



Faculty of Education
Ain Shams University
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

The Effect of Using Drama Activities on Developing Preparatory Stage EFL Learners' Pronunciation

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Prepared by:
Ghada Saeed Badawy Salem
Freelance Teacher Trainer, British Council

Supervised by

Dr. Zeinab El Naggar
Prof. of Curriculum & Instruction
(EFL)
Faculty of Education
Ain Shams University

Dr. Shaima Nasr
Lecturer of curriculum &
Instruction (EFL)
Faculty of Education
Ain Shams University

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The researcher: Ghada Saeed Badawy Salem

Supervisors: Dr. Zeinab Elnaggar - Dr. Shaima Nasr,

Source: Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effect of using drama activities on developing Preparatory Stage EFL Learners' Pronunciation. literature and related studies dealing with drama in EFL teaching and pronunciation were reviewed. A list of the supra-segmental features of pronunciation was prepared by the researcher as a guide for the design of the instruments. In addition, a pre/post speaking test was designed and Cambridge PET speaking rubric was adapted. The drama-based activities were applied on a second-year preparatory class (n= 32) whose ages ranged from (13 to 15) years old. They were submitted to a pre and post-test. Then, the scores were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results showed that drama activities were significantly effective in developing Preparatory Stage EFL Learners' Pronunciation.

Keywords: *Drama, Pronunciation, supra-segmental features of pronunciation*

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CHAPTER ONE

Background and problem

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1.1 Introduction

The overall majority of English speakers worldwide are non-native speakers who often use the language in influential networks. The number of those speakers is growing rapidly so, English has become a "lingua franca" as stated by Harmer, (2001:1). The presence of English can be felt in multimedia, business, tourism, culture and mainly communication. Since languages are meant to be spoken, proficiency in a foreign language is always equated with "The ability to speak language" (Thornbury, 2006:208).

Each language skill is composed of sub-skills which are used to carry out a complex skill. Pronunciation is a major speaking and oral reading sub-skill that should be given a great importance as it enhances learners' oral performance and promotes their motivation. Pronunciation has the power to engage learners' attention in a tangible and beneficial way that could even transform their approach to the rest of their language studies as stated by Underhill (2005).

Many language learners want to sound like a native speaker unknowing that "comfortable intelligibility" is what they should seek as claimed by Crystal (2010). The need to introduce what he

called “the common core model” into classroom where comprehension is the target that can be achieved by improving learner’s intelligibility and avoiding any misunderstanding.

Morley (1994:36) proposed three changes in pronunciation teaching that would make it more effective; firstly, using methods other than mechanical drill or memorized rules to make learners aware of concepts. Secondly, emphasizing the “musical” aspects of pronunciation more than individual sounds. In addition to contextualizing the teaching point within real speech and providing practice.

The need to adopt new methods for promoting pronunciation is urgent nowadays due to the fact that traditional methods such as the “repetition approach for training students did not seem effective or enjoyable” (Underhill, 2005: VI).

Drama as an alternative method in EFL classrooms is not a new concept. Whiteson (1996) claimed that it has been used for ages, as it provides chances for exploring theoretical and practical aspects of the English language. A number of studies investigated the significance of practicing drama activities and their effect on promoting speaking in general such as *Abdel Khalek’s* (2011:5) where she stated that “There was a lack of facilities and educational materials to develop speaking skills such as pictures,

storytelling, drama and role playing”. The role of creative drama techniques such as role-playing as a tool for developing speaking skills was also highlighted by Ahmed, (2000). While Abdel Halem (2004: 3) highlighted the importance of pronunciation when he mentioned that teachers should teach the supra-segmental features of pronunciation as much as words and contexts. He also mentioned that language teachers, who separate in their teaching between pronunciation of words and context, giving more attention to the context structures and ideas than they do pronunciation, are making a great mistake.

Drama activities are useful practices as they suit learners who may feel uncomfortable 'being themselves' in a second language as claimed by Thornbury (2006:71). To Harmer (2002:271), they also help learners give life to conversation; dialogues acting out are both learning and a language producing activities”.

Therefore, learners' shyness can be minimized and their pronunciation can be improved as well through rehearsal and preparation, just as in the real theatre. Drama, as stated by Davies (1990), also strengthens the bond between thought and expression in language, in addition to providing practice of supra-segmental features of pronunciation.

Songs, chants, role-play, rhymes, miming and improvisation are all varied forms of drama activities. Songs, rhymes and chants can be practiced in a dramatic way while Stimulations are interactive forms of interactions that promote creativity through various categories of dialogues where the learners discuss a problem within a defined setting (Davies, 1990).

As gleaned from the literature and related studies, using drama in classrooms has many advantages. First and foremost, being a learner centred approach where the teacher is a guide whose talking time is minimized and learners' activities are maximized. Secondly, songs and chants enable learners to learn a new language better with "rhythm and melody" (Gül-Peker, 2010) as they provide safe environment for language practice. In addition, learning a second language can be enjoyable, stimulating and meaningful when combined with drama activities (Mordecai: 1985) as Acquisition takes place in a meaningful context through fluent, interactive practice of the language.

Drama also improves the sense of confidence of the learner in his or her ability to learn the target language as stated by Wessels (1987:10). It also prepares them for real life and unpredictability through increasing motivation as it is a break from the routine.

According to Wolf (2004:256) the application of drama “Gives opportunities for multiple modes of communication through the voice and body in interaction with others’ interpretations” in addition, Stimulations support critical thinking and creativity through building the meaning in a social context. Furthermore, drama connects the text and reader’s experiences, because learners must engage in deep negotiations with that text in preparation for any drama portrayal (Medina, 2004:273).

The problem of mixed ability classes is also addressed where high achievers can take main roles which require fluent oral communication, meanwhile low achievers compensate for their lack of linguistic ability by simple roles that include mimes rather than lengthy utterances.

1.2 Context of the problem

Although pronunciation is an important component in all language skills, yet it is not sufficiently addressed within the national curriculum. The researcher conducted a series of interviews with a number of educators (teachers and supervisors) in addition to a questionnaire where the proportion of teaching pronunciation was investigated. Both tools proved that some curricula contain pronunciation activities; however, the emphasis is mostly on