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# Analyzing the Role of Contemporary Teaching Techniques and Importance of Drama in Learning English as a Foreign Language Dr. Saba Sadia\*, Dr. Rana Umair Nadeem\*\*, Dr. Afsheen Sallahddin\*\*\*

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#### ABSTRACT

This research explores the important activities and principles of the teaching of drama in learning English as a foreign language. This research is qualitative in nature, and the analysis is based on theoretical grounds and a strong theoretical framework. It concentrates on the brief history of drama in education, its basic principles, techniques, and the possibilities and advantages that drama in education brings into English language learning. The aim of this research, Drama in Learning English as a Foreign Language, is not only to introduce drama in education to the readers but also present drama in the context of English language learning and subsequently support the concept of drama being an English language learning method. It defines drama, its general concepts, principles, and aims. It concentrates on the role of drama in learning English as a foreign language, its techniques, and the benefits that drama brings into the learning. This research is helpful for the teachers to understand the drama and activates related to it in the classroom.



#### Introduction

In 1987, Wessels claimed that the concept of using drama as a tool for learning "is not new, but has been around for quite some time" (Wessels, 1987, p.8). The link between drama/theatre and education can be traced as far back as to ancient Athens, where the education was based on literature, music, and physical games, whereas in ancient Rome the focus was rather on rhetoric skills, as the orators were considered educational models. After losing its importance for being banned by the Church throughout Middle Ages and re-gaining it again during Renaissance, "drama was regarded as an important source for teaching as far as the classical languages and the contents of the classical plays were concerned" (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013, p.20). Moreover, in many educational contexts, the attention was paid rather to speech and rhetoric than to dramatic action, which widely persisted until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013). In the second half of the 20th century, there were many debates over drama not only in terms of a final performance but also in terms of new classroom practices applying drama. As Tschurtschenthaler points out "In the 1950s and 60s Peter Slade and Brian Way marked a new era in the field of drama and education in Britain. Slade's two publications, Child Drama (1954) and Introduction to Child Drama (1958), and Way's Development through Drama (1967) influenced drama teachers not only in Great Britain but also in the US, Canada, and Australia" (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013, p.21). Spontaneity and the absence of an audience while having the whole class engaged in the activity is what Slade's ideas were based on. On the contrary, Way focused on one hand on small groups and pair activities to develop concentration and intuition of the learners, and on the other hand on the individual at the center of the activity, seen as enhancing personal development. This kind of focus is important for language teaching and learning, for more people in a class

get the chance to speak and interact simultaneously. Also, at that time the terms "creative drama" or "creative dramatics" were introduced. (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013, pp. 21-23).

In the 1980s and 1990s, in many countries, there was a division between writers and practitioners who advocated different approaches to teaching drama. Some teachers who followed the theatre approach talked about acting, rehearsing, and performance, whereas "the teachers focused on drama referred rather to experience or living through improvisations" (Hornbrook, 1989). Concerning drama in education, along with two very significant persons - Gavin Bolton or Dorothy Heathcote who are often seen as its parents (of drama focused on the experience, not the performance), many others contributed to the debate from the drama in education. Many of them developed the idea of "living through" further, some of them added different aspects to Heathcote's and Bolton's work (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013, p.27).

Drama in education is a mode of learning. Through DiE and its methods, the learners are engaged in different subject areas in different topics. "They can learn to explore various issues, relationships, and events while actively identifying with imagined roles and situations" (O'Neill & Lambert, 1982). "Drama enables learning processes to be holistic" (Ronke, 2005). While learning through drama, the learning process takes place on different levels, not only in terms of the learning content but also in terms of social skills and personal skills (Tschurtchenthaler, 2013). According to Machková,

"Drama offers practice for one's life, getting to know it via the personal experience without any danger of consequences or sanctions. There is a possibility to go back, to modify, to change decisions or to research, explore and verify both relationships between people and how they work and one's own reactions, decisions and behaviour in certain situations (Machková, 2004)".

