

From Dramatic Text to Educational Stage: An Ethical–Performative Approach to Luu Quang Vu’s The Soul of Truong Ba, The Butcher’s Body

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Citation: Ngoc, A. T. T., Thu, T. N. and Hong, M. H. D. T.(2025). From Dramatic Text to Educational Stage: An Ethical–Performative Approach to Luu Quang Vu’s The Soul of Truong Ba, The Butcher’s Body, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 3396-3407. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i2.2108>

Published: November 19, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores how ethical and personal development can be integrated into literature education in Vietnamese secondary schools. While dramatic texts are often treated as to literary analysis, this research consider them as performative ethical spaces where students both interpret and embody values. The aim is to demonstrate how drama can foster moral reflection, empathy, and civic responsibility alongside linguistic and literary skills. Methodologically, the study combines textual analysis of Truong Ba’s Soul in the Butcher’s Body (Luu Quang Vu) with perspective from performance studies (Fischer-Lichte, Boal), ethical literary criticism (Nussbaum, Rosenblatt), and discourse theory (Foucault, Hall, Fairclough). It also incorporates classroom observations and small-scale dramatization to illustrate how students confront ethical dilemmas and cultural values through performance. The results demonstrate that dramatization transforms the text from a static object of analysis into a dynamic site of ethical inquiry, aesthetic imagination, and dialogic interaction. Students develop critical thinking as well as reflective abilities as ethical and cultural agents. The study therefore suggests a pedagogical move from interpretation-based instruction to experience-based learning and demonstrates the value of drama education in competency-based reform. At the same time, the research expands the significance of literary studies by showing that drama is not merely a text for analysis but also a performative ethical space in which cultural and social values are negotiated and reconstituted. On this basis, it proposes “Repositioning Drama Education: From Literary Text to Ethical Performance Space” as a theoretical contribution to both literary research and a practical approach to teaching.

Keywords: Dramatic Work; Ethical Performance; Discourse; Ethical Literary Criticism

FEATURED APPLICATION

This study contributes to the intersection of literary studies and education by repositioning dramatic works not merely as objects of aesthetic analysis but as ethical–performative spaces within the learning process. Through the integration of performance studies, ethical literary criticism, and discourse theory, the proposed model introduces a new approach to both the teaching and interpretation of literature—one in which learners not only read but live within the text, engaging in critical reflection, moral imagination, and democratic citizenship

1. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In recent decades, literary education and performance studies have changed in how they approach dramatic texts. Once viewed mainly as works to be studied for structure and theme, plays are now increasingly interpreted through interdisciplinary lenses – as dynamic spaces of aesthetic, ethical, and sociocultural expression. Within this evolving framework, the stage is no longer merely an artistic metaphor but emerges as an educational arena where moral reasoning, critical imagination, and active civic engagement are nurtured.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

This study proposes an educational model grounded in the concept of the ethical performative space - an interdisciplinary framework that integrates performance studies, ethical literary criticism, and discourse theory. The model repositions the

literature classroom as a space of ethical performance, where learners actively construct meaning, negotiate moral values, and engage in reflective self-awareness through embodied and dialogic action.

From this perspective, a dramatic work is approached not as a static literary text to be analyzed for structure or motifs, but as a performative event - an art form where language, the body, and space co-create meaning. As Erika Fischer-Lichte asserts, a dramatic text is "the starting point of a transformative process - where meaning is not reproduced but generated through performance"[1]. The essence of drama, therefore, lies not in its textual dimension but in its potential to evoke empathy, role-taking, and dialogical engagement - core capacities of ethical and aesthetic education.

Within this framework, ethical performance refers to the process in which students engage in value-based decision-making and express moral perspectives through role-play and embodied enactment. As Fischer-Lichte emphasizes, performance "has the potential to transform not only the actors but also the spectators, through emotional and corporeal participation". In this sense, dramatic enactment becomes an ethically conscious act, in which learners must make choices, justify beliefs, and navigate tensions among competing moral systems. Manon van de Water, Mary McAvoy, and Kristin Hunt (2015) emphasize that: "Drama education helps learners act differently in the world... reimagining agency and relationships with others" (p.12)[2]. This perspective paves the way for a literature pedagogy grounded in ethical experience.

Drawing on the educational philosophy of Martha Nussbaum and Louise Rosenblatt, this study foregrounds moral imagination as a central capability in literary learning. Nussbaum (1990) contends that through literature, individuals "learn not only to understand what others feel, but to discover what we ourselves might become, and what we ought to strive for" (p. 90) [3]. Similarly, Rosenblatt (1978) conceives reading as a lived-through experience, where reason and emotion converge in a dynamic transaction between reader and text[4]. Through role immersion, students do not simply "read" characters but "live with" them - developing empathy, ethical reflection, and self-understanding.

The classroom thus becomes an ethical performative space, co-constructed by teachers and students through aesthetic and moral engagement. The teacher functions as a pedagogical director, designing learning scripts that invite ethical dilemmas and guide students toward bodily, emotional, and linguistic participation. Students, therefore, are repositioned not as passive interpreters but as ethical-aesthetic agents who live through literature via role-play, structured moral debate, reflective journaling, and embodied expression.

Expanding this framework, the study draws upon Augusto Boal's philosophy in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which conceives performance as both a mode of cognition and a practice of social transformation. Boal transforms theatre into a rehearsal for liberation, in which participants identify systems of oppression, experiment with resistance, and imagine alternative futures. His notion of the "spect-actor" - a hybrid of spectator and actor - embodies a radical pedagogical shift: the learner is no longer a passive observer but an active agent who interrogates, participates, and creates. This philosophical stance deepens the critical dimension of the ethical performative space, aligning with its goal of enabling students to question power, construct meaning, and perform ethical discursive action within an educational context.[5]

From the perspectives of Michel Foucault[6] and Stuart Hall[7], all linguistic and performative practices including textual selection, pedagogical mediation, and classroom performance - are discursive acts embedded in relations of power. Teaching drama, therefore, is not a neutral pedagogical activity but a socio-cultural intervention - an act of discourse through which students participate in the production, negotiation, and transformation of meaning.

Every linguistic choice, every emphasized line of dialogue, and every form of classroom interaction constitutes a site of power - a space where values, identities, and social norms are reproduced or contested. To further examine how these relations of power operate at the micro-level of classroom discourse, this study draws upon Norman Fairclough's *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*. This framework enables language to be understood not only as a communicative medium but also as a critical and transformative practice, illuminating how learners exercise agency, negotiate ethical values, and reconstruct social meanings through performance and reflection within the literature classroom.[8, 9]

By integrating these theoretical foundations, the concept of the ethical performative space is articulated as a transformative learning environment, where students experience, negotiate, and reimagine ethical being through artistic-moral action. The model thus advances beyond a framework for teaching drama to become a framework for living ethically through art - cultivating reflective, empathetic, and agentic learners capable of aesthetic and moral transformation.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that draws upon three key approaches: performance studies, ethical literary criticism, and discourse theory. The selection of these perspectives is not incidental, but stems from the need to interpret and respond to both theoretical and practical challenges in the teaching of dramatic texts within contemporary Vietnamese educational contexts.

1.2.1. Performance Studies

Drama is an inherently interdisciplinary genre, situated at the intersection of literature and performance. Treating drama merely as a written text reduces its educational potential. Instead, it should be approached as a theatrical event - a performative process in which students engage through embodiment, expression, and critical reflection.

Drawing on Erika Fischer-Lichte's perspective, performance is not simply an artistic product but a process of co-creating meaning, wherein audiences are drawn into the dynamics of transformation. As she asserts: "Performance emerges as a transformative process - of actors, of spectators, and of the cultural meanings themselves" (p. 38)[1]. This viewpoint opens up new possibilities for reimagining the classroom as a performance space, where students construct knowledge and identity through lived interaction.

