Effects of Using Drama in EFL Classroom in a Myanmar Context

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Abstract

This study began with current theories regarding the use of drama in learning English. This research tried to elucidate what benefits it offers and what challenges teachers potentially meet. In this research, there were 105 teachers from selected universities took part, and interviews with 11 university teachers were also arranged. The entity of the study discovered was the use of drama to enhance the students' motivation for learning English and lead to greater sociocultural awareness. Just like any other teaching method, apart from the significant advantages described previously, the use of drama could also have some disadvantages. After that, the research focused on techniques for using drama in the classroom. Participants responded that they occasionally used drama games to introduce a new topic to make students feel more confident and to relax, or to encourage them to interact, etc. The essential point was that the student brings their personality, experience, and opinions to the task. Roleplay with

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the second highest mean value was also applied in cooperative groups and/or students that could maintain the identity of their role throughout the class period. It proceeded with a brief description of some useful drama techniques. The research ended by offering some concluding remarks such as giving students more choices in such decisions as to the selection of textbooks and materials; types of classroom activities; the amount, type, and frequency of homework; and topics and activities in class.

Keywords: Drama techniques, EFL, Myanmar students

Introduction

In the current study, it is obviously found that it is difficult for the learners of a foreign language in Myanmar to learn the language easily and comfortably because of the appropriate environment. Moreover, the recent trend in EFL teaching indicates the necessity of integrating literature because it offers various benefits. Hadaway et al. (2002) suggested three benefits of literature use in EFL classrooms. First, it contextualizes the language. By reading literary works, students get familiar with the use of language in various situations. Second, by reading literary works, students will be provided with social factors embedded in different literary genres. Third, literary works offer the natural and meaningful application of language through the use of illustrations and descriptions. Parkinson and Thomas (2000, pp. 9-11) listed ten potential benefits that literature can provide in EFL learning and teaching: (1) cultural enrichment; (2) linguistic model; (3) mental training; (4) extension of linguistic competence; (5) authenticity; (6) memorability; (7) rhythmic resource; (8) motivating material; (9) open to interpretation; and (10) convenience. One of the most potential genres of literature to use for helping EFL learners learn effectively is drama. Besides, drama use also effectively develops creative thinking. It simplifies students of every level of education, advances their intellectual skills such as creativity, problem-solving, communication, socialization, and empathy and it provides individuals the chance for self-actualization, teamwork, and sharing their responsibilities. Owing to the many potential

benefits drama can offer, its use in EFL classrooms is highly recommended. Mattevi (2005) highlighted, "… the use of drama in the language classroom allows the teacher to present the target language in an active, communicative and contextualized way". In fact, Drama activities support the teacher to teach the four language skills. Thus, they also promote the study of some often-ignored parts of language like pronunciation and gestures. The effectiveness of using drama is also supported by Moore (2002) who posited that "Drama has an important role to play in the personal development of our students. The skills and qualities developed by students in drama, such as teamwork, creativity, leadership, and risk-taking are assets in all subjects and all areas of life. Drama stimulates the imagination and allows students to explore issues and experiences in a safe and supportive environment."

Literature Review

Keshta, (2000), Royka, (2002), Mourtaga, (2004), and Olaniyan, (2015) stated that despite its great potentials and effectiveness, using drama in EFL class still causes many difficulties to both teachers and students due to several factors. One of the ways to reduce the problems and difficulties is by getting a more comprehensive understanding of the use of drama.

1. Benefits and Challenges of Using Drama in EFL Classrooms

The absence of an appropriate environment makes it difficult for the learners of a foreign language to learn the language easily and comfortably. A dreadful need is felt to make the university environment suitable for adult learners to learn any native or foreign language. State-run universities faced dilemma situations in the early 90s. To improve teaching-learning conditions that could compete with the global challenges, however, the situation is being changed rapidly for the last two decades where concerned authorities shifted their attention.

