



Bringing Theater to Life: AI Avatars in Literature Classrooms

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Abstract

The pedagogical transmission of theatrical texts within English literature often encounters limitations when confined to traditional, text-based instructional strategies. Theater, by its nature, is a performative genre intended to be seen, heard, and embodied. However, the absence of visual and kinetic stimuli in conventional classrooms may hinder students' ability to fully interpret character psychology, emotional depth, and dramatic structure. This study investigates the educational potential of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) in bridging this gap. Specifically, it explores how AI-generated avatars, designed to exhibit facial expressions, gestures, vocal tones, and character-driven movements, can be utilized to recreate and simulate the performative dimensions of dramatic texts. By transforming literary characters into visually and aurally perceptible entities, this approach enhances learners' comprehension, emotional resonance, and critical interpretation of theatrical works. The integration of Gen AI avatars is proposed not as a replacement but as an augmentation of traditional methods, offering a multimodal, experiential learning framework that aligns with the cognitive and technological orientation of 21st-century learners.

Keywords: *Theater in Literature Education, Generative Artificial Intelligence, AI Avatars, Multimodal Learning, Literary Pedagogy, Drama Instruction, Digital Humanities, Character Embodiment, Experiential Teaching*

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Human beings have always searched for ways to express their emotions, ideas, and experiences. From cave paintings and folk songs to literature and cinema, every art form has reflected the journey of mankind. Among these art forms, theater holds a special place because it brings together speech, movement, music, and visual elements to create a living experience. It is not only a source of entertainment but also a mirror of society, a platform for education, and a means of cultural preservation. Theater in English literature is a unique blend of dialogue, movement, emotions, and symbolic meaning. From the classical plays of ancient Greece to modern realistic dramas, theatrical works are created not only to be read but also to be performed and experienced



(Bessadet, 2022). However, in many classrooms, theater is often taught only through reading and explanation, which creates a gap between students and the actual performative nature of drama (Ma, 2022). With the rise of digital technology, especially the use of generative artificial intelligence, teachers now have new ways to recreate the experience of theater in virtual spaces, allowing learners to see characters, actions, and dramatic expressions more vividly and engagingly (University of Western Australia, 2024).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Integrating AI avatars in literature classrooms marks a significant evolution in educational practice and theorization. Recent scholarship highlights that AI-driven avatars can create interactive, personalized, and engaging learning experiences by simulating dialogue, supporting student expression, and personalizing content to learner needs (Rizvi, 2024). Such avatars utilize advanced algorithms and natural language processing to adapt to student preferences and pace, enhancing motivation, understanding, and knowledge retention (Raut et al., 2025).

Empirical studies underscore the effectiveness of AI avatars in improving accessibility and participation. For instance, the deployment of avatars in language classrooms (e.g., ESOL programs) has led to measurable increases in student engagement and individualized learning pathways, demonstrating scalability across diverse groups (Rizvi, 2024; Raut et al., 2025). Case examples from organizations like the American Psychological Association and Berlitz further reveal benefits such as reduced instructional design time, better content scalability, and a flexible adaptation of materials for broader and more diverse student populations (Raut et al., 2025). However, the literature also cautions against overreliance on avatars without attention to ethical, privacy, and inclusion concerns. Potential issues include algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the psychological effects of extended avatar interaction, especially among young learners (Raut et al., 2025). The consensus suggests that while AI avatars can supplement and modernize drama and literature pedagogy, the teacher's role remains essential for context, support, and ethical oversight (Rizvi, 2024). Numerous studies have investigated the role of visualization and performance in teaching literature. For example, Winston (2013) emphasized that performative teaching methods facilitate a connection between understanding the text and interpreting emotions. Likewise, Huang and Hew (2018) demonstrated that integrating technology into drama lessons significantly enhances students' memory retention and emotional involvement. Furthermore, Bower et al. (2020) pointed out that AI avatars effectively simulate character behaviors in language learning contexts. Collectively, these studies provide evidence supporting the use of generative AI avatars in theater education to create an immersive, multi-sensory learning experience.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The study focuses on exploring the effectiveness of AI-generated avatars in enhancing the teaching and learning of theatrical texts in English literature classrooms.

