THE USE OF DRAMA IN MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING: DOES IT HAVE AN EFFECT ON STUDENTS' LEARNING?

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Abstract- Many researchers believe the use of drama in education helps students to enhance various skills in language learning, especially oral communication. This paper reports finding from action research using drama in modern language learning, implemented for French language students in one of the universities in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia. 15 female students with 56 hours experience in learning French are involved in this study which uses creative drama as a medium of communication in exercising the use of past tense in learning a foreign language. Students participated in four series of drama activities with three particular themes related to their learning. The results from the pre and post-test from the drama activities in the group, in addition to individual oral assessment, based on French International Oral Examination (DELF A2), revealed statistically a positive significance. The result from the written activities for the dialogues also showed a positive significance. Hence, the finding suggests strong support for utilizing drama in developing students' skill in oral and written communication as well as in strengthening students' understanding of grammar learning.

Keywords- Action research, drama in education, foreign language learning, oral and written communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

A social constructivist theorist proclaimed that language development depends entirely on social interaction which supports individuals to build knowledge that is meaningful to them [1]. In his notion of Zone of Proximal Development, he highlighted that a child has the potential to go beyond her/his present level within her/his surrounding. Aligned with this theory, drama which surrounds students with social interaction, offers opportunities to construct, to increase and to strengthen the knowledge of the language learned. Based on this theory and on the reflection of students' difficulty in understanding the use of the verb-tense, past tense, as well a problem in oral communication, this study is carried out. Furthermore, many researchers claimed that interaction between students in a meaningful context helps to use the language naturally and communicatively [2 – 4]. In addition, drama is an effective communicative approach in language learning [2], [9]; learner-centered [5, 11]; an active learning [6 - 7] and goal-oriented learning [8]. Moreover, it is encouraged in teaching-learning a second or foreign language [8].

Drama as explained by Holden [1981, as cited in 10], provides an opportunity for students to express verbal and / or non-verbal expressions using imagination and memory while portraying oneself or another person in an imaginary situation. Thus, it puts students in immediate contact with the language learned in situation. Studies have shown that using drama in teaching/learning a target language (TL) is a valuable tool in helping students develop their learning skills as it integrates three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor [4]. As a tool in TL, drama integrates the four core skills: listening, communicating, reading and writing [4], and it also enhances students' social, intellectual and the linguistic skills [4], social-cultural and linguistic [11]. Furthermore, it has the power to integrate student's different styles of learning which facilitates the communication [8] due to the collaboration involved in producing a make-believe product which is inter-related to their world of imagination. Hence, the process of their learning at the same time would be fun, exciting, and meaningful [3 - 4] since students are engrossed in their world of 'make believe'. Thus, it helps to facilitate and motivate [3] the learning of the TL.

Contrary to other techniques of teaching, drama places students in a variety of language function in a different situation of communication (Kramch, 1993; Paulson 1974, cited in 11] that relate to real-life situation of communication. Furthermore, drama encompasses, at the same time, the linguistic and the culture that stimulate actively language in use [7]. Thus, it gives students a strong reason to communicate in a meaningful context where there is a focus on "how to do things" rather than "how to describe thing" [Moulding, 1978, cited in 12]. As a result, it can heighten students' problem solving, critical thinking and social skills [1]. Also, the repetition process during the rehearsal enhances as well various proficiency in oral communication in a natural way: listening and responding skills [4, 13], reading [4, 11] and pronunciation [15]. From a psychological perspective, drama facilitates oral communication as it can increase confidence, motivation, naturalness, empathy and reduce the feeling of rejection [12] because students have the opportunity to use the language in a meaningful situation that involve physical activity and emotion [3 - 4] and strong support from the group [8]. Consequently, it encourages their social interaction which could further increase their self-esteem [4, 12 -

13], develop their interpersonal relationship and improve the communication skills [11 - 12]. In one of his study, [11] concluded that the participants showed a positive progress in oral communication skill while doing the drama and [16] postulated that her finding also has a significant influence in developing students' communication skill in the TL even with a limited vocabulary. Their results were in line with conclusions from other researchers e.g. [4,[6, 12 - 13]. In addition, [6] concluded that students who performed in the drama delivered 'much more than that was learned.' Drama is also found to be an appropriate technique in vocabulary and grammar learning as well in writing activity of the TL. It improve student's decoding, vocabulary, syntax, discourse and metacognitive knowledge [McMaster, 1998, cited in 6], [10], and writing [14, 17, 18]. According to [10], his study revealed that teaching language tenses are more effective by using drama rather than using the traditional method. Whereas [17] claimed that drama is significant in helping students to grasp the particular traits of the language such as lexis, syntax, and structure which are generally difficult to learn in classroom teaching-learning. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, three related questions are selected:

1. Does the use of drama help students to develop their target language learning?
2. Does the use of drama help students to develop their communication ability?
3. Does the use of drama help students to develop their writing skills?

