity, and practical skills, promoting students' perceptual capabilities to meet SDT's competence needs. Additionally, the harmonious classroom atmosphere and students' team spirit cultivate strong interpersonal bonds among students, fulfilling SDT's relatedness needs.

### 3.6.2 Presuppositional Nature of Instructional Design and Generative Nature of Actual Classroom Instruction

During the instructional design process, educators meticulously prepare for instructional activities, considering the students' foundational knowledge, the content and structure of the text, and integrating the use of multimedia, costumes, props, and other resources in a nuanced manner. Within the actual classroom setting, students immersively engage in dramatic performances and hands-on activities, delving deeper with each step, thereby fully showcasing their proactive engagement in learning. Educators aptly assume a guiding role, adeptly capturing emergent resources such as the students' "Hamlet Knowledge Maps," thereby achieving commendable pedagogical outcomes.

## 4. Conclusion

### *4.1 Teaching Multicultural Theater Based on Self-determinism Has Positive Implications*

Autonomy plays a pivotal role in multicultural drama education (Lin, 2022). By igniting students' intrinsic motivation and fostering their active engagement in the study and comprehension of "Hamlet," educators enhance students' enthusiasm for learning and independence. Throughout the teaching process, instructors craft diverse instructional contexts, guiding students to interpret the work from various cultural perspectives, thereby cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking.

### *4.2 Facilitating the Manifestation of Student Subjectivity in Teaching Multicultural Drama Based on Self-determinism*

In the collision and exchange of multicultural perspectives, students have developed a more comprehensive appreciation of the rich connotations within "Hamlet". They no longer confine themselves to singular cultural interpretations, but instead transcend geographical and temporal boundaries to perceive the work's value and significance across diverse cultural contexts. Moreover, this pedagogical approach has enhanced students' abilities in teamwork and articulation. Through activities such as group discussions and stage performances, students have learned to listen to others' viewpoints, collaborate effectively to accomplish tasks, and confidently showcase their own interpretations and insights.

### *4.3 Self-Determination Theory Should Be Applied with Attention to the Limits of Its Application in Integrating Multicultural Drama Instruction*

However, the research process has also unveiled certain issues and challenges. For instance, some students may encounter difficulties and biases in comprehension when confronted with the impacts of multiculturalism (Wang, 2024). The limited nature of educational resources has, to a certain extent, restrained the development of teaching activities. In light of these issues, future pedagogical practices necessitate the further optimization of instructional design, the provision of more targeted guidance, and a greater investment in and development of educational resources.

In conclusion, drama education rooted in self-determination theory offers new perspectives and

methods for the teaching of "Hamlet," which positively contributes to enhancing students' comprehensive qualities. Nonetheless, during the process of promotion and implementation, experience must be continually drawn upon, challenges surmounted, in order to achieve superior pedagogical outcomes.

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