

## The Impact of Dramatic Activities on Developing Iraqi EFL Students' Speaking Abilities

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### Abstract

Speaking English is a complicated task for many learners. Thus, to foster the speaking skill, the present study is an attempt at instructing dramatic activities. The study aims at finding out the impact of dramatic activities on developing Iraqi college students' speaking abilities of English as a foreign language. Therefore, twentyfive students at their third year were selected for this study to be enrolled in English conversation class. To collect data, pre- and postspeaking -tests were administered.

Research findings indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores students obtained from the pre- and post-tests. This means that the students made a significant improvement in their speaking abilities during the period of study.

**Key Words:**EFL learners, dramatic activities, speaking ability

### الملخص

يعد تعلم الانجليزية مهمة معقدة لدالكثير من المتعلمين. لذلك، ومن اجل الاهتمام او تشجيع مهارة التكلم، فان الدراسة الحالية هي محاولة لتدريس استخدام الفعاليات الدرامية. وتهدف الدراسة الى تقصي اثر الفعاليات الدرامية على قابليات التكلم لدى طلاب الكلية العراقيين متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية. ولذلك تم اختيار خمس وعشرون طالبا في المرحلة الثالثة لينخرطو في محادثات صافية. لجمع البيانات تم استخدام اختبار تكلم عالمي قبل وبعد استخدام الفعاليات الدرامية.

تشير نتائج البحث الى ان هنالك اختلاف واضح بين الاوساط الحسابية للاختباريين القبلي والبعدي. وهذا يعني

ان الطلاب قد ابدو تحسنا واضحا في قابلياتهم في تكلم الانجليزية خلال فترة الدراسة.  
**الكلمات المفتاحية:** متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية، الفعاليات الدرامية، قابلية التكلم.

### 1. An Introductory Note

This study is divided into three sections. The first section is concerned with the problem, the aim, the hypothesis, the limit and the value of the study. The second one presents an overview of theoretical background on which the current study rests. The third one deals with methodology and procedures followed.

#### 1.1 The Problem

Drama has a vital role in teaching language because it gives a context for listening and meaningful language production in which learners need to use their language resources (Chauhan 2004:9). Drama pedagogy provides authentic communicative environments for the learners, and drama activities can be used to heighten learners' speaking ability. Also, the implementation of drama pedagogy benefits learners' motivation and self-esteem through its non-threatening classroom environments. A classroom with drama activities motivates learners to learn and provides them with a relaxing yet challenging environment in which they study (Donnery 2009:18).

To many learners, mastering speaking abilities is the ultimate goal of acquiring a foreign or second language and the other skills are overshadowed by its significance (McCarthy, 1998:45). Speaking is considered as one of the central elements of

communication in EFL teaching. "It is an aspect that needs special attention and instruction" (Shumine, 1997:32).

Concerning applying dramatic practices in classroom, this study investigates the impact of dramatic activities on the development of Iraqi EFL students' speaking abilities.

Third year students have very low English speaking skills. They sometimes present lack of communication skills. The problem is that they show certain difficulties when they have to produce natural and spontaneous oral communication. The researcher decided then to provide students with more encouraging situations in which they had to create and make more use of their English and vocabulary.

Therefore, the researcher believed that it is important to find effective pedagogical techniques to help enhance students' speaking abilities. Thus, this study is an attempt to examine the effectiveness of dramatic activities in developing students' speaking proficiency.

### **1.2 Aim**

The present study aims at finding out the impact of dramatic activities on the development of Iraqi EFL students' speaking abilities.

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant difference between the use of dramatic activities and EFL students' speaking abilities.

### **1.4 Limits**

The present study is limited to Iraqi EFL third year students/Department of English/ College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiyah during the academic year 2014-2015. Also, it is limited to the prescribed textbook "Interchange" by Jack C. Richards with Jonathan Hull and Susan Proctor (2005).