2. Useful Drama Techniques for EFL Learning

Dramas include various types of language teaching activities, e.g., drama games, role play, mime, stimulation, scripted play, and improvisation. The

first five techniques are suggested to use before the students are assigned impulsive activities, like improvisation. To run them effectively, the students need to be prepared in advance. Each of these techniques is briefly described in the next section.

2.1 Drama Game

The drama games and activity ideas are sure to bring hours of fun and laughter to a drama team or department. These games can be used as warm-ups, team-building games, or just activities to have fun. As a teaching approach, games are appropriate for every level and age. Brandes and Phillips (1990) described drama games as "short activities that may have different objectives: they can be ice-breakers or warm-up activities.

2.2 Role-Play

The meaning of the term role-play could be interpreted from the two words that form it. The word "role" indicates that the individual taking part in the activity is playing a part (his/her own or somebody else's) in a particular condition. In short, role-play is essentially an imitation of the reality in which the students are required to act and speak properly in line with the contexts and their "roles". Roleplay is a way of deliberately constructing an approximation of aspects of a 'real-life' episode or experience, but under 'controlled' conditions where much of the episode is initiated and/or defined by the experimenter or therapist" (p. 1). It can be a very short action with a minimum setting preparation and one actor, or it may last longer with many accessories and actors.

Blatner (2009) argued that role play assists students to become more interested and involved, especially by applying knowledge to action, by solving problems, evaluating alternatives, and looking for original solutions. Role-play enables students to develop a wide range of abilities, such as initiative, self-confidence, group work, and communication in general. Thus, role-play makes students ready both for communicating in the target language and also in its cultural and social context.

2.3 Mime

Mime is the art of showing a character or telling a story using body movements and gestures without words as "a non-verbal representation of an idea or story through gesture, bodily movement, and expression" (Dougill, 1987, p. 13). Since it involves non-verbal languages, it provides the advantage that students can perform comfortably as are performing in front of their classmates without worrying about language. It is also fun and, thus, can be easily employed as a warm-up exercise. Since it employs a visual component, it helps students to memorize language for memory is extremely reinforced by visual associations. During the discussion, the foreign language can be used for assessing and evaluating performance. Sometimes a role play and a simulation tend to be confused with each other.

2.4 Scripted Play

A scripted play is a scene or sketch that is acted out by pupils in front of their classmates and the teacher. The sketches can be either original or written by students. It is a great way to reinforce the use of the foreign language because, before it is performed, the script should be read, in a group or individually. Students should also analyze and discuss it and prepare the equipment they need to act it out. After that, they must memorize the script and interpret it based on the director's guidance. Scrivener, 1994: 69 point out that scripted play provides the opportunity to improve speaking and interaction with other people as well as enriches the learners' vocabulary and functional language like agreeing or disagreeing, apologizing, refusing, offering help, etc because the preparation and the performance extensively require language uses.

2.5 Improvisation

Improvisation is a spontaneous action without any script or rehearsal with minimal instruction or framework from the teacher. Wessels (1987) believed that "… improvisation taps the students' already existing command of the language and tests their communicative strategies" (p. 85). The teacher can provide exercises with the use of improvisation involving the whole class or

small groups. To do so, he or she should create the context in which the students are involved. Having got the theme, the students can spontaneously participate in the activity. Yet, students should be prepared for improvisation activities with a suitable warm-up for "even native speakers can find improvisation quite daunting without adequate warm-up activities" (Wessels, 1987, p. 85).