Roleplay and identification with the role, but also the possibility to shake off the character in some situations is the key to success. Therefore, situations arising during drama activities can be seen as possibilities for training for real-life situations, or as some kind of a 'life laboratory'. Moreover, being capable of creating a situation imaginatively and playing a role in it is a splendid experience. "It is some kind of vacation from one's everyday self and the everyday living routine" (Spolin, 1963, referring to Neva L. Boyd, *Play, a Unique Discipline*).

I hear and I forget, I listen and I remember, I do and I understand. (Confucius)

#### **Problem Statement**

To analyze the modern techniques of teaching and learning of English language through teaching of English drama in the class.

#### **Research Objectives**

- To sense reality around deeply and to be knowledgeable about it.
- To solve practical problems creatively.
- To be aware of moral dilemmas and to be able to make decisions, consider the responsibly and individually.
- To undergo criticism of one's opinion and gain openness and ability to change and develop an attitude.

#### **Research Questions**

- **1-** How the teaching of drama has gained importance in modern education?
- **2-** How have modern techniques created a healthy impact while including drama and theatre in education?
- **3-** What are the responsibilities of a drama teacher?
- **4-** What are the possible difficulties in the teaching of drama in the classroom?

#### Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research method is being used in this research. As Wessels states, "Drama is doing. Drama is being" (Wessels, 1987, p.7). If someone studying English asked us 'What is a blind person?', we could either provide him with a simple answer, such as 'It is someone who cannot see', which would probably satisfy him in terms of intellectual understanding, or we might also make him close his eyes and let him try to find a subject on the desk nearby. This would involve not only his intellectual understanding but also an emotional experience. Such experience would possibly awake feelings of empathy with all blind people in him. Moreover, he would be more likely to remember the meaning of the word as a result of his direct experience. In such a situation, Wessels (1987) further describes as students having space for exploring the basis of the surface reality. When the learners are given the needed background to a situation and let think about it, feel the atmosphere, their participation in a situation becomes deeper. As Tschurtschenthaler (2013) states, drama is a social form in which the participants learn from and with each other (which corresponds with Fleming's (2006); & Needland's (1984) statements about the learner-centered aspect of drama. The evoked dramatic situations provide a safe framework, in which the individuals can have new experiences in new roles and see their contributions discussed and modified by the group. Thanks to drama, learning situations can be regarded as social events because they put students into a new process with the other members of the group. Subsequently, students have space to reflect on the process and discuss it within the group. Bláhová (1996) agrees and concludes that DiE deals with personal and social learning. Knowledge of dramatic arts mingling with pedagogy and psychology knowledge can be found in the content and methods of drama in education, aiming to get to know the world, people, society, and one's self, all this in an active way.

#### Importance of Drama in the EFL Learning

Wilson states that "what happens in classrooms is usually highly controlled and structured" (Wilson, 2010, p.3). There is a focus on the outcomes measurable in tests and exams. However, plentiful evidence that foreign languages can be acquired also in a different way exists. Activities focused on enjoyment, physical involvement, playfulness, affective engagement, and activities having the ability to foster the so-called 'flow' state of effortless effort are found very important in this context. One of the ways how to achieve this 'flow' is through drama and improvisation, as they build confidence and something that is the core of interacting in the new language the ability to handle the unpredictability. They also "foster the capacity to deal imaginatively with the unexpected, and the willingness to 'have a go-to take risk in the new language" (Wilson, 2010, p.3) and he adds "In the absence of this capability, little enduring learning is likely to take place" (Wilson, 2010, p.3). Desiatova agrees and emphasizes the benefits of using drama activities in English Foreign Language (EFL) learning. According to her, "the students are encouraged to speak and are given the chance to communicate. Using not only the language but also non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and body movements, the ones whose language is limited can communicate as well" (Desiatova, 2009).