### **1.5 Value**

It is hoped that this study will be of value in helping students improve their speaking abilities. It is also expected to help instructors develop appropriate methodologies in teaching English speaking.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

This section provides theoretical information about the study. It sheds light on the definition of dramatic activities, dramatic techniques, the importance of dramatic activities, dramatic activities and speaking development, and the role of the teacher.

### **2.1 Definitions**

Drama means "any kind of activity where learners are asked either to portray themselves or to portray someone else in an imaginary situation" (Holden, 1982:56). In another words, "it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person" (ibid).

Somasundram (2011:15) states that drama is an alternative teaching tool because it gives a context for listening and meaningful language production, forcing the learners to memorize the use of language which evidently helps on other disciplines, and subtly enhances language abilities.

To Via (1987:114), dramatic activities are defined as strategies to communicate or convey the intended meaning which involves a wide range of activities.

For Kanji (1987:85), drama activities are techniques which are used to enhance learners' communicative competence and encourage their spontaneous and creative use of target language.

## **2.2 Dramatic Techniques**

### **2.2.1 Mime**

According to Dougill (1987:61), "mime is non-verbal representation of an idea or story through gesture, bodily movement and expression". In addition, Hayes (1984:33) asserts that mime emphasizes the paralinguistic features of communication. It builds up the confidence of learners by encouraging them to get up and do things in front of one another. Mime helps develop students' power of imagination and observation.

### **2.2.2 Role play**

Blatner (2002:5) defines role play as a method for exploring the issues involved in complex social situations. According to Kodotchigova (2001:5) role play prepares second and foreign language learners to communicate in a different social and cultural context. It enables participants to deepen prior experience, to translate it into characters for the plot and to provide opportunities for interaction and group discussion. Livingstone (1983:62) asserts that role play, from the point of view of language teaching, enables a flow of language to be produced that might be otherwise difficult or impossible to create. It can also help recreate the language students used in different situations, the sort of language students are likely to need outside the classroom.

### **2.2.3 Simulation**

Jones (1982:41) defines simulation as a case study where learners become participants in an event and shape the course of the event. The learners have roles, functions, duties, and responsibilities within a structured situation involving problem solving. Simulations are generally held to be a structured set of circumstances that mirror real life and in which participants act as instructed.

Furthermore, Smith (1984:23) states that the function of simulation is to give participants the opportunity to practise taking on specific roles and improvising within specific situations on the assumption that with practice the participants will play their roles more effectively when situations involving similar skills occur in real life.

### **2.2.4 Improvisation**

Improvisation can be defined as an unscripted, unrehearsed, spontaneous set of actions in response to minimal directions from a teacher, usually including statements of whom one is, where one is and what one is doing there. The focus is thus on identifying with characters, enacting roles and entering into their inner experience of imagination and fantasy (Landy, 1982:36).

McCaslin (1996:31), points out that the focus of improvisation is on helping learners to discover their own resources from which their most imaginative ideas and strongest feelings flow. Participants gain freedom as self-discipline and the ability to work with others develops.

## **2.3 The Importance of Dramatic Activities**

There are many reasons for using drama activities and techniques in the classroom. In this respect, Heldenbrand (2003: 27-37) considers drama as a recreational means of learning English that helps the learners grow as individuals and enjoy the process of learning English in more interactive and friendly manner.

Vygotsky (1987:71) proposes that language development depends entirely on social interaction. He postulates that knowledge entails self-regulation and that social interaction enables individuals to construct knowledge which is meaningful to them.

McCaslin (1996:34) asserts that in EFL classroom, drama can provide an opportunity to develop the imagination of the students. When the students are given a platform to perform, they can think beyond the classroom and subject themselves to free learning. In this way, drama can also help them in being independent thinkers which is considered to be the real aim of any teaching and learning process.

By dramatic activities, the students learn to develop practical hands-on skills for applying meaning into real-life situations. Hence, drama is a learner-centered approach that allows learners to become active participants in the teaching-learning process (Pathan, 2013: 22).

To Peregoy and Boyle (2008:6), drama activities can help students in providing a variety of contextualized and scaffold activities that gradually involve more participation. They are also non-threatening and a lot of fun.

