

Incorporating Drama in English Language Teaching: A Case Study at a Private University in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Drama is a unique way to make learning more enjoyable, conversational, and relevant to the real world. Integrating a drama-based approach into the language classroom has the potential to improve listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as presentation abilities in a varied manner. This study analyzes the advantages of incorporating drama techniques into teaching English language among tertiary level learners. It also focuses on the strategies for developing a learner-centered classroom to improve the communication abilities of second language learners. 11 students in their second year of English Language and Literature at the University of Asia Pacific in Dhaka, Bangladesh, were the participants of this case study. The study is conducted using qualitative research methodology. According to this study, drama-based English instruction has a positive impact on all aspects of growth—physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. It illuminates the strategy of placing students in authentic settings in order to help them uncover their latent creativity and overcome their anxieties. In addition, this drama-based approach is beneficial for learners to foster their sense of collaboration, conversation, negotiation, and performance.

Keywords: Drama, scripted play, improvisation and role play, learner-centered method, teaching English as a second language

INTRODUCTION

Drama is a form of active education that lets students play roles and explore their surroundings. Social engagement requires multi-level communication across cultures and languages. By being part of a drama ensemble and participating in a fictitious context, the class experiences a shared moment of intensity that involves emotions, facial expressions, gestures, movement, and heightened awareness of others that they would not otherwise experience. Thus, students are emancipated from the accuracy requirements of the standard language classroom and given numerous new instruments to transmit meaning.

English teachers often use literature to instruct EFL/ESL students. However, the teachers should know that well-explored literary texts can help language learning. Literature helps students recognize, analyze, interpret, and describe important ideas, values, and themes. Understanding how these ideas and topics shape culture and society today and in the past strengthens students' character and emotional development. Hill (1986) states that literature "acts as a stimulus that ignites interest and motivates the student by involving them on a personal, emotional level." (p. 9)

Reading literary texts in the language classroom increases vocabulary form and discourse processing, and psycholinguistics (Hall, 2005). Literature in language teaching improves linguistic and communication skills by providing authentic and entertaining materials. Cruz (2010, p. 1) writes "Literature enhances ELT through elements such as authentic material, language in use, and aesthetic representation of the spoken

language, as well as language and cultural enrichment.”

LITERATURE REVIEW

Drama offers a distinct approach to enhance the excitement, communication, and relevance of learning in reality. Drama methods encompass various techniques that enhance the understanding and enactment of dramatic discourse. These methods aid individuals in comprehending and effectively performing the text. According to Maley & Duff (1978, pp. 6-7), drama methods effectively engage students by integrating their body, mind, and emotions. These methods encourage students to utilize their distinctive traits and experiences as a means of enhancing their language production skills. Saricoban (2004, p. 15) says that drama helps students learn more about the target language and society. Learners should use drama to better understand their life events, think about certain situations, and make more sense of their world outside of language.

Hişmanoğlu (2005) highlights the importance of literature in teaching basic language abilities, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Most significantly, theatrical tactics engage students to learn by bringing excitement, joy, and humor to the classroom and encouraging creative cooperation. Students use real-life discourse models to integrate while speaking in this manner. Moreover, theatre tactics increase student engagement in learning. It brings joy, laughter, and creative collaboration to the language classroom. Students imitate and perform real-life discourse models using this strategy.

Many more studies regarding drama have been done in the field of education. For example, Mordecai (1985) and Athiemoolam (2004) found that drama encouraged the teacher to meet the needs of the student. Drama events give teachers a chance to learn about the students' thoughts and feelings as they act them out. Because the tasks give the teacher constant feedback, he or she can come up with better ways to teach and learn. Susan Stern, who studied theater in second language learning from a psycholinguistic point of view in 1980, may have summed up its value. She said that theater improved self-esteem, motivation, spontaneity, the ability to understand other people, and the ability to deal with rejection. All of these things make it easier to talk to each other and make it easier to learn a language. Drama also contextualizes language in actual or fictitious situations outside the classroom. The language utilized in drama-based activities in the classroom is explored, tried out, and practiced in meaningful contexts. Vocabulary and sentence structure are enhanced, retained, and reinforced through role-playing and communication activities.

Savela (2009) discovered that dramatic activities improved communication, cultural awareness, and social skills. Nonetheless, the tasks that taught those concepts were somewhat hazy. Nonetheless, the activities contained beneficial learning aids. They required students to use their imagination and improvisation, as well as rehearse phrases and real-world scenarios.

Drama also aids speech. Drama lets the learners use words effectively. According to Maley & Duff (1978) drama restores emotional content vanished in language. Word structure is less important than meaning and appropriateness. Drama can restore the whole image by reversing learning from meaning to language form. This enhances language learning and prepares pupils for real-life scenarios. Drama and cultural issues make second language learning exciting, fascinating, and beneficial (Mordecai, 1985; Raba, 2014). Drama events mitigate talent differences. Students who speak English fluently can play the primary role that demand more speaking, while students who fail to can communicate through body language and acting skills.