#### Analysis

Each student is different, has different abilities, expectations, personality, skills, and preferred learning style, which reflects in their motivation and enthusiasm in particular activities. Hence, how can teachers effectively encourage their students to stay active, motivated, and aware of what is happening throughout the English language learning time? How can teachers offer the right conditions for learning English to everybody in the group? This research focuses on the drama in the context of learning English as a foreign language. It also provides clarifications that drama is the right answer to the questions above.

#### (i) Drama Teacher

It is also an important aspect when using DiE as a tool for learning is the teacher; his attitude towards classroom management, the relationships with the students, his personality traits. This research provides brief information about this issue. "An important and necessary base of any drama activity is the enthusiasm of the teacher who is eager to work in an open form of classroom management, and whose attitude towards drama activities and techniques is positive" (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013, p.51). Nevertheless, just enthusiasm is not enough. Sawyer stresses that "with an increasing emphasis on innovation and creativity in the 21st century, it is not only students who must learn to be creative but also and foremost teachers need to be creative professionals" (Sawyer, 2012). He also adds there are many structures and guidelines teachers must

follow and that effective creative teaching requires a balance between structure and improvisation.

Heathcote points out that "the need for the teachers who create a learning situation rather than only sharing information, the need to give students opportunities to struggle with problems before they come to the teacher's knowledge, and to reach the information and answers thanks to their activity rather than being passive listeners" (Heathcote, 1972). This will keep knowing at first-hand alert, hence encourage the desires for more knowledge. Wessels agrees and adds that "learners should be permitted to take responsibility for their learning in such a way the teacher can take a less dominant role in the classroom without losing the respect of the class or losing control" (Wessels, 1987, p.14). Moreover, the teachers should neither be afraid of making relationships with their class nor they should be afraid of admitting that they simply do not know. They should never stop trying to learn more about the dynamics of teaching. Also, they should like to get on well with the students and be able to give the responsibility to the class (Heathcote, 1972).

#### (ii) Modern Techniques in Teaching of Drama VS. Theatre in Education

Despite the previous description of the division of drama in education and theatre in education in historical background, when using the term drama in education (or just drama), it might be still a bit confusing for some people, for their connotation of drama might be just playing and performing in a theatre. That is why we should clearly distinguish between those two terms; theatre in education and drama in education. It is important to realize this difference to fully understand what drama refers to. Drama in education, not theatre in education, is the topic discussed in this research. The aim of theatre in education (TiE) is to use pedagogical concepts to rehearse and to present the work, usually a theatre performance, to the outer audience in the best quality possible. While TiE is performance-oriented, drama in education (DiE or just drama) has completely different goals: to initiate or intensify learning processes while using theatre techniques, such as role-playing, improvisation, and mime. "In drama, it is not the quality of performance what is important, but rather the learning process itself as well as the experience of the participants, irrespective of any communication to an audience" (Ronke, 2005). Essentially, in DiE "everything is contrived for the benefits of the learners" (Wessels, 1987, p.8), it is participant-oriented. "The term drama can be also applied to the teaching of other subjects through drama" (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013). DiE involves theatrical elements to enrich the learning experience. Jackson (1993) also adds that DiE is "Usually concerned with the exploration of themes and problems through role-playing and improvisation with an emphasis upon developing the child's imagination, self-awareness and expressiveness and upon the social skills involved in group work." (Jackson, 1993, p. 8)

#### (iii) Possible Difficulties in Drama

Despite all the positive features and rich potential of drama as a method, some objections and difficulties might arise. These comments are not meant to be negative or discouraging, they should rather offer a realistic view of the possible limiting challenges and struggles in drama-based activities. What may some teachers prevent from using drama is their classes is regarding it time-consuming. Is 45 minutes enough time to realize a teaching unit based on drama activities that involve warming-up, topic, and the input, creating a scene in group work, performing the scenes, and then reflect on the time spent with drama? It is not. In a 45 minute class, there is usually space only for single games and activities which can be incorporated." Nevertheless, the more often these activities are used, the faster will learners get into them" (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013). Wilson drags attention to the very common teachers' feeling of the lack of time for drama activities. Nevertheless, he advises against becoming "the only source of information and encourages teachers to use drama activities to prevent their students from being passively involved in the classes" (Wilson, 2010). The problems of discipline might appear during drama activities with younger learners, for drama,