Since drama is essentially an act of communicating meaning, students are actively engaged while learning through drama. They take part in conversations or practices that require them to use their imagination and foreign language in contextualized situations. When such activity is planned well enough, students will also find it interesting. Such motivating learning activity will surely encourage and help them develop their language skills and to acquire the language more deeply and naturally. Owens and Barber (1998) argued that drama is not the only right technique to learn, but it is one of the ways that keep the lessons interesting because it attracts students' attention so that they do not remain quietly seated. It also facilitates variation in the learning process since it can employ different learning styles, functions, and group work forms. Clipson-Boyles (1998) accentuated that although teaching English with drama mostly assists listening and speaking, it also produces processes related to writing and reading. In short, the employment of drama in the classroom provides the students with an opportunity to learn by doing and experiencing rather than only inactive listening and repeating. Several authors have outlined the benefits of using drama in language teaching. Boudreault (2010) summarized that drama use in language teaching facilitates: (1) the acquisition of meaningful, fluent interaction in the target language; (2) the assimilation of a whole range of the features of pronunciation and prosody in a contextualized and interactional fashion; (3) the acquisition of new fully contextualized vocabulary and structure; (4) an improved sense of students' confidence in their ability to learn the target language; (5) an opportunity to develop the students' imagination; (6) an opportunity to increase independent thinking; (7) exercises in critical and creative thinking; (8) the advancement of skills of cooperation and social awareness and understanding; and (9) the chance

for a healthy release of emotion in a safe setting which can work to relieve the tension of learning in a foreign language.

Research Objectives

The research tried to clarify what benefits it offers and what challenges teachers potentially meet. This study also investigated the factors that are necessary for establishing an effective language learning environment at universities.

Methodology

Statistical analysis was performed by the use of a concrete methodology and organizing data into categories based on emerging themes. Each category was, and simple descriptive analysis was used to analyze the questionnaire data and to provide an account of the practices and embraced views of the teachers involved in the interview survey.

1. Population and Samples

Altogether 105 teachers from selected universities in Myanmar took part in this research. Participants were working at English departments of different universities such as the Arts and Science universities, universities of Computer studies, universities of Education, universities of Economics, Engineering universities, and universities of Medicine. Then, 15 interviews with the university teachers were also arranged. The teachers were asked to volunteer to participate in this study. Table 1 illustrates the gender distribution of the research cohort.

Table 1

Gender Distribution of the Research Cohort (105 teachers)

SN	Gender	Sample size and composition of gender of the teachers	
		Number	%
1	Male	31	29.52%
2	Female	74	70.47%
	Total	105	100%

2. Research Design

The study comprised two main phases. Phase one was for detailed interviews for the teachers that were of a semi-structured nature. The questions focused on the teachers' perceptions towards the benefits and challenges of using drama in EFL classrooms. Phase two consisted of the completion of a self-administered questionnaire for the teachers.

3. Instrument(s) and Procedures

Information of a more qualitative nature included detailed interviews that were of a semi-structured nature in order to enable data gathering related to specific beliefs and issues of particular significance to teachers. The purpose of this phase was to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the issues emergent from phase one. Interview data were transcribed, analyzed and interpreted, via thematic content analysis, for emergent themes reflective of participants' visions in higher education.

Results

In this research, the benefits and challenges of using drama in EFL classrooms have been investigated to provide a better understanding of the practice.

Table 2

Sample Interview Responses Towards Benefits and Challenges of Using Drama in EFL Classrooms (n=11)

SN	Interviewee	Sample Responses
1	Interviewee 1	Drama can help the teacher to achieve 'reality' in several ways. It can overcome the students' resistance to learning the new language: • by making the learning of the new language an enjoyable experience • by setting realistic targets for the students to aim for • by creative 'slowing down' of real experience

Table 2 (Continued)

SN	Interviewee	Sample Responses
		• by linking the language-learning experience with the student's own experience of life.
		Thus, drama use in language teaching facilitates the acquisition of meaningful, fluent interaction in the target language.
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		• by making the learning of the new language an enjoyable experience
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		• by creative 'slowing down' of real experience
		• by linking the language-learning experience with the student's own experience of life.
		Thus, drama use in language teaching facilitates the acquisition of meaningful, fluent interaction in the target language.
2	Interviewee 2	One of the advantages of incorporating drama in the classroom is the assimilation of a whole range of the features of pronunciation and prosody in a contextualized and interactional fashion.
3	Interviewee 3	Teaching language through drama was more effective than using traditional methods. Drama helps to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communication games, the acquisition of new fully contextualized vocabulary and structure.
4	Interviewee 4	Drama use in language teaching facilitates an improved sense of students' confidence in their ability to learn the target language. However, shy students may find drama frustrating.
5	Interviewee 5	Drama use in language teaching facilitates an opportunity to develop the students' imagination.