According to Fischer-Lichte (2008), performance operates through an autopoietic feedback loop - a self-organizing system of reciprocal responses between performers and spectators. Rather than following a unidirectional flow from actor to audience, performance unfolds through mutual engagement, reaction, and shared participation. All participants feel both

implicated and responsible for a situation that no single individual fully controls, thereby creating a communal and transformative experience [1].

Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the significance of “shared bodies, shared spaces” - a notion in which the physical co-presence of performers and spectators co-constructs a shared transformative environment. Performance studies, therefore, shifts focus away from plot or props, emphasizing instead the embodied experience and empathetic engagement as core pedagogical acts.

Expanding the performative framework, this study draws upon the emancipatory philosophy of Augusto Boal, who conceptualizes theatre not merely as an art form but as a mode of knowing and acting upon the world (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, 1979)[5]. For Boal, performance constitutes “a rehearsal for liberation,” a space in which individuals recognize, interrogate, and transcend structures of oppression through creative action.

The notion of the “spect-actor” - a fusion of spectator and actor-symbolizes a radical democratization of learning, transforming learners into co-creators of meaning rather than passive recipients (Boal, 1992). In this sense, the stage becomes a democratic arena of experience, where each act of role-playing represents a renewed engagement with the self and the world. In *The Rainbow of Desire: the Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*[10], Boal further extends his liberatory vision to the psychological dimension, viewing performance as an aesthetic and therapeutic space in which participants confront internalized mechanisms of oppression and experiment with alternative modes of being. Accordingly, Boal’s method may be understood as a praxis of liberation - a form of education through embodied reflection and transformative action - particularly relevant to the teaching of drama in schools, where students, as spect-actors, engage simultaneously in ethical inquiry and existential exploration through performative expression.

In educational contexts, this framework invites the design of performative learning scenarios where students are empowered to choose, improvise, and interact in real time. This model promotes three foundational pedagogical principles:

Collaborative co-creation – students reinterpret content through bodily expression and emotional engagement;

Contingency and immediacy – students learn through existential experience and moral decision-making;

Personal-cultural connection – the classroom becomes a shared experiential dome, activating moral imagination and deep empathy.

1.2.2. Ethical Literary Criticism

Ethical literary criticism, as exemplified by the works of Martha Nussbaum (1990) and Louise Rosenblatt (1978), emphasizes the role of literature in cultivating moral imagination and empathetic understanding. Nussbaum contends that novels and plays do more than foster awareness of others - they open up possibilities within ourselves: “We learn not only what it is like to be someone else, but what we ourselves might become, and what we ought to strive for” (*Love’s Knowledge*, p. 90)[3]. Literature - particularly drama - places learners within complex moral situations, developing their capacity for empathy and ethical judgment.

Rosenblatt, building on this tradition, developed the transactional theory of reading, which frames reading as a lived-through event wherein meaning is co-constructed by reader and text. This experience is inherently personal, shaped by emotion, memory, and social context. As such, reading is not a neutral act but an ethical one - an engagement in which the reader lives in another’s world while simultaneously reflecting on their own.

When applied to drama education through theatrical performance, students move beyond understanding characters to becoming them. They embody roles, negotiate moral choices, rewrite endings, and perform from multiple perspectives - thereby practicing ethical reasoning and moral agency in an emotionally resonant, simulated environment.

Within this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator of dialogue, creating the conditions for independent thought and responsible engagement. Ethical literary criticism, therefore, is not merely an analytical lens - it offers a pedagogical foundation for teaching drama as a form of embodied ethical practice within the classroom.

Ethical literary criticism emphasizes the capacity of literature to cultivate moral imagination and empathetic understanding, as affirmed by Martha Nussbaum (1990) and Louise Rosenblatt (1978). Nussbaum argues that literary works enable individuals “not only to understand what others feel but to discover what we ourselves might become, and what we ought to strive for.” At the practical level, Rosenblatt conceives reading as a lived-through experience - a process of co-constructing meaning between reader and text, where reason and emotion dynamically converge.

Building upon this foundation, Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) extends the discussion from “reading” to “performance,” viewing theatre as an embodied transformative process in which meaning emerges through the bodily and emotional interaction between performers and spectators. In educational contexts, this implies that learners do not merely understand characters - they live with them, negotiate moral values, and experience inner transformation through performative engagement.

The integration of ethical literary criticism and performance theory thus provides the conceptual foundation for the “ethical performative space” - a pedagogical environment where literature is learned not only through interpretation, but through embodied action, empathy, and humanistic experience.

1.2.3 Discourse

Since the “linguistic turn” in twentieth-century humanities, discourse has no longer been understood merely as a system of verbal expression, but as a mechanism for the production and regulation of meaning - where language, knowledge, and power interweave to organize reality and construct subjectivity.[11] Michel Foucault laid the foundation for modern discourse theory by asserting that discourse does not simply reflect objects, but determines how they may be known- through historically contingent rules of knowability[12]. Discourse, therefore, is never neutral: it regulates what can be said, who is authorized to speak, and who is excluded from speech. For Foucault, knowledge is inseparable from power; it is produced and circulated within micro-political mechanisms that permeate everyday life, educational language, and pedagogical behavior.[6]

Applied to the teaching of literature-especially dramatic literature- discourse theory enables analysis on three interconnected levels: (1) the dramatic text as a product of discursive systems, (2) the classroom as a space of discourse

reproduction and restructuring, and (3) the learner as an agent negotiating meaning. Teaching drama is not merely a hermeneutic activity but a discursive intervention within specific educational regimes. Critical questions emerge: Which characters are centered? Which moral values are affirmed or contested? What are students allowed to say, and through which language codes?

When students perform, debate, rewrite endings, or advocate for marginalized characters, they are engaging in discursive acts-deconstructing fixed value systems and reconstructing their own ethical and social identities.

Stuart Hall extends Foucault's concept of discourse into the realms of media and cultural identity. For Hall[7], expression is a process of meaning production through encoding and decoding, in which individuals reposition themselves and their communities within discourse. Meaning is never pre-given; it is constructed under specific socio-historical conditions. Thus, dramatic characters do not carry fixed messages but become contested sites of power – language – culture interactions. When students rewrite scripts or reflect from alternative viewpoints, they are reading discourse-a practice that is simultaneously academic and profoundly ethical.

Unlike poetry or narrative fiction, drama is inherently performative. Its nature demands embodiment and dialogue. Teaching drama can be seen as a discursive event in which texts, teachers, and students work together to shape the meaning. When organized as an ethical performative space, the literature classroom becomes a place where students take part in role-play, reflection, and identity formation. From this perspective, literature does more than convey values it also enacts power and shapes subjectivity.

With these three theoretical pillars combined, this study views dramatic texts as discourse, ethical, and aesthetic events that connect directly to the curriculum, cultural values, and school institutions. In this context, the script is not restricted to analytical study but a tool for ethical reflection and experiential learning.

This theoretical framework serves not only to interpret the reception of dramatic texts but also to guide pedagogical practice, bridging theory with educational application. It provides a basis for a dual objective: highlight the humanistic and aesthetic values of drama while proposing strategies to improve literature teaching in Vietnamese secondary schools. These foundations support a broader pedagogical perspective - one that goes beyond text analysis to include the performative possibilities of plays when staged in class. Drama is thus approached as a dialogical event, embedded within the curriculum, cultural frameworks, and institutional discourses, rather than as an isolated literary artifact.

