

BENEFITS OF USING DRAMA CONTEST ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

● DANG THI THANH VAN

ABSTRACT:

This study aims to explore the learner's perception of the benefit of drama on speaking skill. The mixed-methods sequential explanatory was conducted with 30 randomly selected students to carry out this study and the study's data was collected via questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study's qualitative data analysis shows positive impacts of drama on students' speaking skills and these benefits are strengthened by favorable feedbacks from participants.

Keywords: Drama contest, speaking skills, learner, interview.

1. Introduction

Certain researchers have given credence to the importance of oral English language for certain reasons (Ur, 1991; Maxom, 2009; Goh, 2007; Goh & Burns, 2012). Ur (1991) regarded it as the 'speaker' or transmitter of the language, specifically when a person not only knows a language, but also other types of knowing. Whilst, Maxom (2009) believed true speaking proficiency might not be achieved without actually learning to speak it. In the notion of Goh (2007), spoken English played an important role in language development and acquisition. Additionally, it is the top priority of learners as they highly value their feeling of how improved their ability to produce oral English is (Goh & Burns, 2012). For these reasons, the teaching of speaking skills is

inevitable in current second language learning contexts.

Keeping up with this trend, second spoken-language classes at FPT University in Hanoi, Vietnam have been really absorbing with multiple communicative activities. However, there has been a shortage of the explicit teaching of oral skills but a focus on learners' active participation. As a consequence, there has remained the absence of motivation, confidence, and enthusiasm. Besides, those oral tasks have not elicited responses from reserved and afraid-of-speaking participants. To fill the void, dramatic activities have been utilized in order to "expose" them to the language, arousing their increasing interest in spoken English.

Much research has been conducted on the benefits of drama on speaking skills development. Apart from the improvement of oral fluency and accuracy (Galante & Thomson, 2017), drama was thought to provide a motivating and relaxing learning environment full of joy, laughter, and entertainment for learners (Gill, 2013; Gill, 2016). Additionally, affective factors such as the dread of public speaking, fear of making pronunciation mistakes, and language anxiety were believed to better (Atas, 2015). However, there seems to be not much research on benefits of drama on other aspects of speaking skills namely learning context and different types of learners which will be presented in this study. The purpose of the present study is to fill the gap by exploring the effectiveness of drama on two aspects of speaking skills: learning context and different types of learners.

2. Setting and Participants

The setting of the research arises in FPT University, Hanoi, where English is of great importance and regarded as the prerequisite for switching to major subjects. The sample for the current study includes 30 freshmen majoring in Software Engineering, selected from actors and actresses in two play groups. At the time of the research, they were studying Preparation English course, upper-intermediate level.

Annually, during the Preparation Course Phase, a drama contest regarding one specific theme is organized to offer encouragement of spoken English to students, and the topic presented in this study is Heroes. In phase 1, a specific hero is assigned to each class; then, participants created their own script and appointed roles. In the second phase, with the help of instructors in script correction, learners commenced rehearsing the drama before the final performance on the stage.

3. Research Methodology

The author has selected an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to explore student's perceptions of the benefits of drama on

their speaking skills. Initially, a questionnaire was distributed to participants to collect their evaluation on the effects of drama on learning environment and types of learners in spoken development. Each component was sub-divided into minor items scored on a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree). After the survey questions, a semi-structured interview was conducted to allow participants to best their voice.

4. Data collection

Right after the drama contest, 30 students from 2 classes were chosen randomly to do the survey. After screening the data for Descriptive Statistics, the researcher selected 8 extreme cases whose responses were mainly about "Strongly Disagree" or "Strongly Agree" or "Neutral Opinion" to interview. The transcription of interview responses was made and then translated into English.

5. Results from questionnaire

Overall, questionnaire results showed positive benefits of drama on both learning environment and types of learners.

