



The effectiveness of drama methods in the development of communication skills

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The effectiveness of drama methods in the development of communication skills

L. Gabitova¹, L. Shayakhmetova¹, Zh. Beisembayeva²

1 Kazan Federal University, Leo Tolstoy Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication

2 L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Faculty of Philology, info@ores.su

Abstract

Drama in education is not a novelty. However, despite the fact that using drama method has been thoroughly developed in European countries, Canada and the USA, the analysis of the Russian scientific literature on this issue indicates that the use of drama techniques in Russian schools and universities is very limited. The didactic capabilities of dramatization have not revealed to the full extent, technology of using drama method in teaching foreign languages has not been developed. Thus it makes further research on the stated problem relevant.

The purpose of this article is not to argue that drama is the only way of teaching, but to show the importance of drama as a supplemental tool in teaching and learning foreign languages.

For our research we created a special didactic drama techniques program for TEFL students. For a year students of an experimental group have been taught using all methods of drama pedagogy, such as applied drama, reader's theater, scripted and process drama.

Following methods were used to conduct the survey: a questionnaire of students to reveal their initial and post level of interest in theatrical activity; a test for evaluating students' motivation to learn the English language; a test to measure their initial and post level of speaking skills.

Post-tests analysis showed that the use of drama techniques promotes the development of quick thinking, creativity and emotional expressiveness. In comparison to the control group, the experimental group students were able to speak more accurately, quickly and with expression. Their speech was characterized by absence of great pauses. Furthermore, they were more creative in delivering their speech, even weaker students with a low level of vocabulary and grammar remembered and implemented appropriately phrases from the plays they had performed.

Key words: Drama-based pedagogy, educational methods, EFL, ESL, active learning



Introduction

Learning new languages might be a complicated process, especially when students do not have natural aptitude for it. For a foreign-language-learner there can be various difficulties such as coping with pronunciation of unfamiliar sounds, memorizing new vocabulary, acquiring grammar and sentence structures. It is worth noting that drilling, learning by heart and diverse mnemonic techniques to learn a language could be useful, but they are not as effective as communicative methods. Moreover, students should love what they do; they should be motivated to acquire a language. In that case drama method is irreplaceable. It is an amazing balance of thought and feelings. As Shakhovskiy (1991) states it adds affective element into teaching process and according to some psychological research knowledge is more strongly comprehended through emotions.

Using drama means involving the entire class into simulation or role-playing by giving everyone a certain role, sometimes roles of real personalities. Drama method is a set of actions. These actions are means of shaping behavior of students in real and given situations within an educational process that contribute both to the formation and development of communicative competence of students and to the emotional qualities of a person.

Drama, as a form of art conveying feelings and emotions, thoughts and problems, has arisen in the history of human civilization since the appearance of communities. However, for educational purposes it began to apply in the 1980s and 1990s due to the increased popularity of communicative approach of teaching languages, according to Schewe (2013), supporters of the drama techniques in education and specialists in the teaching of foreign languages began to master the drama method in their practice.

The first publication in this field, which made an important contribution to the development of drama method, was the work of British scholars Shin-Mei Kao, Cecily O'Neill "Words Into Worlds: Learning a Second Language Through Process Drama". In their work Kao & O'Neill (1998) brought up following topics: emotion-causing dramatic moments in teaching and learning foreign languages; the nature of interaction between a teacher and a student in drama-oriented language classes; psychosocial aspect of the drama process in teaching.

Although the first works were published in Great Britain, the further systematic classification and conceptualization of a new field in the first decade of the 21st century was developed outside the UK, mainly in German-speaking countries Schewe.

A significant contribution to the development of the drama method in teaching languages was made by Manfred Schewe. In his collaborative work with Show "Towards Drama as a Method in the Foreign Language Classroom", Schewe (1993) considers the idea of teaching and learning as a multi-



sensory experience and drama as a form of pedagogical art. He analyzes the difference between the phases of learning of a foreign language (sensibilization, contextualization, intensification), and on the basis of short and longer assignments proves that drama method in teaching of foreign languages can be applied to the three main areas of the foreign language discipline, such as language, literature and culture.

Subsequent years have led to further diversification of research in this new field and included the development of specific theoretical bases of drama method in TEFL. For example, in the field of language, Susanne Even (2003, cited in Schewe 2013) published a book on the study of grammar "Drama Grammatik", based on the British drama-pedagogy, and particularly on Schewe's concept of 26 steps drama method of learning languages.