Building upon Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall's theories of discourse, identity, and power, this study extends their macro-level insights into a micro-analytical framework for classroom discourse. Foucault and Hall argue that discourse is not merely a reflection of reality but a constitutive force that shapes what can be thought, said, and enacted within social relations. To operationalize this understanding in an educational context, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)(1992, 1995[8]) provides a productive bridge between theory and practice.

Fairclough conceptualizes discourse as "a form of social practice" through which relations of power and ideology are both reproduced and transformed. His three-dimensional model distinguishes among (1) textual analysis – focusing on vocabulary, syntax, and semantics; (2) discursive practice – how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted; and (3) social practice – the broader ideological and cultural contexts in which discourse operates (Fairclough, 1995).

Applied to literature education, this framework enables the classroom to be reimagined as an ethical performative space - a dialogic arena where students not only reproduce textual meaning but also interrogate and reconstruct ethical values through language and performance. For example, in the Vietnamese play *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body*, the line "One cannot live with the inside in one way and the outside in another" can be analyzed through Fairclough's three levels:

- At the textual level, the modal verb "cannot" expresses a moral refusal of inner dissonance and ethical compromise.
- At the discursive level, the utterance occurs within a tension between human autonomy and divine authority - a metaphor for social power relations.
- At the social level, the line becomes a discursive act of resistance; when students perform this dialogue, they practice moral agency and voice within a socially mediated framework.

This approach exemplifies Fairclough's assertion that "discourse not only represents the social world but also contributes to constructing and changing it" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64). Integrating the frameworks of Foucault, Hall, and Fairclough therefore allows the proposed model of the ethical performative space to achieve dual depth: deconstructing dominant moral-ideological systems while fostering students' capacity for ethical reflexivity and critical transformation.

From a discourse-theoretical standpoint, the classroom shifts from a space of transmission to a space of meaning-making. In this reconfiguration:

- Literary texts are no longer "repositories of fixed content" but open fields of meaning;
- Students are not passive recipients but active agents who negotiate and redefine values;
- Teachers move beyond transmitting knowledge to become facilitators of inquiry, challenge, and discursive reconstruction.

Building on this transformation, the literature classroom can be reimagined as an ethical performative space - a dynamic arena where students not only understand but also enact humanistic values through language, embodiment, and social interaction. Each act of role-play, debate, or reflective writing becomes an ethical discursive act, through which learners receive, produce, and renegotiate the interrelations between knowledge, power, and identity. In this sense, the classroom ceases to be a place where ethics is taught and becomes one where ethics and aesthetics are lived, realizing the humanistic essence of literary education.

1.3. Integrated Pedagogical Model

In the context of a global shift from traditional education models to competence-based education, organizing learning activities that emphasize experiential, creative engagement and the diversification of pedagogical methods has become increasingly imperative.[13] Among such approaches, the theatrical adaptation of literary texts has emerged as an integrated method - situated at the intersection of performative arts, aesthetic appreciation, and critical thinking. As Fischer-Lichte (2008)

asserts, the theatre is not merely a space for representation but a “process of knowledge transformation,” wherein learners interpret literary texts through embodied action and construct meaning via immersion into characters and dramatic situations.

In Vietnam, this perspective is clearly articulated in the General Education Curriculum for Literature (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018)[14], which emphasizes practice-oriented, aesthetic, and collaborative learning activities. Notably, Specialized Module – Grade 10 Literature incorporates a dedicated learning module entitled Theatricalizing Literary Works[15], marking a strategic shift in embedding performance arts into the formal curriculum. Activities such as adapting texts, scripting, directing, and performing roles not only deepen students’ understanding of the thematic and ideological dimensions of literary works but also expand interpretive possibilities through multimodal sign systems-gesture, language, spatial design, and movement.

This pedagogical orientation is fully aligned with the international vision proposed by the OECD (2018)[16] in *The Future of Education and Skills – Education 2030*, which highlights the importance of action-oriented, collaborative, and socially meaningful approaches to learning. In this framework, theatre is conceived as an open learning environment in which students actively construct knowledge, cultivate communicative and intercultural competence, and develop reflective thinking and problem-solving capacities-essential skills for navigating a volatile and complex world.

Building upon the three theoretical pillars-performance studies, ethical literary criticism, and discourse theory-this study proposes an integrated pedagogical model that repositions the teaching of dramatic texts within Vietnamese secondary education. Rather than limiting the classroom to reading and textual analysis, drama should be brought into performance, transforming the text into a living material through which students engage in ethical embodiment, develop reflective and empathetic capacities, and actively participate in the construction of cultural discourse. The literature classroom is thus reimaged as an ethical performative space, where the teacher serves as a pedagogical director, and students take on the roles of performers and value negotiators.

The proposed pedagogical strategies include: open-script role-play, ethical debate following performance, reflective writing through character journals or embodied expression, and emotionally immersive simulations such as moral courtrooms.

These strategies are not intended to merely illustrate content, but to establish a moral learning environment-one in which students live with values, confront conflict, and engage in ethical self-inquiry.

In the context of Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum Reform, which emphasizes the development of learner competencies and moral character, this model demonstrates high pedagogical feasibility and adaptability to teacher training programs. While much of the current research focuses on content, aesthetics, or theatrical reenactment, the ethical and performative dimensions of drama education remain under-theorized and under-implemented. This integrated model addresses that gap by proposing a humanistic, interdisciplinary, and pedagogically rich approach with strong classroom applicability.

Cross-national comparisons indicate that this proposed model demonstrates notable advancements over several current practices in drama-based moral education.

- (1) In China,[17], in a study published in *Chinese Education and Society*, investigated the use of drama to promote moral development in primary education. The study found that ethical role-playing enhanced students' capacities for self-reflection and empathy, particularly in civic education classes. However, as the author acknowledges, this approach remains predominantly instructional, lacking a foundation in literary criticism and critical discourse awareness.
 - (2) Recent studies on character education through drama and arts-based pedagogy in South Korean high schools have demonstrated the potential of theatricalized literature instruction to foster moral reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility among adolescents. According to a report by The Korean Society of School Health,[18] character education programs have integrated drama-based moral lessons into the secondary school curriculum, utilizing dramatized situations and short plays to engage students in critical moral reflection and behavioral self-regulation. Notably, Ko J.H. (2016) [18] proposed a comparative pedagogical framework between Korea and France, highlighting drama education in secondary schools as a means to cultivate students’ critical thinking and ethical sensibilities. In this model, students actively participate in enacting, rewriting, and debating dramatic narratives, thus transforming literature into a performative site of moral inquiry and personal meaning-making. This is also a perspective that Garcia, L. explores in his works *Images of Teaching and Classroom Drama* (*Youth Theatre Journal*, 10) and *Placing ‘Diverse Voices’ at the Center of Teacher Education*. [19]
 - (3) In Canada, the Process Drama method-synthesized by Neelands and Goode in *Structuring Drama Work* (2015)[20]- has become a common strategy in secondary schools. This approach constructs fictional worlds in which students are invited to role-play and resolve conflicts through imaginative scenarios. While effective in fostering creativity and communication skills, most of these activities are not explicitly tied to literary content and do not constitute a clear moral pedagogy.
- In recent decades, educational drama-particularly process drama - has gained significant traction across European educational systems as an interdisciplinary, experience-centered pedagogy.
- (4) In Italy, Piazzoli explored the application of process drama in teaching Italian as a second language, emphasizing its capacity to foster intercultural awareness. Her study demonstrated that manipulating aesthetic distance through role-play enabled learners to “reflect on their own social positioning while engaging with fictional others,” a strategy that successfully enhanced critical consciousness and empathy (Piazzoli, 2010, p. 397). [21]
 - (5) In Norway, drama has increasingly been recognized as a valuable medium for fostering social and emotional learning among students. Baraldsnes and Lyngstad (2021) introduced a process drama approach to address bullying in secondary schools, showing that students not only developed a deeper awareness of bullying dynamics but also initiated constructive responses. As they argue, such interventions demonstrate that “through fiction, students can experience, with their whole body, different perspectives on the phenomenon of bullying” .[22] Complementing this, Eriksson (2022) examined

storytelling workshops grounded in educational drama, illustrating how students “enter into” and simultaneously “observe” dramatic roles—a dual perspective fostering both embodiment and critical distance.[23]