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants

This action research involved 15 UMT student-participants from the tourism program. They were between the ages of 21 (66.7%) to 22 (33.3%) years old. All the participants were in the same class with 56 hours (two semesters) of experiences in learning French as a foreign language. Most of the participants have a problem in learning French as their target language particularly in understanding the past tense as well as in communication. The students were divided into five groups with three participants in each group.

2.2. Data collecting and data analysis

Three themes related to students' environment were identified upon reflecting the use of drama for the purpose of this research: a picnic, a visit, and activity during the weekend. The pre-test for the oral individual is taken at the end of their second semester while the post-test, took place two weeks after the fourth presentation. Both the pre-test and post-test are allocated 10 minutes, for each participant. The theme of their oral individual, pre-test, and post-test, is related to students' life and environment, based on the oral individual for the DELF A2. In the oral individual, the students had to perform a dialog with the instructor. Students are given 5 minutes to prepare their dialog. However, they did not know the respond from the instructor and vice-versa. For the drama presentation, the participants are asked, in the beginning, to perform their drama in the last 40 minutes of two hours of their learning session. However, due to the time taken to finish the dialog, the participants had to perform their drama in the next day, during the lunch break between 1 – 2 pm. The participants are given freedom to create their performance based on the theme, with 10 minutes time allocated. They also need to use the past tense in their dialog. The performing is held in the open space where other students also had the opportunity to watch in three consecutive weeks with one theme each week. Additionally, the participants also accomplished a fourth performance where they could choose one of the three themes. However, for the fourth performance, the participants are given three weeks of preparation time with 15 - 20 minutes time allocated for the performing on the stage. The grading for the weekly presentation of each group is assessed by the French instructor while for the fourth performance, by experienced French assessor from another school. All the grades given for the drama performance and the written dialogue are based on the predetermined criteria/rubrics which has been discussed beforehand by the assessors (French instructors) and the researcher. 60% of the grading was in the language criteria. The four written dialogues for the drama presentation were examined by two experienced assessors from different schools. The total mark for each written dialogue was 50 and for the drama presentation was 100. The reliability analysis between the two assessors was quite high with alfa Cronbach $\alpha = .95$ and $\alpha = .91$ and the analysis for the inter-correlation between them also showed a strong correlation ($r = \rangle .9$, $p = \langle 0.01$). The collected data is analyzed using SPSS version 21. A Paired Sample T-test is used in analyzing the data for the pre and post-test of the oral individual, drama performing (1 to 4) and the written dialogue for the drama performing (1 to 4).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: does the use of drama help students to develop their target language learning?

The mean, Table 1, from the drama presentation showed an improvement of students' ability from the first to the fourth presentation (M = 58.8, 67.0, 69.9, 84.20).

	M	SD	SE
Drama 1	58.80	2.48	.641
Drama 2	67.00	4.09	1.056
Drama 3	69.60	8.55	2.208
Drama 4	84.20	6.19	1.598

Table 1: Mean and SD for the drama presentation (N=15)

The results of T-test, Table 2, also showed significant results of $p<0.05$ between drama performances 1 and 2, 3 and 4. However, there were no significant differences between the drama performances 2 and 3, although there was a difference in the mean between the presentation 2 and 4. Nonetheless, the different was too small to be counted as positive significant in the T-test analysis. Thus, it clearly showed that the performance of the drama 2 is better than 1, and 4 is better than 3.

	Paired Differences					
	M	SD	SE	t	df	Sig.
1 & 2	-8.20	5.61	1.45	-5.66	14	.000**
2 & 3	-2.60	6.60	1.70	-1.53	14	.149
3 & 4	-14.60	3.44	.89	-16.44	14	.000**

Table 2: Paired Sample T-test for the drama presentation

Our result from this study revealed that drama plays a significant role in helping students in acquiring and developing the TL learning. Through drama, students are more engaged in their learning as it is focus on students and futhermore, it requires students to get involved in the action, physically and sentimentally, which make the learning more enjoyable. Our finding is compatible with the finding of [e.g. 3 - 6].

Other resilient factor which improve students learning is due to the repeated process of rehearsing the written text which benefit students to strengthen the linguistiques elements in language learning. The strong support and resilient teamwork from each member of the group also a strong contributing factors in ensuring the success of learning process in the drama. These factors instill in them the sense of belonging which supports the building of confidence, motivation, naturalness, empathy and reduces the feeling of rejection. Thus, the result from the current study supported other findings that claimed drama is a significant tool in learning a TL. Our study substantiates the findings of [e.g. 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 -16]. Additionally, in line with [3] and [7], we also noticed that students really enjoyed performing the drama even though the process was difficult in the beginning.