In terms of learning environment, as presented in Table 1, the most striking result to emerge from the data is that over 80% of respondents agreed drama had offered them great advantages, of which nearly all the questions got high mean scores, ≥ 4 . Twenty-five out of 30 reporters admitted drama contest provided a natural and real environment for them to drill their oral English. The lowest mean score (3.7) went to the question about spoken spontaneity.

With respect to different types of learners, as can be seen in Table 2, the average score for all questions in this component of the questionnaire was 3.9 out of 5. Interestingly, the rehearsal with classmates motivated participants in spoken-language confidence with the highest average score of 4.1, whereas it seemed they received no feedback on speaking skills from other classmates.

Table 1: Mean score of learning environment

Questions	Min	Mean	Max	Standard Deviation
1. Drama contest is a natural / real environment to practice English speaking	3	4.3	5	0.7
2. Drama contest brings a good opportunity to speak English.	3	4.2	5	0.7
3. Drama contest is a natural environment to learn English speaking from your classmates.	3	4.1	5	0.7
4. Drama contest helps you speak English spontaneously without help of teachers.	2	3.7	5	0.8
5. Drama contest keeps you active in learning speaking English.	2	4	5	0.8
6. Drama contest makes learning English speaking more meaningful.	2	4	5	0.9

Table 2: Mean score of different types of learners

Questions	Min	Mean	Max	Standard Deviation
7. Playmates encourage you to be active and cooperative in learning English speaking.	1	3.8	5	1
8. Playmates provide you feedback about your English speaking.	2	3.6	5	1
9. Rehearsing playlets with your classmates makes you feel more confident in speaking English.	3	4	5	1
10. Rehearsing playlets with your classmates motivates you to speak English.	3	4.1	5	0.7
11. Rehearsing playlets with your classmates makes you enjoy speaking English more.	2	3.8	5	0.9

Results from interview

To start with, all interviewees had positive perceptions of learning environment through the drama contest. They reached an agreement that the contest provided them opportunities to become closer to one another. Take one example: "I am really into the contest as I commenced talking more to my classmates. That is teambuilding, and we all stand by one another." (excerpt 1). More than that, the environment was fun, full of joy, and comfortable, for example: "It brought more fun, more memory with friends." (excerpt 2). Even, one confirmed they were not tied in the course book; something real was happening and this made them excited.

In addition, the drama contest had brought them an advantage to learn from friends and classmates. "The ways of speaking, word use, word stress, intonation, and emotional expression" are some of their beliefs. This happened during their rehearsal and discussion of the script. More importantly, better students actively assisted others in their line completion and memorization: "I actively gave my classmates feedback on their pronunciation, helped them speak right and pronounce certain difficult words clearly such as proper names or long words and so on." (excerpt 3). However, there also remained disagreement: "I did not really learn from my classmates. Only those who

were confident in speaking got up and spoke out. We did not put any pressure on anyone. We helped those who had not memorized the lines.” (excerpt 4)

Last but not least, in terms of motivation, there were several distinctive notions. Some admitted the event was an environment to motivate participants to acquire a little bit of a meaningful spoken language. Take some examples: “It made me a little more confident in oral English.” (excerpt 5) or “I know other students from different play groups who speak English really well, even perfectly. Their accent is genuinely like native speakers, and I was really excited about showing off myself with them and try to speak like them.” (excerpt 6). Following the idea by excerpt 6, another student added “I was much motivated as I was in the role of a narrator. Thus, I had to practice speaking at home over and over, especially pronouncing words properly.” (excerpt 7). Meanwhile, the others believed one play was not enough to talk about motivation, or it did not help them much in spoken speech.

6. Connecting the quantitative and qualitative results

Quantitatively, the results showed learners' positive perceptions of drama benefits on their speaking skills.

Qualitatively, the results bolstered what was found in the survey; however, there were some distinctive notions of motivation and confidence that drama provided the learners.