- (6) In Hungary, a national survey by Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2024) revealed that educational theatre has become a structurally diverse and socially responsive practice. Their analysis of over 200 programmes identified a common emphasis on participatory methods aimed at developing students’ social competencies, critical thinking, and civic engagement through role-play and scenario-based inquiry. As they contend, “educational theatre in Hungary serves not merely as artistic enrichment but as a transformative pedagogical strategy”.[24]
- (7) Meanwhile, In the United Kingdom, the Drama for Learning and Creativity (D4LC) initiative, led by Baldwin between 2005 and 2010, integrated drama into primary education through a co-teaching model involving drama specialists and classroom teachers. Evaluation reports indicated significant improvements in students’ imagination, engagement, and oral language skills. These outcomes affirmed that “drama-based teaching fosters deep learning, collaboration, and creative confidence across curricular domains” (European Commission, 2018).[25]
- (8) Lastly, In Slovenia, Lešnik (2021) questioned the conventional divide between drama as art and drama as pedagogy. Drawing on classroom ethnography in England, her research illustrated how drama-based approaches enabled students to engage with the emotional and ethical complexities of historical events, thereby broadening their capacities for both historical inquiry and moral reflection. As Lešnik emphasized, “drama created a liminal space in which students interrogated history not merely as observers but as critically engaged participants.”[26]
- (9) O'Toole and Dunn (2002) pioneered the use of process drama in teaching literature at Australian secondary schools. Instead of passively analyzing texts, students engaged in role-play and improvised scenes based on literary narratives. The approach fostered deeper understanding of character psychology and thematic values, while enhancing critical thinking and collaborative skills. Their findings suggest that drama-based pedagogy transforms literary learning into an active, embodied experience rich in emotion and personal insight.[27]

Overall, these studies highlight the educational potential of drama in facilitating experiential learning, fostering intercultural dialogue, and promoting ethical engagement across diverse national contexts. When approached as a literary genre, drama not only conveys knowledge but also represents life, reflecting conflicts, values, and human behavior. At the same time, through role-playing and stage interaction, students develop the ability to evaluate values, engage in critical thinking, cultivate empathy, and assume civic responsibility – core competencies essential for the twenty-first century.

Accordingly, this study raises two central questions: In what ways can approaching drama as an ethical performative space generate interdisciplinary pedagogical models that both address theoretical concerns in literary studies and yield practical effectiveness in secondary education? Furthermore, how can the repositioning of drama as an ethical performative space contribute to the development of students’ aesthetic, moral, and civic competencies within the current context of educational reform?

In contrast, the model proposed in this study presents three key innovations: This model unifies three theoretical lenses: performance, ethics, and discourse - within an interdisciplinary conceptual structure, transforming theoretical abstraction into a viable and humanistic educational practice;

It is directly aligned with the current Vietnamese General Education curriculum, particularly through the inclusion of three canonical dramatic texts from the high school literature program;

It offers concrete, adaptable instructional strategies that are implementable in typical secondary classrooms with limited resources.

This ethical performance model is informed by the works of Fischer-Lichte (on performance), Nussbaum and Rosenblatt (on ethical literary criticism), and Foucault, Hall and Norman Fairclough (on discourse). Every teaching activity is designed as a form of ethical discursive action, wherein students express, negotiate, and critically reflect on meaning. The model serves both as a critical framework and a pedagogical vision, reimagining the literature classroom as a space for aesthetic and moral transformation.

As Nussbaum powerfully asserts, liberal education is the foundation of democracy because it cultivates critical thinking, dialogic engagement, and empathy among free individuals[3]. Approaching dramatic texts as ethical performative spaces thus opens a new paradigm for literary education—one that aligns theory with practice.

More than fostering reflective, emotional, and creative reading competencies, this model enables students to practice moral agency in a safe and dialogic environment - where truth, beauty, and personhood can be embodied, contested, and expressed. “In the project Drama & Bullying (2017–2020), 95 16-year-old 10th-graders participated in different roles, explored the drama conventions, and thus developed a deeper insight into bullying and its prevention. The participants adjusted the original story that was provided to fit their present-day challenges.” [22] Rather than emphasizing content recall, students are encouraged to construct their identities, values, and voices within a collaborative learning community.

This is not a quantitative experimental model, but rather a philosophical and pedagogical foundation—connecting performance theory, ethical inquiry, and critical discourse analysis—toward a humanistic, transformative vision of literature education.

In the current context of educational reform, the shift from a content-based to a competency-based approach represents a crucial transformation in Vietnamese general education. The ethical performance model proposed in this study contributes not only to the theoretical enrichment of literature pedagogy but also to a redefinition of what it means to learn literature - as an act of experiencing, co-creating, and ethically reflecting upon life through art.

First, the model positions literature not merely as an object of interpretation but as a living ethical environment, where students rehearse humanity through role-playing, moral debate, and embodied reflection. This aligns with the core competencies identified in the Vietnamese Language and Literature Curriculum (2018), including moral reasoning, aesthetic sensibility, and civic responsibility.

Second, by integrating canonical Vietnamese plays such as *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* (Luu Quang Vu) the model bridges national cultural depth with contemporary educational innovation. Through role enactment and ethical dialogue, students not only grasp the humanistic values embedded in the text but also cultivate the ability to navigate moral dilemmas in real life - thus engaging in a form of ethical action learning.

Third, this model proves particularly feasible in resource-limited secondary schools, as it relies on interactive, reflective, and performative activities rather than sophisticated infrastructure. Teachers, functioning as pedagogical directors, guide the learning process as a dialogic stage where every student becomes a co-creator of meaning and value.

Finally, this framework enhances Vietnam's contribution to global scholarship in drama and literature education. Its contextualized adaptation demonstrates how international theoretical paradigms - such as performance studies and ethical literary criticism - can be restructured and localized to fit national curricula. In doing so, it introduces a distinctive Vietnamese voice to the global discourse on drama education, one in which students emerge simultaneously as learners, performers, and ethical-reflective agents.

So, the contribution of this study does not lie in the creation of an entirely new set of methods, but rather in the systematic integration of these strategies within a pedagogical model explicitly aligned with the Vietnamese Literature Curriculum and anchored in a canonical dramatic text familiar to students. Furthermore, the adaptation of these strategies to the resource-constrained conditions of Vietnamese secondary schools adds significant practical value. Thus, the originality of the study resides not in the techniques themselves, but in the processes of localization, restructuring, and contextual adaptation that simultaneously preserve an international theoretical foundation while ensuring effective applicability within Vietnamese classrooms.