- i. How can AI-generated avatars be designed and utilized to visualize and animate characters from theatrical texts to enhance comprehension?
- ii. How effectively can AI-avatar-assisted video demonstrations be implemented in literature classrooms?
- iii. What is the impact of AI avatar-enhanced pedagogy on students' comprehension, emotional engagement, and critical interpretation of dramatic texts?
- iv. How do students perceive and respond to the integration of AI avatars as pedagogical tools in literature education?



Google image of Aristotle transformed into AI-video.

The objectives include designing and implementing AI-generated avatar-based instructional videos, evaluating their impact on student comprehension and engagement through pre- and post-tests, and exploring student attitudes toward this innovative educational approach.



METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative research design to evaluate the effectiveness of AI-generated avatars in enhancing first-year Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) students' understanding and engagement with theatrical texts in English literature classes. The population comprised 30 purposively sampled students enrolled in these courses. Data collection involved administering a multiple-choice pre-test to assess baseline comprehension of selected plays such as Sophocles' *Antigone*, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Following this, students were exposed to AI-avatar-enhanced video demonstrations created using Sora for lifelike facial expressions, Leonardo AI for character animation, and Character.AI for voice and dialogue simulation, accompanied by instructor-led explanations. After the intervention, a post-test measuring comprehension and critical analysis was conducted. Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using paired sample t-tests in SPSS software to determine statistically significant improvements. Supplementary student feedback was gathered via questionnaires to capture perceptions of the AI-assisted



learning experience. This methodology allowed for a structured, empirical assessment of Gen AI avatars' pedagogical impact, combining numerical test results with learner responses to produce valid and reliable findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of pre-test and post-test results shows a clear improvement in students' comprehension and engagement with theatrical texts after receiving AI avatar-assisted instruction. The paired sample t-test revealed that post-test scores ($M = 82.4$, $SD = 6.5$) were significantly higher than pre-test scores ($M = 64.7$, $SD = 7.8$), $t(29) = 9.34$, $p < .001$. This indicates that AI-generated avatar videos, which animated characters from plays such as *Antigone*, *Doctor Faustus*, Aristotle's tragedy play, *Plato*, Shakespeare, and *Waiting for Godot*, helped students better understand character psychology, emotional depth, and dramatic structure.

Qualitative feedback supported these findings. Most students reported greater interest, satisfaction, and confidence in interpreting theatrical literature. They emphasized that avatars made abstract elements more concrete, creating a memorable multi-sensory learning experience.

These results align with recent research showing that avatar-based learning systems can increase engagement, support personalized learning, and enhance knowledge retention (Zhang, 2024; Fink et al., 2024; Jäkel et al., 2025). While some studies note initial adaptation challenges, evidence suggests that interactive, emotionally responsive avatars can foster motivation and critical thinking (Tan, 2024). Overall, the study highlights the effectiveness of integrating generative AI avatars into literature pedagogy, contributing to emerging scholarship on the role of digital tools in enriching educational outcomes across disciplines (Netland, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that integrating generative AI avatars into English literature classrooms can substantially augment traditional teaching methods by offering an immersive and engaging avenue to explore dramatic texts. AI avatar-enhanced videos significantly improve both cognitive comprehension and emotional connection to literature, bridging the gap often experienced in text-based pedagogy. While AI avatars do not replace educators, they serve as powerful pedagogical tools that align with modern learners' technological fluency and multimodal learning preferences. This approach encourages active, embodied engagement with theatrical works, fostering deeper literary appreciation and critical thinking. Future research should explore long-term effects and scalability across diverse educational settings to further validate these promising findings.



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