Table 2 (Continued)

SN	Interviewee	Sample Responses
6	Interviewee 6	Drama in its purest form gives the student several avenues to self-awareness and opportunities to increase independent thinking.
7	Interviewee 7	Drama use in language teaching facilitates exercises in critical and creative thinking.
8	Interviewee 8	Drama as a tool in communicative language teaching not only deals with spoken utterances but also examines the wider aspects of communication and is a whole-person approach: it encompasses and develops the kinesic features of communication (gestures, movement, and facial expression), self-expressiveness, creativity, advancement of skills of cooperation and social awareness and understanding.
9	Interviewee 9	By using drama in language teaching, students can express the need for social change, communicate a universal theme, recreating and interpret information, ideas, and emotions. Students also have the chance for a healthy release of emotion in a safe setting which can
10	Interviewee 10	We can sum up the benefits of drama in language teaching as follows: • the acquisition of meaningful, fluent interaction in the target language; • the assimilation of a whole range of pronunciation and prosodic features in a fully contextualized and interactional manner; • the fully contextualized acquisition of new vocabulary and structure; an improved sense of confidence in the student in his or her ability to learn the target language.

Table 2 (Continued)

SN	Interviewee	Sample Responses
11	Interviewee 11	Disadvantages of using Drama in ELT • Time-consuming. • Teacher preparation time is big. • Students may not want to participate in acting all the time. • Hard to control students since they can have too much fun. It encourages incorrect forms of language as long as the teacher is not encouraged to correct mistakes immediately so as not to discourage students' work to relieve the tension of learning in a foreign language.

According to qualitative results, participants stated that the drama approach offers many benefits in language education because drama (1) directs students' awareness of how people communicate in different communication modes and improves communicative behaviors; (2) helps students develop their English abilities: speech acts; pronunciation and intonation, and discourse strategies; provides a genuine context for communication and makes the target language more real. Additionally, based on the data, it can be summed up as follows: (1) Students are able to express themselves in ways other than through words; (2) Drama activities offer community-building opportunities in a classroom where there are students of varying levels of language proficiency; (3) Teachers are also able to use non-verbal cues to demonstrate caring and concern for students in a way that more formal language instruction does not allow, bound as it is by the physical constraints and the pressure to understand; (4) Non-verbal drama activities provide an excellent means of releasing the stress of language learning; (5) Students, often hesitant to speak out, can become confident when the language expectation is removed entirely; (6) "Total Physical Response is enhanced through drama activities; (7) In all drama work, power dynamics shift as the teacher becomes a participant alongside

the students; (8) Non-verbal drama activities transfer directly to verbal ones, and subsequent verbal interchanges are triggered by these non-verbal activities". In addition to these views, several current empirical studies also proved the benefits of using drama in EFL classrooms. The study also revealed that the use of drama enhanced the students' motivation for learning English and lead to greater sociocultural awareness. Just like any other teaching method, apart from the significant advantages described previously, the use of drama can also have some disadvantages.