"Some problems with hesitating or refusing to cooperate may appear with the older ones, as they may perceive such activities as a waste of time, feel shy or be afraid of an embarrassment. This does not have to be a problem when repeating drama activities, allowing students to come across such techniques more often, they will become more confident. Though, it is very often the group who helps the individual to overcome such feelings and solve the problem." (Fleming, 2006).

This is one of the reasons why drama requires a safe environment. Up to this point, drama in

education, in general, was discussed. After the term drama in education (DiE/drama) was clarified, the benefits this method brings into the learning process were looked at as well as the aims of drama. The need for an enthusiastic teacher when using drama was mentioned too. The focus was also on possible difficulties that might occur when using drama.

The language into context comes with lively interaction through an intense focus on meaning. The possibility to use and practice the language weighs in its learning. Krashen claims that "acquiring the language takes place only if the filter is low, e. i. when learners are motivated, self-confident, and emotionally safe environment and have a low level of anxiety" (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Further, it is observed that "designing activities that systematically consider students' multiple intelligences and their different learning styles is essential for all of them to learn effectively" (Berk & Trieber, 2009, p. 36). Ellis claims that "within the interaction, the negotiation of meaning takes place, which helps learners to receive a comprehensible language input and also directs their attention to certain linguistic features." (Ellis, 2015).

#### (iv) Motivation

The aspect of entertainment in drama and therefore claims it is highly probable that students will be motivated to learn, it is fun and therefore highly motivating. Besides, they both agree on various opportunities for different uses of the language that drama offers, such as the same activities can be done at different levels, which means that all the learners can do it successfully. There is a variety of factors that can create such a desire, which is the bedrock of motivation. There are two types of motivation; *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*.

- 1) *Extrinsic motivation* arises from outside and may be influenced by many different factors; this can be the attitude of society, family, and peers, to the subject in question. It is the motivation learners bring from outside (Harmer, 2007).
- 2) *Intrinsic motivation* arises from inside the individual and involves engaging in abehavior because it is personally rewarding, e. g. the person's behavior is motivated by an internal desire to participate in an activity for its own sake rather than the desire for some external reward (Cherry, 2016).

It may be relatively easy to be extrinsically motivated (i.e. to have a desire to do something), what seems to be more problematic is to reach intrinsic motivation and to sustain motivation. However, there are many ways how the motivation of the students can be sustained. Harmer (2007) suggests some of them, all relevant for drama activities, for example:

- To incorporate activities that would *involve students*, excite their curiosity, hence provoke their participation and help them keep their interest in the subject.
- To consider the issue of *effect*, which is how students feel about the learning process, their need to feel that the teacher cares about them, as with the feeling of being supported and valued they are more likely to be motivated to learn.
- To give them *responsibility* for their learning.

Drama supports the confidence and self-esteem of the learner but also self-awareness and awareness of others and motivation is developed as well as through the variety and sense of activities generating expectancy.

#### (v) Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles

Multi-sensory inputs which typically appear when the drama is used help learners to make use of their strengths and also to widen their range. Doing so offers great opportunities for obtaining different learning strategies. Fleming and Baume (2006)subsequently add a fourth learning style, i.e. *reading and writing preference*, and characterize all types of learners:

- *Visual learners* learn best when they can use a lot of images, maps, and graphicorganizers to access and understand new information.
- Auditory learners best understand new content when listening and also speaking in

- group discussions or lectures. They use repetition when studying and benefit from the use of mnemonic devices.
- *Kinaesthetic learners* prefer different physical movements and activities, andthey understand information through its tactile representation. They learn best by doing things rather than by listening or reading. They like to touch or hold materials and enjoy being part of things that are being done.
- **Reading/writing learners** prefer learning through words. They like taking andrereading notes and are capable of translating abstract concepts into words and essays.