A study by Hailat (2006) compared how well fourth-grade students did in social education when the drama was used versus when they were taught in a regular classroom setting. From the schools run by the Irbid Directorate of Education, 208 children were picked at random. The sample was then split into two groups: the experimental group, made up of 140 students who were re-taught through play, and the control group, made up of 68 students who were re-taught in the usual way. The findings showed that the experimental group

did better than the other group regarding achievement.

Gomez(2010)investigated how well drama can be used to teach English as a second language(ESL)instead of more traditional methods. He focused on how well drama can improve speaking skills like pronunciation and fluency. The kids who were tested spoke Spanish as their first language and went to a public school in Madrid, Spain. Over the course of three weeks, two classes from the same year were taught using different methods. They were checked before and after the lesson. A two-tailed t-test was used on two independent groups with the same amount of variation to see if one method was better than the other. The study thought the two approaches wouldn't be a big difference. But the study's results showed that using drama to teach English was better than using more traditional ways. The null hypothesis was declined.

Ntelioglou (2006) looked into what happened to second language learners' language skills when drama and ESL classes were taught together. The two main goals of the study were to use drama to help language learners improve their hearing, reading, speaking, and writing skills and to use drama to look at "Immigration, Canadian Identity, and Multiculturalism" in an ESL/humanities course for first-year college students. Strategies for drama education were created to give ESL students a place to tell stories about their own lives. The ESL students balanced real and made-up events, the past and the present, and used in-role and out-of-role reflection all the way through. Students were very interested in drama because it gave them a chance to use verbal and nonverbal communication, work together, analyze information, use their imaginations, and take risks in a safe environment. The study shows that putting drama into a multicultural second language classroom helped students cross borders of cultures, identities, and ways of reading and writing.

Culham (2003) examined how drama could be used to help people learn languages and learn about other cultures. This thesis looks at what can go wrong and what can go right when drama is taught to adults who are learning English as a second language(ESL). This study goes into detail about interactive drama activities and how students respond to them. The focus is on the non-linguistic benefits that drama gives players. Activities that have been used in Drama in Education for a long time have been changed to meet the needs of ESL learners. These changes and their results are described in depth. The results of this study show that ESL teachers can reach their students in important ways through theater. In this way, they can improve their students' language skills and help them learn about other cultures. To explore the relevance in Bangladesh context the researchers conducted a qualitative study in a private university of Dhaka.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to examine the role of drama in improving students' English language from the students' perspectives.

Research objectives:

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How can the students prosper in language skills while engaged in drama in the classroom?
2. Which drama methods are usually used in language classrooms?
3. What are some barriers that can prevent drama from being used in language classrooms?

Significance of the Study

In a world where everything is always changing, education is vital to assisting people in dealing with these changes. Teachers should also utilize various methods to teach languages, in this case, English, to stimulate and improve their students' attitudes towards language acquisition. The purpose of this study was to show

that using drama as a teaching approach might affect learners' language development.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted only among the English Department's students at a renowned Bangladeshi Private University, situated in Dhaka city. Due to time shortage, the researchers could not include other private and public universities in this research. As for the learners inputting data was convenient in Google Forms, the researchers formulated a Google Form to collect all the data online.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

For this research, 11 students (6 females and 5 males) from the Department of English, University of Asia Pacific were chosen and all of them are studying at the second year. They were randomly selected. Their ages are in between 19 to 20. Both male and female student took part in the study. They were treated with dignity and fairly and no incentives were given to them. These participants have already had finished their foundation courses which focused on the four skills of the English language. Previously, they had exposure to English drama as part of their course content.

Instrument and Methods

The study was done using qualitative research method. The questionnaire was distributed using a Google form and the form was emailed to all 11 participants. 15 items (open-ended questions) were included in the questionnaire and enough time was given to the participants to fill out the forms and send back to the researchers. All responses were kept anonymous.

FINDINGS

As per ethical consideration, and confidentiality, students name are kept anonymous in this study. They will be mentioned as St 1, St 2, St 3, St 4, St 5, St 6, St 7, St 8, St 9, St 10, St 11 respectively. Researchers have divided the findings into three categories. The description is as follows,

Part A: Development of Language skills

1. Conversational skills

Most of the students find that drama help them boost their communication skills through the dialogues, delivery pattern and diction. St 5 says:

"So, in overcoming inertia, especially in communication or reducing sluggishness in speech, I am greatly favoured using this technique." To be more exact, St 3 says:

"Drama can help speaking skills to be more natural and native." Also, St 1 elaborated, "By practicing dialogue and delivering it, we can enhance our ability to speak English."

By looking at these responses, we can see that conversational skills are developed through dramatic activities in class.

2. Listening skill

Several students agreed that drama can help improve their listening skills if the play is staged or students read out the dialogues through role-plays. Some, on the other hand mentioned that if they read any drama

alone it doesn't help them that much. St 6 says: *"Drama can improve my listening abilities since, we must listen to other characters in order to gain a deeper understanding of the play."* However, St 3 responded:

"I don't think drama can help develop my listening skill if it is only read. But it can help if it's played onscreen or performed on stage."