1.4. The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body (Luu Quang Vu)

Luu Quang Vu's *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* (1981)[28] is widely regarded as a modern masterpiece of Vietnamese theatre, adapted from a well-known folk tale of the same name. The play tells the story of Truong Ba, a gentle and respected man celebrated for his skill in chess, who dies unjustly due to a clerical error committed by the celestial registrars Nam Tao and Bac Dau. To rectify their mistake, Nam Tao, Bac Dau, and the deity De Thich permit his soul to return to life in the body of a recently deceased butcher, since Truong Ba's own body has already decayed. From that moment on, Truong Ba is forced to endure profound tragedy: estrangement from his family, harassment by local officials, the earthly demands of the butcher's widow, and, above all, the torment of a noble soul confined within a coarse body - one increasingly seduced by desires that are not his own. Confronted with the danger of moral corruption and the loss of authentic selfhood, Truong Ba ultimately chooses to relinquish the borrowed body and embrace death, thereby preserving his dignity and spiritual integrity.

More than a philosophical tragedy about the conflict between soul and body, the play embodies a deeply humanist reflection on the meaning of authentic existence. It raises enduring ethical questions concerning identity, dignity, and social judgment, while cautioning humanity against the alienation of the self amid material temptation and pragmatic compromise. Through its compact structure, rich linguistic texture, and multi-layered philosophical depth, *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* stands not only as a landmark of Vietnamese drama but also as a moral parable conveyed through the language of theatre.

Beyond its artistic achievement, the play possesses significant potential as a pedagogical and ethical resource. By dramatizing the tension between inner authenticity and the constraints of physical embodiment, it invites learners to engage with universal moral dilemmas that transcend cultural boundaries. Such universality - articulated through the oppositions of truth and falsity, dignity and expedience, selfhood and conformity - renders the text especially suitable for performative learning contexts such as role-play, ethical debate, and reflective drama practice.

For Vietnamese learners, the play's canonical status ensures accessibility while providing profound intellectual and moral substance for the application of ethical - performative pedagogy. For international scholars, it exemplifies how localized literary works can contribute meaningfully to global discourses in drama education, offering distinctive cultural perspectives while engaging with universal human concerns. Integrating *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* into a pedagogical framework thus demonstrates the capacity of literature to act as a bridge between national identity and cross-cultural dialogue, affirming its enduring educational, ethical, and artistic value.

2. Research Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Hermeneutic Approach to Literary-Educational Inquiry

2.1. Interdisciplinary Methodological Orientation

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical integration model as conceptualized by Julie Thompson Klein(1990), aiming to connect diverse bodies of knowledge from performance studies, moral philosophy, discourse theory, and literary education into a unified pedagogical framework. The integration is not a mere accumulation of disciplinary content, but rather a reconstruction of epistemological perspectives, positioning literature as a site of value-based education and discursive negotiation.

The methodological process unfolds in five key stages:

Identifying the Problem – defining gaps in current pedagogical approaches to drama texts within school curricula;

Selecting Disciplinary Frameworks – choosing theoretical lenses from relevant academic fields to address the identified problem;

Interacting Theoretical Constructs – facilitating a dialogic synthesis among frameworks to generate new conceptual insights;

Designing the Pedagogical Model – developing an educational structure informed by interdisciplinary insights;

Testing for Contextual Feasibility – examining the model's applicability within the specific socio-cultural and curricular context of Vietnamese education.

By treating theory and pedagogy as mutually constitutive, this approach supports the development of an innovative instructional paradigm-one in which drama is reimagined not only as a text to be analyzed, but as a performative, ethical,

and socio-political event. The interdisciplinary orientation thus enables a critical, context-sensitive, and transformational approach to literature education.

2.2. Methods and Applied Techniques

- Hermeneutic Textual Analysis: The play is examined through an interdisciplinary lens, allowing for the deconstruction of its ethical, aesthetic, and socio-cultural layers of meaning. This method foregrounds literature as a space of moral inquiry and cultural critique.
- Close Reading: This technique focuses on the linguistic, symbolic, and structural elements of the dramatic text in order to uncover implicit mechanisms of value expression, ethical tension, and aesthetic affect. Close reading treats the text as a multi-coded artifact, opening up possibilities for educational transformation and ethical engagement.
- Socio-Cultural Contextual Analysis: Texts and pedagogical strategies are situated within the broader framework of the Vietnamese secondary education context. This analysis allows for the critical assessment of feasibility, cultural appropriateness, and curricular alignment of proposed instructional models.
- Theoretical-Practical Reflection: A dialectical method is employed to bridge theoretical paradigms-performance theory (Fischer-Lichte, 2008), literary ethics (Nussbaum, 2010; Rosenblatt, 1978), and discourse theory (Foucault -1972; Hall -1997, Fairclough -1992) -with real-world teaching practices in Vietnamese literature classrooms. The aim is not only to apply theoretical insights but also to adapt, localize, and evolve a pedagogical framework that is responsive to educational realities.
- Theoretical Pedagogical Model Design: Based on the integrated theoretical framework, the study proposes and conceptualizes several instructional models such as the “ethical performance classroom,” “moral tribunal simulation,” and “embodied role-play”. These are structured environments in which students actively negotiate values, embody moral dilemmas, and co-construct aesthetic-ethical agency through expressive and embodied learning.
- International Comparative Analysis: This comparative dimension highlights the model’s originality, theoretical richness, and contextual adaptability to the Vietnamese educational system.

To avoid overstating its empirical scope, the current research primarily constitutes a theoretical – design feasibility assessment rather than a comprehensive field trial. This assessment was conducted through two approaches: (a) systematic curriculum mapping to align proposed activities with the learning objectives and standards of the 2018 Vietnamese General Education Literature Curriculum; and (b) international comparative analysis of drama pedagogy to identify transferable techniques and their adaptation under conditions of limited resources. In addition, the research team conducted preliminary testing through interviews with teachers and school administrators, which yielded positive feedback regarding both feasibility and classroom relevance.

Building on this foundation, the paper outlines a second-stage pilot study to be conducted with Grade 9 and Grade 11 classes during the teaching of tragedy. This pilot will employ a mixed-methods design, incorporating student reflective journals, teacher observation protocols, focus group interviews, and pre- and post-tests of ethical reasoning and reflective competence. Instruments, templates, and ethical procedures have already been developed, enabling the pilot to be implemented efficiently. Accordingly, the current study provides the necessary theoretical and curricular foundation while paving the way for a broader-scale empirical validation.

This positioning not only strengthens the study’s local relevance but also lays the groundwork for comparative international inquiry, thereby extending its implications beyond the Vietnamese context.

2.3. Limitations and Research Trustworthiness

The academic trustworthiness of this study is ensured through the following components: A robust interdisciplinary theoretical foundation, drawing upon performance theory, literary ethics, and discourse analysis; Clearly articulated, transparent, and replicable scholarly procedures, facilitating methodological integrity; Strong internal coherence between theoretical assumptions, research methods, and pedagogical modeling; High compatibility with Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum, particularly in the context of teaching literature in secondary schools.

The research process is structured around an integrative theoretical framework encompassing three foundational pillars: performance studies (Fischer-Lichte), ethical literary criticism (Nussbaum; Rosenblatt), and discourse theory (Foucault; Hall). This framework not only provides a critical apparatus for textual interpretation but also serves as a generative base for designing pedagogical strategies that are liberatory, reflexive, and humanistic.

Rather than conceiving theory as detached from practice, this study highlights their mutual interconnection - where classroom interventions are understood as acts of ethical performance and discursive negotiation. The alignment of philosophical depth with educational applicability ensures that Figure 1: Performative-Interpretive Model demonstrates reliability, transformative potential, and pedagogical relevance in both local and broader educational contexts.