Engaging multiple ways of learning allows students to fix learning experiences more firmly in their minds. For instance, visual learners or those having good spatial awareness as well as kinaesthetic learners will benefit from drama activities such as sculpting or creating still images. They might also respond well to miming and acting out. Audible learners will appreciate techniques such as voices in the head, hot seating, or alley of consciousness. drama stimulates all learning styles and therefore enables learners to feel confident since they can adopt new information through their preferred channel. All of these learning styles can find their place when applied in drama techniques. Supposing that each learner fits into one of these categories, we can state that everyone can find their preferred learning style when drama techniques are used in the language learning process.

#### **Discussion**

Drama is a social activity, thus it creates space for social and communal aspects of learning, as opposed to individual learning. That is why drama is highly learner-centered and participants can learn from each other. In drama, when learners are given special roles, they are encouraged to be that character and leave their shyness behind. There is the possibility to use roles for encouraging the ones who would otherwise hold back and to control the ones who dominate the weaker learners. It is important to point out is that even the personal and social aspects have a lot to do with supporting the learners in learning English. The process of taking on imagined roles leads learners to reflect upon what a situation could be like in someone else's shoes. Tschurtschenthaler points out the moment when "the real and the fictitious are simultaneously present and provide a frame within learners are confronted with how they feel and act and how others might feel and act as well. While they are actively engaged in a make-believe situation, their emotional involvement is real and makes this experience an authentic one" (Tschurtschenthaler, 2013, p. 31). In drama, very often the learners work in pairs or groups, and to achieve their aims, they have to cooperate. As mentioned above, using drama contributes to learners' inner motivation, as it is a method involving them actively, in a fun way, engaging different bits of intelligence and various learning styles. The drama also allows learners to "enhance not only their intelligence but also their physical, social, emotional and spiritual abilities and provides them with psychological support that is not found in other areas of the curriculum" (Wilkinson, 2000, p. 1).

#### **Findings**

Several elements are a must in lessons using drama techniques; warp-ups, the teacher being rather in the background and the students' leadership, goal orientation, the suitable physical environment, and good relationships in the group. The students should be happy to work with each other in pairs or groups and to reach their willingness to do so, the teacher should help them to get to know each other better. The teacher should know the students well to the atmosphere in which both the students and the teacher can feel secure can be established. The only insecure atmosphere, it is possible to enjoy and benefit from drama activities. It creates a positive effect on classroom atmosphere and dynamics when using drama, as it helps to formulate a group, the participants of which can learn together.

Through drama, the real world can be brought into the classroom, as the aims do not have to be only in terms of linguistics. Topics and issues that run through the curriculum can be incorporated, for example, respect for the environment. The culture of the English language can be introduced through drama, through stories and customs, and with a context for working on different kinds of behavior. The concept of collaborative dialogue is crucial for drama and especially improvising which requires collaboration, mutual understanding, and the above-mentioned negotiation for meaning when creating a drama situation. DiE appears the individuals with their personal development, identity, confidence, sensitivity, self-expression,

and the uniqueness of each individual. It also emphasizes the importance of personal factors in language learning. The affective aspect of learners, their view of themselves and others, their values and attitudes, all plays a serious role in becoming a language user.

