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Enhancing Students' Oral Production by Using Drama Activities

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Abstract

The aim of this action-research was to enhance students' oral production by using drama activities. It was developed in a rural public school in the municipality of El Carmen de Viboral with 38 graders. The Genre-Based Approach (GBA) guided the action strategies of this study, including three stages: modeling, joint construction, and independent construction. Data was collected through informal talks, focus groups, tests, and personal journals. Findings showed the usefulness of drama activities to improve students' oral production, having direct positive impacts on their performance, integrating students' interests, being an encouraging methodology for students, and allowing to use a wide range of teaching strategies. Moreover, problems regarding extracurricular activities, lack of time, disposition, basic knowledges, and confidence were found.

Keywords: Drama activities, Genre-Based Approach, Oral production, EFL.

Degree requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree in foreign language education (English- French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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Preface

I am an undergraduate student of foreign languages at the University of Antioquia, and I am passionate about performing arts such as theater and music. The desire to undertake this research arose from my early observations and conversations with students. I observe that students enjoyed learning English when they were in touch with music, movies, or any other material related to their daily life. Besides, during the classes they were actively engaged in exercises of representation and interpreting a certain character. Finally, I could not ignore the context of the Institution, specifically, being in El Carmen de Viboral which is one of the most important municipalities in the country in terms of culture and arts. For this academic work, I identify a problem associated with students' low oral production in the EFL class and propose an action plan involving several drama activities to try to improve the situation. This action research was conducted with 38 eleventh graders of a rural public institution from El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia. This paper is aimed primarily at teachers who are interested in using performing arts to teach and learn a foreign language.

Leonel Muñoz Arenas.

El Carmen, Antioquia. December 10th, 2022.

Description of the Context

Institución Educativa Santa María (IESM) was a rural public institution from El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia, Colombia that offered education services from pre-primary to high school levels. The institution worked under the model of full-day school modality and followed a traditional methodology. Its mission was to educate people with a spirit of self-improvement, responsibility, respect, and engagement with environmental sustainability. As for its vision by 2020 the institution expects to be recognized with a holistic pedagogical approach and an integral management of quality, educating integral, competent, and autonomous people for peace and social and cultural improvement.

Regarding the class of English, students started learning the language from the 3rd grade of primary school, and at the end of high school (11th grade) they took three hours of English weekly. English teachers designed a specific program for their students named “Malla Curricular” including the content, objectives, and competences for each level. As supporting material, the institution counted on a library and a systems room where students could search for English language physical and audiovisual resources. Besides, English classes used the textbook *English Please!* suggested by the Ministry of Education to support and design classes and different activities for students.

Participants of this study were 38 students, the cooperating teacher (CT). Students were youngsters between 15 and 18 years old. Most of them lived in strata 2 and 3. The cooperating teacher taught in 11th grade, in high school, and 3rd grade, in primary school. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Humanities Spanish and English, a specialization in Bilingual Education

and a master's degree in Learning and Teaching of a Second Language. Moreover, she had experience in teaching to kids, and in teaching Spanish and English to young people, all in public institutions.

I observed that a big part of the class had to be translated to Spanish, as the students' linguistic level was not appropriate for listening to other people in fluent English. Besides, students' oral skills were limited as they did not have enough class chances to orally produce in the target language.

Statement of the Problem

I can remark that this 11th grade students did not have enough chances to improve their oral skills in English. Although the English class methodology was well planned, there was not enough space for students to produce in the target language. The methodology applied in the English class allowed the use of music as authentic material for promoting students' language and critical skills (Informal talk, March 22nd, 2022). Nonetheless, the activities proposed did not involve students to work on their oral production skill. They always spoke in Spanish, and their language learning focused exclusively on vocabulary acquisition (Observations February 18th, March 8th, and March 22nd, 2022). In this sense, I considered that although the methodology of using music was very appropriate, the activities that could emerge from it could be more productive in terms of language production.