Similarly, (Davies, 1990: 96) says that drama bridges the gap between course-book dialogues and natural use of the English language. It also bridges a similar gap between the classroom and real-life situations by providing insights into how to handle tricky situations. It strengthens the bond between thought and expression in language. Drama helps the students to focus on their natural abilities of imitating and expressing themselves.

Zafeiriadou (2009:21) stresses that the significance of drama is attributed to the fact that it allows for creation of contexts for different language uses. He adds that drama has a unique value as a pedagogical technique as it helps students to develop their creative thoughts and stresses language education as a creative process.

Mattevi (2005:10) argues that the use of drama in an English class not only enables English teachers to deliver the English language in an active, communicative, and contextualized way but also equips language teachers with the tools to create realistic situations in which students have a chance to learn and use the target language in context.

#### **2.4 Dramatic Activities and Speaking Development**

Bygate (1987:39), refers to speaking skill as one by which learners are judged. It is the vehicle of social solidarity, social ranking, and business. It is also the medium through which much language is learnt. Further, Ur (1996:21) points out that among the four language skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important.

Wessels (1987:81) states that drama can reinforce a need to speak by drawing learners' attention to focus on creating dramatic situations, dialogues, role plays, or problem solving exercises.

Desiatova (2009:13) points out that using drama and drama activities has clear advantages for language learning. It encourages students to speak; it gives them the chance to communicate, even with limited language, using non verbal communication, such as body movements and facial expressions.

Furthermore, using drama could help the learners to use the language for genuine communication and real life purposes which generates the need to speak. This results in real communication which involves generating ideas, emotion and feeling which could stimulate learners' intellect and imagination (Barbu, 2007:11)

Drama is a particularly effective tool for pronunciation teaching because various components of communicative competence (discourse, intonation, pragmatic awareness, non verbal communication) can be practiced in an integrated way (Goodwin, 2001:58).

### **2.5 The Role of the Teacher**

Concerning using drama in the classroom, the teacher becomes a facilitator rather than an authority or the source of knowledge. As Silberman (1996: 6) points out that collaborations are central to contemporary theories of learning. He (ibid) confirms that in providing students with the tasks in which they depend on each other, teachers capitalize the social need of the students and encourage and motivate them to bring out their feelings by sharing and discussing their viewpoints.

### **3 Methodology and Procedures**

This section deals with presenting a description of the procedures followed to carry out the aim and the hypothesis of the study.

**3.1 Design:** In conducting the present study, a one-group pre-test post-test design was employed.

#### **3.2 Participants**

Twenty five third year college students at Al-Qadissiya University were enrolled in English conversation course: eleven males and fourteen females, during the academic year 2014-2015.

#### **3.3 Instrument**

To measure the subjects' speaking ability, the researcher has adopted IELTS speaking test in its pretest and posttest forms (see Appendix A). The test included three parts. In part 1, which lasted 4-5 minutes, the candidate answered general questions about themselves, their jobs/studies, their interests, and a range of similar familiar topic areas. In part 2 (3-4 minutes) the candidates were asked to speak for one to two minutes on a particular topic. The topic was written on a card, and the candidate had one minute to prepare for the talk. S/he was asked one or two follow-up questions. In part 3 (4-5 minutes) the examiner and candidates discussed issues and concepts thematically linked to part 2. The test lasted for 11-14 minutes and candidates were assessed for their performance on a 0-9 scale. The reason for choosing this instrument was that it is accepted at international scale. It is a reliable and valid test (see IELTS Teaching Resources, 2006) and it observed comprehensive criteria including fluency, accuracy, lexicon, and pronunciation, to assess speaking skill which suited the very purpose of the study.

#### **3.4 Classroom Teaching Procedures**

In order to achieve strategic interaction and use the target language purposefully and skillfully in communication, different situations have been selected from students' textbook to be dealt with. In these situations, the students are free to respond to the problem presented in their own way and devise their own personal strategies for dealing with the situation at hand. It is a characteristic that is similar to real life experience-naturally occurring interaction. The course lasted three weeks where the students had to negotiate the dialogues in groups in order to perform them in front of the class.