3. Critical thinking and interpreting skills

Drama can foster critical thinking abilities among the students. It can also help the students interpret any specific context using deeper understanding. Sometimes, drama helps students' boost their reading fluency which affect their interpreting skills of emotions and feelings. Like, St 5 says: *"I'm always amazed and excited by the characters' dynamic interaction and the developing suspense, which motivates me to understand the context and finish the book."*

St 7 stressed on the point that: *"Drama encourages repeated reading to understand the emotions or the tone of it. It also gives me a new world to imagine (from scripts) which encourage me to read more and more."*

4. Creative writing skills

Once a drama is taught in a class, usually teachers give writing tasks to the students based on that drama text. All students have agreed at this point that drama does help enhance their creative writing skills. St 5 says:

"Studying a drama can help me develop my writing skill in English as while reading the texts I encounter many new vocabularies, characters, the style of the writer, tone. All these things affect my writing skill." Some students pointed out that their imaginative skills also got improved while studying drama. St 3 explained:

"Writing screenplays for drama frequently involves people suggesting dialogue and coming up with creative ideas that are then incorporated into the scripts. This is how I can improve my writing abilities by suggesting creative ideas." In line with that, St 11 added:

"In drama texts, I have witnessed many extended sentences and comprehending their structure, I devised many sentences that were utilized for academic and personal purposes."

Part B:

5. Drama techniques that have been used in your language classes

Among all kinds of dramatic techniques, most of the students have mentioned that "role play" and "stage adaptation". St 8 says:

"I liked stage adaptation the most. I got to write my own screenplay from the original text with my friend then I direct the play according to my screenplay and creative freedom. Stage adaptation was fun and it engaged my whole classroom to my story successfully."

St 6 explained, *"I liked the role play part a lot. It was a good experience for me and to perform that we had to work very hard on our accent which was very effective."*

However, there were 2 students mentioned that they found a combination of storytelling and role play technique more effective. For instance, St 3 says,

"In one course, we had to perform a certain act through role play and it was entertaining, however, before that the teacher used to storytelling technique to make us understand the whole plot and context. This made

me understand the play thoroughly.”

Part C:

6. Obstacles in using drama in classes

All respondents mentioned several obstacles for implementing drama techniques in a classroom.

St 3 says, *“A classroom is not a big space to perform a drama. There is not enough time to practice the drama and make a good outcome as the classes have limited time.”*

To support the same view, St 10 says:

“It is difficult for teachers to monitor the students while they perform the drama in class. Too much noise and chaos happen. And not all students want to perform drama in front of an entire classroom”

St 9 elaborates: *“Not enough time is given to perform a drama in our class. Another problem is most of the students don't like that practical use of drama in classroom. They just want to pass the exams by studying the main points about drama.”*

7. Strategies to overcome the challenges of using drama in language classroom

Even though there are some obstacles to using drama in language classroom, it can be performed as a group work as St 8 described: *“We put a lot of hard work to stage a drama, it would be worthy to be included as a part of assessment.”* St 7 explained:

“It can be organized as a competition, where students will be rewarded as best director, actor, or writing”.

To overcome the time constrain, St 5 discussed:

“it can be assigned at the very beginning of the language course, that we can have enough time to prepare ourselves”. St 8 explained,

“because they are performing the drama with their peers it helps them to practice the language in a non-threatening environment”.

From the above discussion. It is evident that, even though there are a few obstacles that students perceived there are several ways to overcome the challenges to use drama in language classroom.

DISCUSSION

All the eleven participants agreed that if the dramatic techniques are utilized properly in a classroom context, it can enhance the students' four skills of English language. However, “Drama” is difficult to embrace in Bangladesh because of the language barrier, antiquated curriculum, and high student-teacher ratio.

Students in EFL (It is still debatable if English in Bangladesh is an ESL (English as a Second Language) or an EFL (English as a Foreign Language); however, Kachru (1986) and Jenkins (2009) both mention that English holds the status of ESL in Bangladesh.) lessons have limited vocabulary, fear of criticism, lack of empathy, and reading/writing difficulties. Polishing and providing the tools they need to execute this skill (changing the curriculum to meet this way) will make it easier. In a role-play, a student may trip and be laughed at. The truth is that this level has many learners in the classroom, and their actions can take time. Thus, it would take longer than class and be difficult for the teacher to review and provide feedback. But as explained by several students, with few planning and changing the assessment criteria would help the approach to work more effectively. However, since it is a case study technique with a limited

number of students participating, it cannot be said that it will work in every scenario. The usefulness of theatre in the language classroom varies according to learners' educational situation, culture, and language competence levels.

CONCLUSION

Drama is an effective educational tool because it allows kids to participate, demonstrate their abilities, and learn vital concepts in a safe and supportive setting. Simply put, this strategy provides pupils with an alternate and innovative way to acquire and demonstrate their knowledge. Drama is an excellent approach for kids to explore and develop their originality and spontaneity and feel more confident in expressing their views. Finally, this component of learning teaches crucial abilities such as self-discipline, accepting

and responding well to feedback, and cooperating with others. Of course, English teachers can use this strategy in their lessons to help their students improve their language skills, but they must consider the drawbacks before implementing the necessary techniques.

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