Applying a methodology that included drama in this context was not only meaningful, but enjoyable for students. First, according to Farokhi and Hashemi (2011, p.923) to make students familiar to arts is an amusing part of authentic learning; it integrates social, creative, emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects for children or youngsters' development. Second,

during one of my implementations, students successfully performed a puppet show, producing an oral text confidently (Implementation, May 13th, 2022). They created a dialogue regarding different topics of their interest, and each student spoke in English for some time allowing them to react positively and affirming that they really learnt vocabulary and improved their pronunciation. Therefore, I found drama very adequate to develop not only language skills, but also social, creative, emotional, intellectual, and physical abilities as Farokhi and Hashemi (2011) suggested.

There was enough action research that stated the usefulness of arts to learn a foreign language. Some studies such as Vasquez (1981), Urso (2006), De Jesús (2016), Ludke (2018), supported arts in general as a useful tool for promoting language learning, addressing students' needs and interests meanwhile. Moreover, some authors such as Caín (2019) found that language students learnt how to express ideas and feelings by being part of drama activities. According to the previous theory, using arts in the EFL classroom is helpful for both intellectual and emotional aspects of language education.

Finally, developing this type of action in a rural institution of El Carmen de Viboral would throw different and complementary results. Performing arts are a powerful expression, strongly related to the different students' interests. Besides, it is a medium for expressing what human beings want to communicate, and so the target language acquisition could be more spontaneous for students. Thus, bearing in mind these class issues, I designed an action research proposal aimed at identifying how the use of performing arts activities enhanced 11th graders' English oral production.

Theoretical Background

This action research focuses on the concepts of oral production and performing arts, specifically drama. This section presents, first, definitions and characteristics of oral production and its assessment, moving then to the concept of drama belonging to performing arts, and its importance in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), finishing with a description of the Genre-Based theory as the instructional model guiding the project.

According to Sanabria and Silva (2017) oral production in EFL is, in general, the process in which learners express their ideas and thoughts, that is, the activity of speaking, and although difficult, the speaking skill is likely the most important one when learning a language. As Hernández and Hugo (2019) conclude, oral production is that important because “it is an instrument that helps each person to create assertive communication in different contexts.” (p. 24). In the same line of Hernández and Hugo (2019), this action research envisioned oral production from a communicative approach, namely, a skill that has communicative goals. Additionally, Vaca and Gómez (2017) argue that speaking in EFL should aim to accomplish communicative goals, understanding how the language works, and how and when to adequate the speech to the circumstances of real life.

Regarding oral production, there are several sets of elements to measure its development and proficiency, depending on the characteristics that each author considers important. In the case of the Institutional English Language Testing System IELTS (2007, as cited in Hernández and Hugo (2019, p.25) those relevant aspects are fluency and coherence; lexical resources,

grammatical range, and accuracy; and pronunciation. From another perspective, Sanabria and Silva (2017, p.26) state that the features of the oral discourse that students are supposed to develop are: contractions, vowel reductions, and elision; the use of slangs and idioms; stress, rhythm, and intonation; and the need to interact with at least another speaker. Nevertheless, this specific research finds Levis' (2006) characteristics to assess speaking more appropriate to the communicative approach.

Levis (2006) mentions the following criteria when assessing speaking: intelligibility, comprehensibility, and fluency along with speech rate. The first one is primarily an issue of decoding, in other words, the listener's ability to transcribe the speaker's message. The second one has to do with semantics, that messages have a comprehensible meaning in their context. The third one is related to the speakers' ability to access the grammatical system of the language to communicate their thoughts without unusual effort and at a reasonable speed.

Ultimately, working on oral production is not only very important, but also challenging. Talking about the importance of working on the oral skills, it can be found that, according to Segura (2012, p.19) the ability to speak a language has become a synonymous with knowing that language, and there are many daily situations where people need speaking for communicating through the phone, answering questions, asking for directions, meetings with friends, and so on. Now talking about the challenges of working on speaking, Segura (2012) assures that it is common to find that learners get frustrated for studying the language for years without being able to speak fluently. Besides, as stated by Madrid and McLaren (2006, as cited in Sanabria & Silva, 2017, p.26), oral production is the most difficult skill in EFL because of the fear students may feel or the lack of knowledge to express their ideas.