Role-taking is the crucial and irreducible bridge between any form of drama and theatre techniques. Using role-play in a learning environment is abundant in a huge range of benefits. It creates effects on the language, perceives role play as an activity providing the learners with opportunities. Experiencing situations and react in a role can equip the students with abilities useful when dealing with real-life situations. By simulating reality, students can prepare and practice for possible future situations. When students are in a role, they play as if they are someone else and the role is taken on in a safe environment where students can be as playful and inventive as possible. Concerning rather the shy members of a group, they might have a great deal of difficulty participating in conversations about themselves. However, thanks to the role play they no longer have to be shy because they are not in the focus as themselves but as someone else, i.e. they do not "feel that their personality is implicated" (Ladousse 1992, p.7). From language learning, the greatest advantage of the role play is that it enables a flow of language to be produced, which may be otherwise difficult to create.

Improvisation is a modern technique that can be used in the EFL classroom as it motivates the learners to be active participants in authentic situations, thereby reducing their anxiety. They remind that students will be probably quite shy and hesitant in the beginning. However, owing to techniques such as improvisation aiming to improve the learners' confidence in learning English, after some time they will become more enthusiastic and there will be a huge improvement in the level of their confidence. Their higher confidence level will unavoidably lead to an improvement in the use of the target language. A group, working as themselves or in the role, can question a role-player (remaining in the character). This character may be either released from frozen improvisations or the role can be prepared, the role-player formally seated and facing the others. The power and responsibility shift from the teacher to the group when they become characters endowed with specialist knowledge that is relevant to the situation. These situations are task-oriented, thus experts' knowledge/skill is required to fulfill the task. A technique leading to tension as the character, facing a problem or a hard decision, becomes influenced by the others who express themselves. They represent and speak aloud the possible thoughts the character might have in such a situation.

Drama elicits lively classroom interaction through an intense focus on meaning rather than accuracy. The learners have just used their knowledge of English for something useful and concrete, thus they feel happy and satisfied with themselves. If every mistake was analyzed at this moment, the learners would lose their feeling of satisfaction, and also the level of their confidence might be decreased, willingness to participate in another similar activity as well. Therefore, the teacher should keep in mind that after providing the students an enjoyable way of using and practicing their English, the feedback should be given primarily on what they have done, on the process, their cooperation and decision making, not only the language they used. Anything positive should be valued, commented on, brought to attention. On the other hand, the areas good to work on should be a part of the feedback as well. To sum up this research project, drama can be used as a method in learning English as a second language was looked at from different points of view. The attention is paid to drama in terms of its benefits that drama brings into language learning, its techniques, how it can be incorporated into the EFL learning, how important the relationships and safe environment are, and also how to deal with mistakes in drama-based activities.

#### Conclusion

In the theoretical part of this research, as this research is qualitative in nature, it has presented the issue of drama in education with the main focus on learning English as a foreign language through drama. The role of drama in English language learning was characterized by different points of view, such as its benefits when used in learning, motivation, learning styles, or language learning theories. The core drama techniques have been discussed as well as the incorporation of drama into EFL learning. Moreover, there was a focus on the importance of good relationships in the group and the attitude towards error correction. There are different attitudes to using drama in foreign language learning, pointing out that many teachers perceive it simply as something enjoyable, nevertheless with possible difficulties, useful mainly with extrovert, easy-going students during classes in spoken communication skills. Drama can offer a wide range

of activities, operate on different levels; be it simple, superficial games or the deepest levels of the whole group role-playing. Both ways, the drama brings language to life considering it the highest and most demanding level of drama. To evoke a real-life situation, background, emotions, relationships, status, not only verbal communication but also body language and other paralinguistic features must be present. During a project, students get involved with creating scenes rather than with the task of learning English, and therefore they do what was mention many times - learn by doing. Learning through drama can accomplish the goal of multiple intelligences involvement. Drama is presented not only as an effective educational tool but also as a way of supporting personal development and social skills. Having an entertaining character, drama fosters and maintains motivation. It has the power to evoke such a learning environment where the focus is on cooperation, emotions, creation, and discovery, whilst the singularity of the participants is appreciated. The drama involves all the learners interactively. Anyone can shine when participating in drama activities even without being an excellent language student, for drama involves various opportunities for expressing and engages all learning styles.

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