7. Discussion

This section examines the benefits of drama on students' speaking skills, based on quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Firstly, the drama contest has provided a stimulating learning environment for learners, which fits well with previous findings by Gill (2013; 2016). Observably, they had to discuss greatly about language uses including grammar structures, word choice, sentence structures to have a striking script during their rehearsals; in addition, they regularly gave one another feedback on pronunciation, intonation, word

stress, and emotional expression of characters with the aim to have a performance audible to audiences. Besides, an interesting topic outside the course book has attracted their interests, causing them to feel free to speak out confidently, which is consistent with a study by Atas (2014). These reasons showed drama better students' learning spoken English in different facets.

Secondly, the drama contest improved consolidation among members in class. They had to talk more to and increasingly discuss with one another to have a complete script, assign the best roles, and get an audible performance. Their closeness was also expressed in their determination and persistence to win over other classes, gaining the highest prize.

One proverb saying that better learning from your friends than your teachers is absolutely true in this situation, where participants took the advantage to learn abundant things from others. Rehearsals have enabled them to obtain better articulation, assign right word and sentence stress, and express emotions of characters. Crucially, they were also motivated to speak louder, more confidently, and more meaningfully in an attempt to compete with other classes to win the highest prize.

8. Conclusion

Drama has made a great contribution to language development, especially oral speech, one of the two significant productive skills. The present study aims to explore the students' perceptions of the benefits of drama on their spoken English. With this aim, the research has put an emphasis on two aspects of speaking skills namely learning context and different types of learners. The main findings suggest several striking outcomes. Firstly, a stimulating learning environment through the drama contest has exposed learners to real practice with the results of better pronunciation, intonation, word and sentence stress, increasingly confidence (without fear of public speaking). Secondly, closeness among classmate, which has not been able to gain beforehand, has bettered. Last but not least, it seems that learning or competing with other classmates and classes has urged learners to try harder ■

REFERENCES:

1. Atas, M (2015). *The reduction of speaking anxiety in EFL learners through drama techniques*. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 176(2015), 961-969. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815006023>
2. Galante, A., & Thomson, R. I. (2017). *The Effectiveness of Drama as an Instructional Approach for the Development of Second Language Oral Fluency, Comprehensibility, and Accentedness*. *TESOL QUARTERLY*, 51(1), 115-142. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.290>
3. Gill, C (2013). *Oral Communication in ESL Through Improvisations, Playwriting and Rehearsals*. *Advances in Language and Literacy Studies*, 4(1), 34-41. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1129675>
4. Gill, C. (2016). *Maximising Asian ESL Learners' Communicative Oral English via Drama*. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(5), 240-246. Retrieved from <http://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/all/article/view/2741/2343>. Doi: 10.7575/mac.all.v.7n 5p.240
5. Goh, C. C. M., & Burns, A (2012) *Teaching Speaking: A Holistic Approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
6. Goh, C. M. (2007). *Teaching Speaking in the Language Classroom*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
7. Maxom, M. (2009). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language for Dummies*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
8. Ur, P. (1991). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Received: 13/8/2019

Revised: 23/8/2019

Accepted for Publication: 5/9/2019

Author's information:

Master. DANG THI THANH VAN

FPT University

LỢI ÍCH CỦA VIỆC THI KỊCH TRONG PHÁT TRIỂN KỸ NĂNG NÓI CỦA SINH VIÊN

● ThS. ĐẶNG THỊ THANH VÂN

Trường Đại học FPT

TÓM TẮT:

Mục đích của bài báo là nghiên cứu nhận thức của người học về lợi ích của kịch đối với kỹ năng nói. Phương pháp nghiên cứu hỗn hợp được tiến hành trên 30 sinh viên được chọn ngẫu nhiên. Dữ liệu thu thập thông qua bảng câu hỏi và phỏng vấn. Kết quả định lượng cho thấy, những lợi ích tích cực của kịch lên kỹ năng nói của người học và những lợi ích đó được củng cố thêm thông qua kết quả phân tích từ phỏng vấn.

Từ khóa: Thi kịch, kỹ năng nói, người học, phỏng vấn.