Regarding performing arts, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (n.d., para. 1) states that they are integrated by music, dance, and drama, as cultural expressions that reflect human creativity. In addition, according to Doerr and Bekiari (2008), there is one essential characteristic that distinguishes performing arts from other cultural fields: “the process of perception necessarily covers in time and space the process of performance” (p.8). Different to arts like literature, painting, or sculpture, the product of these arts can be only appreciated when they are performed. In the case of this action research, the interest is focused on performing arts, particularly drama that is considered as the most useful one for EFL learning.

In the educational field, “Drama is any activity in which the learners are asked to either portray themselves or portray someone else in an imaginary situation.” (Angelianawati, 2019, p.127). Much research has been developed to find the usefulness of drama in the EFL classes, as for example Angelianawati (2019), Cobos and Guzmán (2019), Nurhayati (2016), and Caín (2019). They highlight how drama allows students to have meaningful, fluent, and authentic interaction in the target language. Specifically, in Angelianawati (2019) some of the most relevant advantages of using drama in an EFL classroom can be found. It promotes students’ use and development of language, thinking skills, and creativity; it is a student-centered strategy that promotes cooperation; and it enhances students’ maturity and motivation. On the other hand, some theorists also remark on the challenges of implementing drama activities in the EFL classroom. For instance, Sam (1990) lists some of the main disadvantages of this strategy: The activities are artificial and difficult to monitor, it causes embarrassment, spontaneity is lost, and timing in lessons is difficult, to name a few.

Having said that, it is important to note that there is also specific research that has studied the impact of using performing arts activities for improving students' oral production in EFL. Authors such as Caín (2019) remark the relevance of drama when helping students to improve their oral skills in the following aspects: It provides social context to develop sociolinguistic competence when speaking, it improves students' oral interaction, it strengthens students' non-verbal communication to complement the oral speech, and it helps to orally produce in a holistic manner, taking into account that speaking is also a process that includes feelings and emotions.

Concerning Genre-Based theory, as the instructional model applied for this research, it aims to explore the genre "narratives" with students. This exploration will finally help students to produce an oral text at the end of the process, namely, a play. In this sense, the concepts and stages of this theory will guide that final oral product of a play. The process of narrating belongs to a joint of genres proposed by Knapp and Watkins (2005). They mention 6 genres: the process of describing, explaining, instructing, arguing, and narrating. Specifically, the genre of narrating is the process of sequencing people and events in a particular space and time. Managing this genre will allow students to have a bigger domain on the elements of their respective plays. Then, from all the kinds of possible genres to work on during the classes, it is the process of narrating the one guiding the classes as part of the instructional model chosen. Additionally, Genre Based implies 3 key concepts: context, genre, and grammar. The context is related to the fact that every single text is produced in a specific social environment, modifying its content and structure. The genre is understood as a process in which you use different structures and grammar resources to produce a text. The grammar refers to the organization, coding and structure that makes communication effective to the language users. Then these 3 concepts are present in each activity of the project.

To conclude, this action research adopted Knapp and Watkins (2005) views. They state that genres are not products, but generic processes including 3 stages: modeling, joint negotiation of texts, and independent construction of texts. The first one refers to the presentation of a text belonging to a specific genre, finding characteristics such as generic structures, vocabulary, and other language features. The second one addresses the moment when teacher and students construct a new text together. The last one concerns the individual practice of students. Moreover, the Genre-Based theory is coherent with the notion of drama in the EFL classroom, as Burns (2010) says that the major problem of traditional materials and resources to learn a language is their unrealistic nature. In this sense, both Genre-Based theory and drama support the process of improving students' oral skills by giving them realistic contexts and situations to practice the language.

Research Question

How does the use of drama activities enhance eleventh graders' English oral production?

General Objective

To enhance eleventh graders' English oral production by using performing arts activities at Institución Educativa Santa María.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess students' oral skills before the implementation of the teaching activities.
2. To identify students' perceptions about their oral skills, non-verbal communication, and the impact of performing arts in the improvement of oral production.