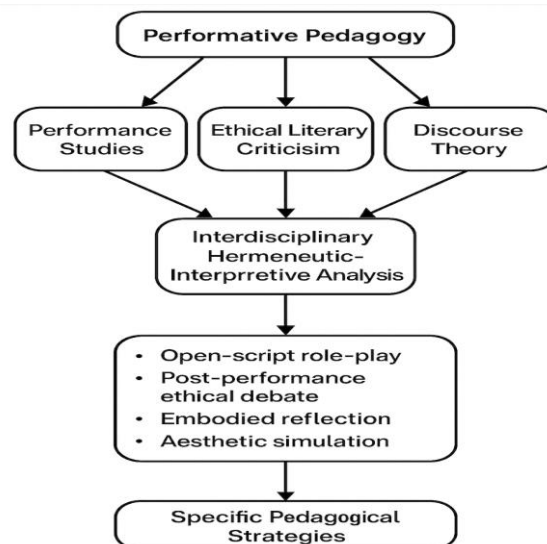


Figure 1: Performative-Interpretive Model

Overall, the research method in this study used here shows both the intellectual and aesthetic dimensions of dramatic texts and support a pedagogical model that combines emotion, ethics, expression, and critical reflection. The direct alignment of the model with the 2018 Vietnamese General Education Curriculum and the choice of a canonical dramatic text such as *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* represent a significant practical contribution to the Vietnamese educational context. This can be regarded as a creative contextualization strategy: it renders the model feasible, responsive to classroom realities, and strengthens the connection between pedagogical theory and national educational needs. While it may not constitute a fundamental theoretical innovation, its value lies in the fact that, within the Vietnamese literature curriculum, this is the first model intentionally designed to integrate both the ethical dimensions and performative qualities of a dramatic text into the teaching process. Accordingly, the contribution of this study can be understood as a meaningful step forward in the localization of international theory, while simultaneously opening possibilities for sustainable and wide-ranging practical application in the teaching of literature at the Vietnamese secondary level. This contributes to literary studies in the context of Vietnamese education by proposing an approach to literature teaching that is both theoretically grounded and pedagogically feasible.

So, this study emphasizes its distinctive contribution as one of restructuring and localization: the deliberate integration of performativity with ethical-reflective competence, tightly aligned with the 2018 Vietnamese Literature Curriculum and a canonical national play (*The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body*). Thus, the novelty of the model does not lie in merely “transforming the static into the dynamic,” but rather in foregrounding an ethically performative framework specifically suited to the Vietnamese context. In doing so, it contributes an additional voice to the already diverse global discourse on drama education.

By situating this contribution within both the Vietnamese curriculum and the wider international conversation, the study not only clarifies its localized significance but also suggests broader implications for how drama education can be adapted across diverse cultural and educational contexts.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Studying drama in education should go beyond content and style to address a wider interpretive context - where artistic vision, ethical inquiry, and performance intersect. Using an integrated framework that brings together performance studies, ethical literary criticism, and discourse theory, this study looks at how using dramatic texts in teaching can foster students develop critical thinking, moral imagination, and the ability to reflect on values.

Lưu Quang Vũ's play *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* stands as a classic of modern Vietnamese drama, widely recognized for its profound humanistic vision and distinctive moral-reflective structure. Beyond its enduring influence in theatrical and literary discourse, the play is also included in Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum, providing an officially endorsed and pedagogically feasible foundation for the implementation of integrated teaching models. Owing to its universal engagement with ethical and existential questions, the play serves as an especially effective medium for developing an ethical performative space within the context of contemporary educational reform.

The play presents a central ethical conflict between authentic selfhood (the soul) and embodied materiality (the butcher's body), raising question about identity and authenticity. This makes it particularly appropriate for the concept of a “moral performance space.” In this context, students can role play, ethical decision-making, and embodied reflection. Through this dramatic engagement, they cultivate empathy and moral reasoning in away that abstract teaching cannot achieve.

In addition, the play's layered dialogic structure - connecting moral, cultural, ontological, and socio-political dimensions - allows the model to be implemented with flexibility and cultural sensitivity. It creates opportunities for cross-cultural exchange in literature education, enabling students to interpret, question and build ethical understandings together as they confront complex human problems.

By treating *Truong Ba's Soul in the Butcher's Body* as both a performative event and a discursive act, this study reframes literature not merely as content to be decoded, but as a pedagogical site for ethical embodiment, aesthetic negotiation, and subject formation. This approach repositions the literature classroom as a transformative space - where students not only read about moral conflict but inhabit it, cultivating both personal insight and democratic citizenship.

The ethical and existential tensions in *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* [28] are vividly embodied through the play's key dialogues. When the wife laments, “You are no longer the gentle gardener Truong Ba you once were. You are now the butcher...” (p.62), the protagonist's moral corruption is reflected through the social gaze, revealing that individual ethics are always constituted in relation to others. The conflict intensifies when Truong Ba confronts himself: “I cannot live with my inside being one thing and my outside another. I want to be myself-whole and undivided.” (p.65), expressing a profound yearning for integrity between body and soul, between existence and moral truth. His final declaration: “One cannot live at any cost, Mr. De Thich. Living like this is worse than dying.” (p.69) - culminates in an ethical act of self-liberation: the rejection of false existence in order to preserve human dignity. These moments reveal that Lưu Quang Vũ's theatre functions as an ethical performative space, where moral awareness is enacted through embodied choice, dialogic reflection, and aesthetic engagement - resonating deeply with Boal's (1995) assertion that “theatre is the rehearsal of revolution”. When implemented in the classroom through performative pedagogy, *Truong Ba's Soul in the Butcher's Body* becomes a transformative learning scenario, where students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active agents in experiencing, choosing, and negotiating values. In the initial pilot phase conducted with two Grade 9 classes (lower secondary) and two Grade 11 classes (upper secondary) (in Thainguyn, Vietnam), the activities of role-play and ethical debate demonstrated promising outcomes. Teacher observations indicated that students at both levels engaged actively in discussions, moving beyond the mere reproduction of textual content to offer arguments with notable ethical reflection. One Grade 11 student expressed in a focus group interview: “I felt torn when having to choose between living in another person's body and accepting death. I understood why Truong Ba was so tormented and ultimately chose the path of departure.” (Student A, focus group interview). At the lower secondary level, students emphasized connections to everyday experience. As one Grade 9 student wrote in a reflective

journal: "Before, I only studied the play to answer the questions in the textbook, but when I played the role of Truong Ba, I truly felt his inner struggle, and it seemed similar to the conflicts I face in my own life." (Student B, Grade 9, reflective journal). These responses illustrate different levels of ethical reflection across age groups. At the upper secondary level, the Grade 11 student demonstrates an ability to grapple with existential choices, articulating the moral dilemma between authenticity and survival, and thereby showing engagement with the philosophical dimensions of the play. In contrast, the Grade 9 student highlights the relevance of the play to personal, everyday conflicts, using role-play as a medium for empathetic identification. Taken together, these findings suggest that while younger students tend to anchor their reflections in personal experience, older students are capable of abstracting ethical principles, indicating a developmental trajectory of moral-reflective competence fostered through ethical-performative pedagogy.

Teachers participating in the pilot phase also reported notable pedagogical gains in students' engagement, interpretive depth, and ethical reflection. Classroom observations revealed that students not only took active roles in questioning, debating, and defending their viewpoints, but also demonstrated empathetic listening and responsible response to differing perspectives. As one Grade 11 teacher noted in her reflective log: "When students took on the role of Truong Ba and engaged in ethical debates, the entire classroom atmosphere changed. They no longer repeated what was written in the textbook but truly lived in the situation-thinking, feeling, and choosing as the character would." (Teacher 1, Grade 11, teaching log). A Grade 9 teacher shared a similar impression: "Even though they are younger, my students showed remarkable sensitivity to issues of right and wrong, good and evil. Through role-play and debate, they learned to express their feelings, reflect on themselves, and connect the play's moral conflicts to situations in their everyday lives." (Teacher 2, Grade 9, post-lesson interview). Overall, teachers agreed that the model effectively fostered critical thinking, emotional resonance, and dialogic learning. Allowing students to "live within the text" helped them shift from passive reception to active participation, thereby cultivating self-awareness, empathy, and moral agency through embodied learning and reflective dialogue.