The researcher has adopted dramatic techniques developed by Di Pierto (1987). Time management in the classroom was divided into three classroom activities: rehearsal, performance and debriefing. Table 1 shows the description of the activities as follows:

**Table 1: Time management of dramatic activities in the classroom**

Session	Activity	Time
<b>Rehearsal session</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The teacher select or create appropriate situation and prepares the necessary</li> <li>2. Students form groups and prepare agendas to fulfil the roles assigned to them, while teacher acts as adviser and guide to students groups as needed, giving them words or idioms, helping them with the grammar or pronunciation and even providing possible strategies if necessary.</li> </ol>	The time allowed for rehearsal is 22 to 27 minutes for a simple dialogue; a longer play may have to be finished as home work.
<b>Performance session</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students perform their roles with support of their respective groups.</li> <li>2. Teacher and reminder watch and take notes during the performance.</li> </ol>	The average is around 10 to 13 minutes per performance.
<b>Debriefing session</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The teacher leads the entire class in a discussion of the students' performance.</li> <li>2. Tape recordings are played back and comments are made by both the teacher and the students.</li> <li>3. At the end of each new script, students were required to write down all language forms and vocabulary items introduced.</li> </ol>	The time allowed for debriefing is 18 to 20 minutes.

### 3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data, IELTS speaking test was administered before and after exposing students to dramatic activities of different situations. The subjects' performance was assessed by two scorers\* for both pre and post test assessment. To ensure the reliability of the rating process, interscorers reliability was computed. It was roughly 0.82 which appeared as an acceptable value of inter-rater reliability.

The z-test value was employed to determine the increase in the speaking scores gained after the implementation of dramatic activities. The findings are illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Comparison of speaking pre-test and post-test scores

	Number of students	Mean	Standard Deviation	z-value		Degree of freedom	Level of Significance
				Computed Value	Critical Value		
Pre-test	25	30.00	3.547	5.88	1.96	48	0.05
Post-test	25	55.04	8.173				

Table 2 shows that the mean score of the post-test is statistically significantly higher than that of the pre-test. The computed z- value (5.88) is higher than the critical z- value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the

\*The scorers are: 1.The researcher. 2.Inst..Saadiyah Wdaah Hasan/College of Education/University of Al-Qadissiya.

hypothesis which indicates that “there is no statistically significant difference between the use of dramatic activities and EFL students’ speaking abilities” is rejected. It could be claimed that the English instruction delivered through the use of dramatic activities was effective in enhancing speaking ability.

### 3.6 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that classroom dramatic activities are effective for the enhancement of speaking abilities. The statistically significant difference between the mean pre-test and post-test speaking scores suggested that students benefited from dramatic activities.

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#### Appendix A/ IELTS Speaking Test/ PART 1

Are you a student or do you work now?

Why did you choose this course/job?

Talk about your daily routine.

Is there anything about your course/job you would like to change?

I'd like to move on and ask you some questions about shopping.

Who does most of the shopping in your household?

What type of shopping do you like? (Why?)

Is shopping a popular activity in your country? (Why/why not?)

What type of shops do teenagers like best in your country?

Let's talk about films.

How often do you go to the cinema?

What type of films do you like best? (Why?)

What type of films don't you like? (Why not?)

#### PART 2

Before you talk you'll have one minute to think about what you are going to say and you can make notes if you wish. Do you understand?

Here's some paper and a pencil to make notes, and here is your topic. I'd like you to describe an important event in your life.

Describe an important event in your life.

You should say:

When it happened

What happened

Whether this event affected other people

And explain why you feel it was important.

Follow up questions:

Do you still think about this event often?

Can the other people involved remember this event?

#### PART 3

Some questions related to an important event

What days are important in your country?

Why it is important to have national celebrations?

How is the way your national celebrations are celebrated now different from the way they were celebrated in the past?

Do you think any new national celebrations will come into being in the future?

Are there any celebrations from other countries that you celebrate in your country?

What are the benefits of having events that many people around the world are celebrating on the same day?