3. To assess the impact of drama on students' oral production, contrasting student' starting point and results.

Action Plan

In the development of the action plan, I carried out two actions from August to December. The first one was using some activities coming from drama such as constructing scripts, imitating people, and using gestures and body language to communicate. Those activities envisioned to improve students' oral production. The second action addressed the implementation of the Genre-Based theory as the instructional model guiding this process, starting with the simplicity of narrative texts to continue exploring a more complex genre as drama is. In this way, we constructed several plays from the very beginning, to motivate students to enhance specific aspects of their oral skills.

Data was collected through journals, informal talks, diagnostic and final oral tests. These aimed at introducing to students the language of performing arts, motivating students to work on the topics they are interested in, providing elements of non-verbal communication for transmitting messages, engaging students with an authentic situation, and finally, making students practice their oral skills.

Development of Actions

To start my practicum implementation, I asked my cooperating teacher about the curriculum and topics I had to cover. Her suggestion was to teach the subjects of the English Please! textbook. Then, I adapted my activities according to those themes. My advantage was that my proposal consisted of implementing drama activities which could address all the

curriculum. While the textbook gave the content, the drama was the way in which we were going to deal with that content. I began with my implementation as planned, however, as I implemented my practicum with 11th graders, we missed many classes due to their extracurricular activities such as visiting universities or having psychological orientation.

The first action consisted of presenting some models of drama as suggested by the Genre-Based Theory (GBT). I proposed students analyze the structure of drama in terms of narrative texts. They had to identify characters, starting point, conflict, and resolution of several plays and stories. Usually, I gave them a list of vocabulary that they employed to understand the material. Then, I showed them a short video with a narrative structure and related to the topics of the curriculum. After all, they identified all the elements of a narrative in that video, modelling the type of genre that we worked on during the course.

As a second action, we moved on to the joint construction of GBT. During this stage, I guided students to make a text, or a part of it, belonging to the genre previously modelled. Additionally, as the curriculum suggested, I taught the future tense. In this way, they expressed in future tense their plan to make a play, creating sentences as, for instance, “our topic will be saving the Earth”. Similarly, they thought about the characters and the situations of their texts. Besides, we went deeper into each element of narrative texts, from starting points to resolutions. Then, at this point of the class, students already had a general plan of their plays.

The third action consisted of writing the scripts as part of the independent construction stage of GBT. As they already had their respective models of their plays, the following step was to write dialogues. They wrote a starting point answering the questions what, when, where, and why of their stories. Then they read their texts aloud for the whole group during the class. At that

moment, each group received ideas from their classmates and me about how they could continue their scripts and represent them. Consequently, they finished the texts according to their dialogues of the starting point they wrote, and the suggestions that they got from their peers.

During the fourth action, we concentrated mainly on specific aspects of oral production and drama. First, we worked on pronunciation, fluency, and speech rate through by imitating English speakers and reading aloud their own scripts. Second, we studied extra linguistic competences by interpreting people's gestures and movements and doing a silent presentation of the scripts. Third, we worked on music and sounds as a fundamental part of drama and daily interaction with any culture. And, then we spoke about what theater was capable of, reducing students' nervousness and making them feel that they were doing something relevant.

Finally, students presented the play, and it was a complete success. The students, cooperating teacher and I felt very satisfied with their results. We did it in a real theater with lights, sounds, and ambience, presenting a real context that could be meaningful for them. I assessed their performances using the following criteria: drama elements (props, scenography, and costumes), pronunciation, extralinguistic competences, music and sounds, fluency and speech rate, and the scripts. Moreover, we applied a self-evaluation of the experience, having as the criteria their pronunciation; fluency and speech rate; body language and actions; script and story; music and sounds; and their costumes, props, and scenography.