In the field of culture Angelika Mayrose-Parovsky (1997, cited in Schewe 2013) used techniques such as duplication, mirroring, role play, originating from Moreno's psychodrama, to support her concept of "building intercultural interaction through play" within the lessons of the German as a foreign language.

In the field of intercultural communication, a major contribution was made by the collective work edited by Gerd Bräuer (2002) "Body and Language. Intercultural Learning through Drama" and the use of intercultural drama-pedagogy for the teaching of English as a foreign language by Kessler & Küppers (2008).

Despite the fact that using drama method has been thoroughly developed in European countries, Canada and the USA, the analysis of the Russian scientific literature on this issue indicates that the use of drama techniques in Russian schools and universities is very limited. Shaiakhmetova, Shayakhmetova, Ashrapova (2016), Mukhametzianova, Bezuglova, Kuznetsova (2015) claim that basically, Russian teachers focus on traditional methods of teaching languages. Ivanova, Veselova, Mukharlyamova (2015) highlight that the psychological aspects of the emotional involvement into the process of learning a foreign language have not been adequately studied. The didactic capabilities of dramatization have not revealed to the full extent, and technology of using drama method in teaching foreign languages has not been developed. Thus it makes further research on the stated problem relevant.

We can conclude, that drama in education is not a novelty. However, in spite of the fact that drama method in a certain way contradicts the current tendency of teaching languages, since it is difficult to measure results and cognitive training, its individual techniques are widely used by the teachers of TEFL.



Thereby the purpose of this article is not to argue that drama is the only way of teaching, but to show the importance of drama as a supplemental tool in teaching and learning foreign languages.

Method

Participants

Our research was conducted with second year EFL students of the Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of KFU. It should be noted that the native language of the students was Tatar and about 90% of participants did not study English at school. In other words, at the end of the first year of study the most diligent learners achieved Intermediate level in English (B1) and some students got Elementary level (A1), but the average level was Pre-Intermediate (A2⁺). For reliability of the results we selected students of Pre-Intermediate level. A total of 60 students aged 18-19 years old were included in the study.

In order to analyze the effectiveness of drama method in the development of communicative skills in the EFL classroom, the study was carried out with two reference groups: an experimental and a control groups. Drama techniques were included into the training program of the experimental group as a supplementary material. The control group were taught based on their basic curriculum.

Instruments

Following instruments for data collection were used in this research: a questionnaire of students to reveal their initial and post level of interest in theatrical activity; a test for evaluating students' motivation to learn the English language; a test to measure their initial and post level of speaking skills.

The questionnaire, a form consisting of 9 questions, was aimed at gathering information about students attitude to use of drama techniques in English classes, various techniques introduced by their English teachers, what drama techniques they prefer to be used within English classes.

The test, consisting of 15 questions, was aimed at collecting information about students' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

The test for assessing speaking skills consists of two parts, the first one is the photo discussion (students are given three photos and they have to compare two of them, on their own, for a minute), and the second one is collaborative task (in group of two students get a mind-map with five keywords and two questions and they have to discuss these questions and come to an agreement in three minutes).

Procedure

The whole study consisted of three phases.



The first phase included the pre-questionnaire and the pre-test of speaking skills of both groups. The motivation pre-test was hold only in the experimental group.

After the analysis of pre-tests the second phase commences. A special didactic drama techniques program was compiled for the experimental group. For a year they have been taught using all methods of drama pedagogy indicated by Gary Carkin (2011).

We started with applied drama activities including warm-up exercises, pantomimes, role-playing, simulations. All activities were based on the learned grammar constructions and vocabulary. The purpose of these exercises was to teach the students to relax, express themselves and emotions freely, awaken creativity and desire to learn the language.

Gradually we applied reader's theater. The students were sitting in a circle and reading their lines with expressive voices and gestures. They did not learn their roles, scenery was not set. The aim was to teach students to comprehend the meaning of texts and read with correct inflection.

Then we added performing of scripted drama method. It is informal acting without audience and with limited costumes. Emphasis was on the process, students practiced reciting and blocking and the teacher checked their accuracy.