As Erika Fischer-Lichte emphasizes, performance is not simply the reproduction of a fixed script, but a dynamic process of "self-emergence" - a co-creative act where both performers and spectators generate meaning through bodily presence, emotional investment, and shared space. By stepping into the role of Truong Ba, students are not merely "playing" a character; they are inhabiting ethical conflict, enacting existential dilemmas, and engaging in embodied reflection.

This pedagogical vision resonates with Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, which conceptualizes literary engagement as a "lived-through event" - an integrative process where intellect, affect, and personal context converge, thereby positioning reading as an inherently ethical practice. In *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum refers to this process as "moral imagination"-the capacity to vividly inhabit another's situation, thereby cultivating empathy and moral responsibility. When students engage in moral debates about whether Truong Ba should continue living in the butcher's body, rewrite the ending, or participate in performative forms such as mock trials, interior monologues, or character journals, they are enacting ethical judgment within a simulated yet deeply humanistic learning space.

From a discourse-theoretical perspective (Foucault; Hall, Fairclough), the imposed body functions not only as a source of dramatic conflict but also as a metaphor for ontological alienation in a society governed by power and regulatory mechanisms. In embodying and reflecting upon these conflicts, students are not merely studying literature; they are actively participating in the discursive construction of selfhood, engaging in a process of redefining fundamental concepts such as "life," "humanity," and "moral agency."

Thus, *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* is more than a text of ideological significance; it becomes a pedagogical resource within the framework of the "ethical performance space." The play does not simply convey a message; it activates a process of living-through, reflection, and moral choice-thereby enabling a mode of literary education grounded in embodied action, emotional resonance, and resistance to oppressive discourses. The classroom, in this model, is no longer a space of one-way textual analysis, but a moral-aesthetic forum, where students practice argumentation, expression, and self-reflection.

Under the lens of performance theory [1], students become co-creators of meaning; in Rosenblatt's terms, reading is a "lived-through experience"; and for Nussbaum, literature becomes a space to cultivate moral imagination. When combined with discourse theory (Foucault, Hall, Fairclough), the classroom is reimagined as a space where students not only receive meaning but intervene in meaning-making, interrogate power, and construct personal identity within contemporary cultural frameworks.

In contrast to many current studies that emphasize content analysis or literary techniques, this research approaches drama as an ethical-performative space, where students are positioned as active agents-engaging in role-playing, reflection, and co-construction of values. Grounded in an integrated theoretical framework-comprising performance studies, ethical literary criticism, and discourse theory-this study proposes a transformative pedagogical model that reconceptualizes the literature classroom as a moral stage, in which students not only interpret but live through the text, act alongside the characters, and thus cultivate critical thinking, moral sensibility, and ethical agency.

This approach resonates with the work of Gallagher and Freeman, who emphasize that drama education enables learners to "act into the world differently"-not merely to reflect the world but to participate in reshaping it. This principle underpins post-structuralist approaches to performative education, which conceptualize the classroom as a space of meaning-making through action and interaction.

The study also draws upon Louise Rosenblatt's reader-response theory (1978), which views literary reading as a "lived-through experience"-a dynamic interaction between cognition and emotion that gives rise to ethical insight and reflective awareness. From a philosophical-educational standpoint, Martha Nussbaum (1990) contends that literature activates moral imagination, allowing learners to understand not only others but themselves - who they might become, and how they ought to live. This, she argues, is the core capacity of liberal and democratic education.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, this study proposes a model of Performative Moral Pedagogy, integrating performance studies (Fischer-Lichte, Boal), ethical literary criticism (Nussbaum, Rosenblatt), and discourse theory

(Foucault, Hall, Fairclough). The dramatic text is reconceptualized as a multi-layered space, where artistic knowledge, aesthetic emotion, and value conflict intersect. The classroom is transformed into a “performance arena”, in which students inhabit the text through role-play, reflection, and expression, thereby constructing moral reasoning and developing personal agency within the dynamics of cultural and social dialogue. In literature classrooms, this Boalian principle resonates profoundly: students, like spect-actors, do not merely interpret a dramatic text but inhabit moral conflict, performing ethical choices and reflecting upon their implications. Each enactment becomes a discursive act of ethics, where language, emotion, and body converge to reconstruct moral understanding and challenge normative assumptions.

Within the context of Vietnamese education, this model offers three core contributions:

- (1) It enables students to approach dramatic literature as a living ethical space, rather than merely an artistic or narrative structure;
- (2) It effectively integrates aesthetic learning with civic education, fostering critical thinking, moral affectivity, and discursive competence;
- (3) It aligns with the competency-based goals of the Vietnamese National Curriculum 2018, especially in fostering self-regulation, communication, aesthetic appreciation, and problem-solving.

As such, Performative Moral Pedagogy is not merely a theoretical proposition but a practical pedagogical framework capable of transforming how dramatic texts are received and taught in contemporary Vietnamese classrooms. It allows students to truly “live inside the text”, where each work becomes not a closed system of meaning but an experiential ethical environment - a space to raise questions, negotiate values, and develop independent moral thought.

This model does not merely position students as passive recipients of knowledge, but as active participants in value-making through expressive actions - via role-play, dramatization, ethical debate, and personal reflection. It enables students to “live within the text”, where each literary work is no longer a closed body of content, but a dynamic moral environment in which learners can question, make value-based choices, and develop independent thinking. Moreover, this model is highly compatible with progressive pedagogies such as liberal education, experiential learning, interdisciplinary integration, and social-emotional learning (SEL).

A distinct contribution of this model to the reception of dramatic texts in Vietnam lies in its capacity to transform the classroom from a static learning environment-centered on interpretation and memorization - into a performative space of dialogue, creativity, and critical engagement. Thanks to its flexibility and high adaptability, the model can be effectively implemented in integrated literature lessons (combining analysis, performance, debate, and reflection), thereby contributing to the realization of the holistic, humanistic, and competency-based educational goals set out in Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum.

4. CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM AS A SPACE OF MORAL PERFORMANCE

Situated at the intersection of performance studies, ethical philosophy, and discourse theory, this study underscores the transformative power of dramatic literature in shaping a learning environment that not only cultivates critical thinking but also fosters ethical discernment and a deeply humanistic sensibility. By engaging with drama as both a literary form and a lived experience, learners are invited to navigate complex moral landscapes, reflect on human behavior, and develop the competencies necessary for thoughtful, socially responsible participation in the twenty-first century. The representative play analyzed not only reflects profound ontological, ethical, and social conflicts, but also opens up opportunities for students to engage in moral practice within a safe, emotionally resonant, and creatively open space.