Data analysis

To analyze the data collected, I followed Creswell's (2012) strategy to analyze qualitative data. I wrote and codified the journals of my classes weekly; I made two oral tests evaluating

students' initial and final oral performance; and finally, I transcribed and codified the information of two focus groups and some spontaneous informal talks with students. Then I created an Excel chart to rearrange the information in broader categories. After that, I organized the categories in order of importance according to my research objective. Finally, I validated the evidence by triangulating the data looking for patterns and corroborating my findings.

Findings and interpretations

The data analysis revealed that implementing drama activities in the English classroom is very useful to improve students' oral production, having both direct and indirect impacts. The former are all the impacts related to the improvement of the language, and the latter are the ones related to the lessons implemented to improve students' oral production through drama. However, it also showed that there are some challenges that should be overcome to have a positive impact on the students' oral production through drama activities.

Usefulness of Drama to Improve Students' Oral Production

The use of drama activities brought both direct and indirect impacts on the improvement of students' oral production. Data analysis revealed direct impacts, such as the promotion of a fearless and confident environment to speak; the improvement of fluency and speech rate; the awareness about extralinguistic aspects; the fostering of an active and eager participation; and the production of intelligible and comprehensible ideas. Regarding the indirect impacts, it was found that drama activities allow the integration of students' interests, permit the use of several teaching strategies, and develop a positive students' perception about class activities and methodology.

Direct impacts of drama activities on students' oral production

Data analysis showed that the most important aspect that students could enhance was their fluency and speech rate, as it is stated in the following excerpt from the tests applied:

“Comparing the pre - test and the post – test, the aspect that students have improved the most is Fluency and Speech Rate. They can now connect their ideas in English easier, and so their speech is not as mechanical as before.” (Chart of analysis pre-test and post-test, November 2022).

The importance of this finding is high as fluency and speech rate are fundamental aspects of pronunciation (Levis, 2006). Data analysis revealed enhancement in students’ oral production, as reported in the journal “drama helped in the improvement of students’ oral production. I could perceive it because of their safety, tone of voice, fluency, scripts, and so on” (Journal entry excerpt, October 18, 2022). This finding corroborated those from Cobos and Guzmán (2019) who also found that their students “Improved their fluency in their speech when acting because they created more complex dialogues as they were learning new things and concepts” (p.34).

Another characteristic of oral speech that students was their awareness about extralinguistic abilities. The activities were interesting for them. Besides, they realized how important extralinguistic abilities were in the oral production. For instance, one of the students expressed gestures help in the oral communication and explained his reasons in one of the conversations we had, he said “Digamos que uno no sabe decir una palabra y luego pues con los diferentes gestos y las diferentes expresiones, uno puede llegar a transmitir ese mensaje”¹. (Personal communication, October 18, 2022)

¹ “Let’s say that one does not know how to say a Word but with the different gestures and expressions, one can send the message”

Besides, after the implementation of drama activities data analysis showed that students were more fearless and confident to speak in English. In fact, many students recognized the contribution of the activities to reduce their fear to speak and then becoming more at ease to speak in English. To exemplify, in the focus group students expressed “Con el teatro sí se puede mejorar el hablar el inglés porque puedes ir quitando miedos a la hora de hablar”² (Students’ focus group, September 13, 2022); “Lo que pudimos mejorar fue la pronunciación. La pérdida de temor para hablar”³ (Students’ focus group, October 25, 2022). Additionally, they demonstrated during the classes that the implementation of drama had a positive effect on “the affective filter in the moment of speaking” (Journal entry excerpt, October 4, 2022).

Two of the elements that were also evaluated before and after the implementation of the drama activities were the intelligibility and comprehensibility in students’ products. The data revealed that though the biggest progress was related to fluency and speech rate, the students also enhanced their capacity to be intelligible as it is read in the analysis of the post and pre-tests:

In general, students could improve their intelligibility, although there are specific students who make the same mistakes as before. Something to remark is that they are improving in the pronunciation of basic words, such as the verb live and the preposition with. (Chart of analysis pre-test and post-test, November 2022)

Similarly, almost in the same measure of intelligibility, they progressed in terms of comprehensibility. “*In quantitative terms, students improved a 5% in intelligibility and comprehensibility.*” (Chart of analysis pre-test and post-test, November 2022). Besides something that calls the attention is that “*they have improved a lot in the aspect of Spanish*

² “With the theater we can improve the speaking in English because we can get rid of the fears when talking”

³ “We could improved pronunciation. Not being affraid to talk”

intrusion. In the first test, they made 5 mistakes related to Spanish intrusion, while in the second test, there was only one” (Chart of analysis pre-test and post-test, November 2022).