RQ2: does the use of drama help students to develop their communication ability?

The mean for the oral individual, Table 3, showed a wide difference between the pre-test and post-test with SD 5.18 and 2.50. Whereas the finding from the T-test analysis fro the oral individual, Table 4, also showed a positive significance at 0.05 which proved that the post oral individual is higher than the pre-oral individual [$t(14) = -4.445$, $p < .05$]. Therefore, it gave a concrete support that the participants in this action research showed an improvement in their oral communication skill.

	M	SD
Pre-oral	19.30	5.18
Post-oral	24.63	2.50

Table 3: Mean and SD for the oral individual (N=15)

	Paired Differences					
	M	SD	SE	t	df	Sig.
Pre-Post Oral	-5.33	4.65	1.20	-4.445	14	0.001**

Table 4: Paired Sample T-test for the oral individual (N=15)

The result of our study validates other findings [e.g. 2 – 7, 9, 11, 16] that drama encourages students to communicate because the language use becomes more meaningful, language and culture are infused together and moreover, learning through drama requires action involving sentiments and physical movements which help students to connect their environment and their world of imagination in the learning. Additionally, we also noticed that students' pronunciation improved from one drama to another due to the repeated process of reading and memorizing the written text. Another important factor that encourages students in the oral communication is the strong support and collaboration that exists within the group.

Students also exhibited a good progress and more confident while doing the oral individual for the post-test even without using the same theme as in the drama. Their interaction with the instructor using the present and the past-tense structure was rated relatively good and seemed natural. Only one student out of 15 received a moderate mark. This finding gives a concrete support to the benefits of drama in enhancing students' ability in oral communication [e.g. 7, 11, 12, 16].

RQ3: does the use of drama help students to develop their ability in writing skills?

The result from the analysis of mean in the dialogue writing , Table 5, showed that the mean scores for the dialogues from drama 2 were higher than the dialogues in drama 1 and the dialogues in drama 4 was higher than the dialogues in drama 3. However, the mean score of the dialogues in drama 3 was lower than the dialogues in drama 2.

	Pair	M	SD	SE
Pair 1	1	37.70	2.06	.532
	2	38.20	2.40	.619
Pair 2	2	38.20	2.40	.619
	3	37.90	3.91	1.009
Pair 3	3	37.90	3.91	1.009
	4	41.80	3.67	.947

Table 5: Mean and SD of Paired Sample in dialogue writing

The paired T-test, Table 6, also revealed a positive significance of <0.05 for the written dialogues in pair 3 and 4 (t = -2.976, p ‹ .05). While there was no significant difference for the dialogues in pair 1 and 2, 2 and 3, (t = - .913, p › .05, t = .352, p › .05).

The present finding showed that drama stimulates and encourages students to write: they showed a good progress in their dialogue writing especially in the use of vocabulary, expression, and the structure. They also made progress in using the past-tense. Compared to the oral communication, written activities were more difficult particularly in the beginning: it was a slow process to improve students' competence in writing. Nevertheless, vigorous and consistent support from the instructors is very important. Accordingly, this finding supports other findings that the use of drama enhances the linguistic part of language learning [e.g. 7, 10, 12, 17, 18]. Hence, in line with [6], the use of drama in teaching-learning the TL helps students to learn and get more than the normal language learning itself. In the drama, they learn by doing: they communicate, support each other, develop and strengthen their knowledge of the language, enhance the critical thinking, the creativity, the social skills, etc.

CONCLUSION

This action research study aims to find whether drama in education plays a significant role in foreign language learning. Our finding reveals that the technique helps students to enhance their oral communication and strengthen their ability in writing activity (dialogue). Additionally, it also enriches and reinforces their linguistic knowledge of the TL (vocabulary – word and meaning, sentences structures). Most of the students who participated in this action research showed an overall good progress in their TL learning (in this case, French language). Students' result in their TL learning at the end of their level three came out as 'something surprising' as most of them were poor to medium students. Our study also reveals that the use of drama or role play in teaching-learning a foreign language can enhance students' confidence and motivation in participating in classroom activities. It also helps them to strengthen their understanding as well as retaining the knowledge learned. Due to several limitations in our study, more thorough study related to drama in education should be done especially in student's vocabulary enhancement, ability in writing activity including the verb tense and structure. A more profound study of students' oral communication should also be examined. We would like to suggest also a study related to gender different in using drama in education since in our study, we did not have a gender difference in the group. Still, our finding could add to the empirical evidence in this area of the study which supports the use of drama in education.

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