The integration of role-play, reflection, embodiment, and debate transforms the literature classroom from a site of meaning reception into a dynamic process of meaning-making - where students are invited to live with literature, think through the body, and act as moral agents. As Fischer-Lichte, affirms, “Performance is a transformative process in which both actors and spectators participate in the co-creation of meaning through embodied presence and shared space.” Accordingly, the application of theatrical strategies in teaching drama should not be viewed merely as a pedagogical aid, but as a fundamentally experiential, expressive, and creative educational approach.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the present study proposes a set of strategies for transforming the literature classroom into a space of moral performance. In such a setting, the teacher is not merely a content deliverer but becomes a pedagogical director who orchestrates moral and aesthetic engagement; while students are not passive recipients but active co-creators who express, negotiate, and construct value systems through performance. Suggested pedagogical practices include:

- + Open-ended scene performance: Students are encouraged to creatively devise multiple alternate endings for a selected scene in the play, thereby exploring ethical possibilities and narrative openness.
- + Role-based journaling and ethical debate: After performing in character, students write reflective journals from the character’s perspective, or participate in moral court simulations where ethical dilemmas are debated in a structured forum.
- + Emotional embodiment in symbolic spaces: The classroom is arranged into mini-performance corners where students use facial expressions, bodily gestures, and symbolic props to physically express the character’s inner conflicts and emotional journeys.
- + Emotion-focused discourse simulation: Dramatic scenes become sites for articulating, deconstructing, and reconstructing complex emotional experiences-encouraging students to engage in interpretive and affective discourse.

Importantly, school-based performance pedagogy does not require elaborate technical setups but calls for creative flexibility, mutual trust, and thoughtful facilitation. In such a setting, the literature classroom becomes a space where students raise ethical questions, narrate lived experiences, and co-construct a shared value system with peers and teachers. This reflects the foundational ethos of liberal humanistic education - an approach that is deeply practical, critically engaged, and morally sustaining, as emphasized in the works of Martha Nussbaum.

To illustrate the interplay between the theoretical triad (performance theory, ethical literary criticism, discourse theory), literary texts, and pedagogical strategies, the following table synthesizes the analysis with a comparative lens - juxtaposing *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* (Luu Quang Vu) and *Romeo and Juliet* [29] - to assess cross-contextual applicability (Table 1).

Table 1: Reconstructive Pedagogical Framework - Triangulating Theory, Text, and Strategy

Literary Work	Core Ethical Aesthetic Conflict	Theoretical Foundation	Suggested Pedagogical Strategies	Competencies Developed
<i>The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body</i> (Luu Quang Vu)	Noble soul vs. vulgar body	- Performative ethics - Moral imagination - Discourse of embodiment	- Mock trial: Should Truong Ba continue to live? - Inner monologue journal from Truong Ba's perspective - Ethical debate: "What is the right way to live?"	- Self-identity awareness - Personal autonomy - Moral imagination
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (William Shakespeare) [29]	Personal love vs. familial prejudice	- Moral imagination - Discourse of resistance - Expressive performance theory	- Role-play: Juliet's suicide note or protest letter - Rewrite the ending from a reconciliation perspective - Defense argument in "court of love" scenario	- Ethical empathy - Intergenerational communication - Value negotiation skills

By conceptualizing a pedagogical model called the "Performative moral space," this study offers a liberatory, integrative, and ethically grounded approach to teaching dramatic literature in the classroom. Instead of approaching the text as a static object of analysis, students are reimagined as active participants - agents who act, reflect, and co-construct meaning through embodied engagement. This model forges a powerful intersection between aesthetics, ethics, and education, while simultaneously responding to current calls for pedagogical reform in literature instruction: envisioning the classroom as a dynamic moral forum where learners are not merely educated to know, but educated to become.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the integration of theory and practice rather than in a purely curricular innovation. Specifically: (1) it synthesizes performance theory, ethical literary criticism, and discourse theory into a pedagogical framework for ethical practice; (2) it adaptively aligns this framework with the Vietnamese secondary Literature Curriculum through a systematic curriculum mapping process; and (3) it proposes classroom-ready strategies - such as open-script role-play, structured ethical debate, character journals, and embodied simulations - that are feasible within resource-constrained contexts. The alignment with the national curriculum is intended to enhance scalability and practical uptake, rather than serving as the sole basis for claims of theoretical innovation.

To avoid overstating its empirical scope, the manuscript clarifies that the current research primarily constitutes a theoretical-design feasibility assessment rather than a comprehensive field trial. This assessment was conducted through two approaches: (a) systematic curriculum mapping to align proposed activities with the learning objectives and standards of the 2018 Vietnamese General Education Literature Curriculum; and (b) international comparative analysis of drama pedagogy to identify transferable techniques and their adaptation under conditions of limited resources. In addition, the research team conducted preliminary testing through interviews with teachers and school administrators, which yielded positive feedback regarding both feasibility and classroom relevance.

Building on this foundation, the paper outlines a second-stage pilot study to be conducted with Grade 9 and Grade 11 classes during the teaching of tragedy. This pilot will employ a mixed-methods design, incorporating student reflective journals, teacher observation protocols, focus group interviews, and pre-and post-tests of ethical reasoning and reflective competence. Instruments, templates, and ethical procedures have already been developed, enabling the pilot to be implemented efficiently. Accordingly, the current study provides the necessary theoretical and curricular foundation while paving the way for a broader-scale empirical validation.

Taken together, these early observations provide promising indications of the model's pedagogical potential. Rather than engaging with tragic texts solely as objects of analysis, students began to experience them as living moral situations, through which they cultivated capacities for ethical reflection, value negotiation, and self-awareness. Although the current pilot remains limited in scale, the findings suggest that the approach can foster learning experiences that intertwine aesthetic understanding with moral life, nurturing students as reflective, empathetic, and ethically responsive individuals. In this sense, the study not only affirms the feasibility of a performative-ethical approach within Vietnamese secondary education but also points toward a broader pedagogical vision in which moral reflexivity emerges as a central aim of aesthetic education.

It is important to underscore that the call to shift from an interpretation-based pedagogy toward an experience-based pedagogy is not meant to negate the role of interpretation, but rather to redefine and integrate it within a broader praxis. In literary scholarship, interpretive work remains central to critical thinking, as manifested in close reading, interpretive analysis, symbolic exegesis, and other hermeneutic practices. Yet in a performative-ethical approach, interpretation is no longer restricted to the "decoding" of textual meaning; rather, it is expanded into an experiential act-one in which learners both reflect through language and incarnate meaning through action, emotion, and social interaction. Thus, interpretation is not superseded but transformed into a process of embodied interpretation, where understanding a text becomes inseparable from ethical experience and aesthetic expression. This synthesis not only deepens students' interpretive and reading competencies but also cultivates their capacities for moral reflection and aesthetic empathy - competencies that lie at the heart of contemporary humanistic education. In this regard, dramatic literature provides the content, performance becomes the method, and moral transformation stands as the ultimate aim - a vision aligned with the broader mission of humanistic, democratic, and sustainable education in the twenty-first century.

At the theoretical level, the study affirms the value of repositioning drama not merely as a text for analysis but as a performative moral space, thereby contributing to the interdisciplinary discourse that bridges literary studies, performance studies, and educational science. This framework provides new conceptual ground for understanding the interrelation of aesthetics, ethics, and education, while also informing the development of innovative and humanistically oriented pedagogical models in contemporary literary scholarship. Importantly, the significance of this research does not lie in its contrast with international experience but in the way the model is reflected and adapted within the Vietnamese context. For the first time, a pedagogical framework has been systematically designed to align with the 2018 Vietnamese Literature Curriculum while deeply engaging with a canonical national play - *The Soul of Truong Ba, the Butcher's Body* - as a performative moral space. The study's contribution should thus be understood as a parallel reflection within localization, adding a distinctive Vietnamese voice to the global discourse on drama education. In doing so, it demonstrates that moral and aesthetic education through drama can be both theoretically rigorous and contextually grounded, advancing a vision of literature teaching that educates not only to know, but also to become.

This research was funded by Thai Nguyen University of Education – Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam, under the institutional-level science and technology project, grant number TNUE-2024-05

Declaration of AI Use

The authors acknowledge the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools solely for language improvement, grammar correction, reference formatting, and translation. No AI tool was used for generating ideas, data analysis, or substantive content. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the manuscript.

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