Data analysis also revealed an increase of students’ eagerness and willingness to participate orally. For instance, regarding eagerness, the students seemed to enjoy the activities: “When they were speaking, they were constantly smiling. Moreover, some classmates found their classmates’ performance funny” (Journal entry excerpt, September 30, 2022). Besides, students themselves considered that their participation in the activities was worthy, for example, in the focus group, one of the students said: “Mi aporte en el grupo fue valioso, porque a medida que mis otras compañeras iban planteando ideas, yo la sigo como complementando y así podemos como llegar a un acuerdo entre todas”⁴ (Students’ focus group, October 25, 2022). Then they were willing to participate, especially in the preparation of the play, as it can be read in the following excerpt: “Yo participé activamente ya que les comenté sobre un tema que es de poco conocimiento y a mi grupo les gustó mucho y pudimos hacer un trabajo muy diferente a los demás”⁵ (Students’ focus group, October 25, 2022).

Indirect impacts of drama activities on students’ oral production

One of the most important indirect contributions of implementing drama activities in the English classroom for the enhancement of students’ oral production is that it can cover students’ interests as a student-centered approach. For instance, data analysis showed how drama activities could embrace different topics related to students’ interest such as drug abuse, global cultures,

⁴ “My contribution to the group was valuable, because when our classmates we were sharing ideas, I was complementing them, I continue completing the ideas and we can get to an agreement together”

⁵ “I participated actively because I commented about a topic that was not well known and my classmates liked a lot and we could do a different task from the other groups”

sports, social problems, ghosts, music, and science. Moreover, allowing students to choose the topic they wanted to address made them feel comfortable to participate in the class activities, “se aprenden muchas cosas, pero basándonos en inglés y la vida se desarrolla más y de forma más lúdica, con actividades que le puedan gustar a muchos, que les llaman la atención a todos”⁶. (Students’ focus group, October 25, 2022).

Indeed, according to Lozano (2019) not only students’ interests are included, but also students’ learning styles: “Due to its basic nature, dramatic plays are accessible to any kind of student, regardless of the learning style they tend to prefer, and it enables interplay between different modes of expression through its forms” (p.26, 2019). It suggests that drama activities allow students to look for their interests and to accommodate the language learning to their own abilities.

In addition, drama helps to develop a positive students’ perception about class activities and methodology, finding them helpful, motivating, and varied. One of the students manifested in the focus group that using drama activities in EFL learning “*es una forma de expresión muy diferente en la que las personas pueden salir de esa monotonía de siempre, estar en clases así, común y corrientes, sino salir de ahí y empezar con nuevas prácticas, como es el teatro.*”⁷ (Students’ focus group, October 25, 2022).

Likewise, other students reacted positively to the activities, mainly to the final presentation, not only because it was different to other English teaching methodologies, but also

⁶ “We learn many things, but regarding English and in life, we can develop more things in a ludic way, with activities that many classmates like and that are attractive for many”

⁷ “It is a very different way to express and people can move from the monotonous activities and participate in those types of classes, but to get out of that monotony and start doing new practices such as the theater”

because it was convenient for their language skills. One of the students manifested in the focus group that: “Para mí lo que me más me aportó fue la realización de la obra de teatro. En total, fue donde se abarcaron varios temas, el diálogo, se pudo cambiar la escritura que tuvimos en todos los campos”⁸ (Students’ focus group, October 25, 2022).