Finally, we performed process drama. The students expressed desire to perform the play "The First Theater" written by the prominent Tatar playwright Galiaskar Kamal. For this purpose they translated the play into English with the support of their teachers, assigned roles, modeled appropriate behaviors within situations and made scenery.

At the end of the year the third phase was carried out. It involved the post-test of speaking skills of both groups, and the motivation post-test of the experimental group.

Results

The pre-questionnaire showed a positive attitude of the more than half of the students (59 %) to the use of drama activities in English classes. The rest said that they were not sure about their ability to act and they could not improvise or speak without preparation.

Large group of students (92 %) stated that they did not act out plays or small sketches in English at school. 35 % of students played occasionally role-games or simulations, but it was not fun, they were shy and scared of using English because of their low level both of grammar and vocabulary.

The motivation pre-test showed high rates of both the extrinsic (83,3 % of the students cared the most about getting a good mark; 46,7 % of the students were concerned about the exam) and intrinsic (56,7 % of the learners preferred the material to be challenging to learn new things; 100 % of them believed that English would be useful for their professional development; 53,3 % were interested in the thematic contents of this subject) motivation.



Compared to the motivation pre-test answers, in the post-test the students' extrinsic motivation decreased. They were not worried or concerned too much about the mark (26,7 %) or the exam (40 %), they started concentrating on the activities themselves. The intrinsic motivation remained at the same high level (66,7 % of the learners preferred the material to be challenging to learn new things; 100 % of them believed that English would be useful for their professional development; 70 % were interested in the thematic contents of this subject).

The test for assessing speaking skills were evaluated based on six rubrics: pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, communication, interaction, fluency.

In both reference groups we analyzed the same criteria, in pronunciation it is appropriate pronunciation and correct inflection; in vocabulary – using specific, appropriate to the contexts vocabulary and it's level; in accuracy – accurate spoken grammar; in communication – creative use of the language, producing understandable speech; in interaction – the ability to understand and answer questions; in fluency – the ability to speak with speed and coherence.

The results of the pre- and post-test for assessing speaking skills are shown in Table 1 and Table 2 below. Scores of the experimental group are higher than the scores of control group.

Table1: Overall results for the pre-test speaking skills

Rubrics	Pronunciatio n	Vocabular y	Accurac y	Communicatio n	Interactio n	Fluenc y
Mean						
Experiment al group	5	4	3	6	5	3
Control group	5	5	3	6	5	3

Table 2: Overall results for the post-test speaking skills

Rubrics	Pronunciatio n	Vocabular y	Accurac y	Communicatio n	Interactio n	Fluenc y
Mean						
Experiment al group	6	7	4	7	6	4
Control group	6	6	4	6	5	3

Discussion

The pre-questionnaire revealed low interest of students in drama pedagogy. Perhaps this is due to the lack of such experience, not using drama techniques in English classes at school, or it is



related to the improper use of drama techniques. According to Vygotsky's (1986) theory of the “Zone of Proximal Development”, there should be “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”. It means that the tasks should be difficult, but students should be able to manage doing them with teacher’s support. In other words, drama techniques have to be based on learned grammar and vocabulary.

A high level of motivation is probably explained by the fact that it is strongly connected with the future profession of the participants and it was their conscious choice to learn the English language.

Speaking skills post-test analysis revealed that, in comparison with the control group students, the experimental group students were able to speak accurately, quickly and with expression. They felt quite comfortable while they were speaking. Their speech was characterized by absence of great pauses and gaps. They used multiple tenses, correct word order. Furthermore, they were more creative in delivering their speech, even weaker students with a low level of vocabulary and grammar remembered and implemented appropriately phrases from the plays they had performed, they succeeded at delivering the gist. Concerning collaborative task student were able to listen to their partners attentively and give appropriate responses. In the comments to the test, some students expressed the opinion that it was easier for them to perform the second task (communication with a partner), as they felt confident and it was like acting they had got used to.

Conclusion

Thus, based on the data analysis we can conclude that drama method is one of the effective approaches of developing the communicative skills of students. It is a technique of involuntary memorizing of phrases and fixed expressions. In this approach, students are regarded as equal subjects of training and education. The use of drama techniques promotes the development of quick thinking and creativity, emotional expressiveness, as it affects the emotional qualities of students. According to the results drama techniques in the classroom positively affects students social integration. Combined effects of integrating drama pedagogy lead to the developing of a positive attitude towards the foreign language culture and language studying.

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