Regarding drama techniques used for EFL teaching in a university setting were shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Questionnaire Responses on the Drama Techniques Used for EFL Teaching (n=105)

SN		Drama techniques	Responses		
			Mean	SD	Meaning
1	Drama Game	We use drama games to introduce a new topic to make them feel more confident, etc. e.g. • Taking a picture of each student and glue it to a piece of paper.	2.97	1.07	Occasionally
		We use drama games to relax or to encourage students to interact, etc. e.g. • Having students go through magazines, newspapers, etc. • Having them cut out pictures and characters.	2.61	1.09	Occasionally
		Average	2.79	1.09	Occasionally

Table 3 (Continued)

SN	Drama techniques		Responses		
			Mean	SD	Meaning
2	Role-Play	This technique can be done in cooperative groups and/or students can maintain the persona of their role throughout the class period. Students are more engaged as they try to respond to the material from the perspective of their character.	3.08	1.04	Occasionally
		To succeed in the use of role-playing in language learning, there are seven steps to follow. First, the teacher has to create a situation that meets the students' needs, interests, age, and previous experience. Second, the teacher develops the role play in line with the student's level of competence in the foreign language. Third, the teacher analyses the linguistic factors students should prepare to properly get involved in the performance and let them acquire them. In the fifth step, the students are given precise role descriptions and information. Sixth, such roles are assigned and the role play is represented. Finally, the follow-up activity is dedicated to debriefing, in which students can express their opinion about the performance.	2.48	1.03	Rarely
		Average	2.78	1.08	Occasionally

Table 3 (Continued)

SN	Drama techniques		Responses		
			Mean	SD	Meaning
3	Mime	In mime, the students use movement, gestures, and expressions to act a story or some ideas without using any words.	2.00	0.85	Rarely
		Although words are not used during mime, verbal language is employed when an explanation is required, both with the teacher's instructions and students' debates, which are made in pairs or groups.	1.98	0.86	Rarely
		Average	1.99	0.85	Rarely
4	Scripted Play	In this activity, students should also analyze and discuss it and prepare the equipment they need to act it out. After that, they must memorize the script and interpret it based on the director's guidance to provide the opportunity to improve speaking and interaction with other people as well as to enrich the learners' vocabulary and functional language.	2.59	0.93	Occasionally
		A scripted drama, in the context of literature teaching, is an extended written text that has been carefully crafted for its performers – taking a story and making its twists and turns accessible to them.	2.23	0.96	Rarely

Table 3 (Continued)

SN	Drama techniques		Responses		
			Mean	SD	Meaning
5	Improvisation	In improvisation, the students employ their ideas and imaginations to collaborate. They are also encouraged to actively participate.	2.41	1.01	Rarely
		Improvisation is the ability to take existing pieces and put them together in a new combination for a purpose. The pieces could be bits of information about a problem or they could be parts of a melody. Teachers or students apply tools or methods to these pieces in a very flexible manner.	2.07	0.96	Rarely
	Average		2.24	1.00	Rarely

Note. 1.00-1.75=Never, 1.76-2.50=Rarely, 2.51-3.25=Occasionally, 3.26-4.00=Frequently.

According to quantitative results, participants state that they occasionally use drama games to introduce a new topic to make students feel more confident and to relax, or to encourage them to interact, etc. (Mean=2.79). The essential point is that the student brings their personality, experience, and opinions to the task. Roleplay which has got second highest mean value (Mean=2.78) was applied in cooperative groups and/or students that can maintain the identity of their role throughout the class period. Students are more engaged as they try to respond to the material from the perspective of

their character. Consequently, it helps the teacher construct the opportunity for the students to have more chances to communicate and practice their language abilities in the real world with their engagement and enjoyment. Win and Liu (2021) stated that it is necessary that universities provide a favorable environment where students get enough stimuli for learning the English language.

Discussion

Based on the research issues found from the analysis, first, shy students may find drama frustrating. To solve this problem, the teacher should find a way to help such students overcome their fears and shyness so that they are willing to actively participate. In comparing with the research "Teaching Poetry to Increase the Comprehension of University Students: Myanmar Context", it also discusses that teachers need to get out of the traditional word-by-word focus on meaning, verbal inflection, and figure of speech. Their role is not to impose authoritative interpretations but to develop individual responses, to be nonprescriptive, non-didactic. They should alternatively view the continuity of the poem as a whole, as though it were an oil painting Second, the teacher often needs extra time to plan the lessons rigorously. Wessels asserted: "… drama requires meticulous planning and structuring." and also "create a learning situation which will ensure a constant supply of stimuli to the students, which will keep them active and alert." (Wessels, 1987, p.15). The teacher, therefore, must be always well prepared for the lessons. They should anticipate if the drama happens to last too long or to end too early. The third disadvantage is that correcting students' mistakes during a drama performance could be difficult. Mistakes are a natural part of language learning. Concerning this, the teacher should employ such feedback techniques for correcting mistakes that do not interrupt and discourage the students during the drama performance. Win et al. (2020) proposed that the teachers who have tried to accumulate literature in the curricula have observed that literary texts add a new dimension to the teaching of EFL. Short stories, for example, come to great help for learners

to learn the four skills-reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Finally, discipline should be kept during lessons to avoid disorder and misinterpretation. During a dramatic activity, it is possible that the class becomes noisy. Some students could possibly scream or shout. To anticipate such conditions, the teacher should have techniques to settle the students down and avoid them changing the dramatic activities into a confusing situation. Holden (1982) proposed the following five-point plan for integrating drama activities into the lesson. First of all, the teacher clarifies the idea, theme, or problem to the students and arranges any preliminary work to ensure that the students exactly know what to do. Secondly, the students discuss in groups, plan what they are going to do, and are precisely aware the plan should be executed. Then, they try out in groups with various interpretations until they find the best one. Mary and Phiewma, (2020) verified that the students in Myanmar tended to express a strong belief that their teachers should have the responsibility of class management. The fourth stage could concern students showing their interpretation or solution to one or more other groups. Finally, the students discuss their show or solution in groups or with the rest of the class. This discussion can serve as a form of valuation for the students of their work. Such evaluation, which is carried out in the target language, provides more opportunity for the students to practice their target language and to feel that the scene they have just been working is satisfactory. The discussion session could be moderated either by the teacher or by a nominated student. It could also be conducted in groups under the guidance of a selected group leader, and this would undoubtedly strengthen the amount of individual student talking time. The results indicate that English drama was effective to employ for learning specific English expressions and it was beneficial for both students with high and low English proficiency. Students can also use the expressions learned in drama in different situations. Even though these disadvantages are less in number compared to the advantages, they are worth considering as anticipation so that they can be prevented or be properly solved. The study "Teaching Short Stories in the EFL Classroom: Myanmar Context" also suggests that teachers should give students more choices in such decisions

as to the selection of textbooks and materials; types of classroom activities; the amount, type, and frequency of homework; and topics and activities in class.

Recommendations

The current research has shown more potentials for using drama in EFL classrooms. Since drama is essentially an activity of portraying oneself or other people through actions and words, in language classrooms it promotes students to use and develop their language skills, thinking skills, and creativity in an interesting way. Another factor that makes drama beneficial to use is that it promotes student-centered learning because performing a drama often necessitates several stages of team preparation, during which the students cooperate with other students. Besides getting more talking time during performance preparation, it also improves students' maturity and motivation. Discussions can be even conducted after a performance. This will also provide each student to practice communicating in the target language in a natural context. Various literature reviews have shown that using drama offers many benefits. Based on these, several authors highly recommended the use of drama in EFL classrooms. Also, many current empirical studies clarified the benefits of using drama in language education. Like any other teaching approach, the drama also has some potential difficulties. However, using good preparation, they could be anticipated, reduced, or avoided. To succeed in the use of drama, the teachers should first analyze what section of the lesson can be interestingly learned through drama. Based on the students' readiness, the teacher should also decide the best type of dramatic activity to use: drama game, role-play, or mime, etc. In addition, the teacher should also make proper preparation, and this research includes a general guideline proposed by Holden (1982) to do this.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should be investigated such as the ability of games and drama activities to develop listening and speaking skills, the potentiality of games and drama activities to match the characteristics of the new

generations, or effects of drama activities on EFL students' speaking skills in Myanmar Context.

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