At last, this drama implementation in the English classroom permitted the use of several teaching activities. For instance, some of the strategies that a teacher could implement in accordance with the particularities of drama activities are translation, modeling – imitation, decodifying - identifying elements, oral comprehension, reading aloud, spontaneous speech, interpretation - body language, critical thinking, grouping strategically, and making predictions. In fact, authors such as Caín (2019) argue that drama activities involve students in an immersive interaction, addressing their personal needs and purposes by establishing different types of activities. In this sense, drama activities allow teachers to look for different activities for helping students to enhance their oral production, intervening directly or indirectly, but helping students to improve progressively.

Challenges to Use Drama for Oral Production

Data analysis revealed linguistic and non-linguistic factors as challenges for improving oral production. The linguistic challenges refer to problems of tone of voice, and Spanish overuse. The non-linguistic challenges are related to the waste of time on extracurricular activities; the time-consuming activities; the lack of teacher’s clarity to give instructions, and the lack of students’ disposition to work during the class.

⁸ What was more useful for me was the making of the play. In total, we covered different topics, the dialogue, we could change the writing part in all the topics”

Linguistic challenges to use drama for oral production

First, some students, especially the most introverted ones, spoke in such a low tone of voice that it was difficult to understand them during the process. Specifically, in the play, it was difficult to catch some of the students' words. For instance, as reported in the journal "some of them were not intelligible, especially because of their tone of voice" (Journal entry excerpt, October 18, 2022). Fortunately, drama allowed them to share their ideas, thanks to the gestures and other non-linguistic abilities.

Second, it was also very problematic that many students overused Spanish during the activities. For example, during one of the activities "the majority of the groups participated in Spanish, although I asked them continuously to change to English." (Journal entry excerpt, September 13, 2022). This situation improved little by little and in the last presentation the students spoke completely in English.

Non-linguistic challenges to use drama for oral production

The non-linguistic challenges were those that affected the implementation without being directly related to students' oral production. The most worrying problem during the action research was related to the waste of time due to extracurricular activities. As the project was developed with 11th graders, a big quantity of classes had to be canceled to let students participate in other events. These kinds of situations naturally forced a change of schedule and number of activities for the implementation of the project.

Another challenge related to time waste is that the methodological activities inside the class demanded a lot of time. Due to the lack of resources in the institution, there were several

delays that impeded to advance the project quicker, as it can be demonstrated in the following excerpt:

“Unfortunately, at school there is no internet connection, and I thought I had all the material offline, but I did not. I tried to deal with it by using my personal internet connection, but it did not work. After 2 minutes, I decided to continue with the next activity.” (Journal entry excerpt, September 13, 2022).

Moreover, on the teacher’s behalf, the most prevalent problem had to do with the lack of clarity to give instructions. It sometimes did not allow lessons to move on, wasting time unnecessarily, as can be noticed here: “Once they had met, the majority of the groups hesitated about the activities to do. Then I started to pass group by group solving every single doubt they had about it” (Journal entry excerpt, September 6, 2022).

Finally, at the beginning of some lessons, it happened that students did not have enough disposition to work. They were not used to starting classes punctually and they took many minutes before being willing to receive class. To exemplify, as reported in the journal One of the students said aloud: “yo no entiendo los profesores para qué vienen tan rápido”⁹. I suddenly understood students’ misbehaviors at the initial point of our classes. They do not start class on time.” (Journal entry excerpt, September 13, 2022). This situation took a lot of time from each lesson delivery.

Conclusions and Implications

⁹ “I don’t understand why teacher come to the classroom early”

This research had the purpose of enhancing eleventh graders' English oral production by using drama activities. The data analysis demonstrated that drama activities are useful to improve students' oral production, having as positive impacts the promotion of a fearless and confident environment to speak; the improvement of fluency and speech rate; the awareness about extralinguistic aspects; the fostering of an active and eager participation; and the production of intelligible and comprehensible ideas, among the direct results. Besides, it was found that drama activities allow the integration of students' interests; permit the use of several teaching strategies; and develop a positive students' perception about class activities and methodology; regarding the indirect impacts.

However, some linguistic and non-linguistic challenges also appeared when implementing drama activities. The former was related to problems with students' tone of voice; and Spanish overuse; the latter regarded the waste of time on extracurricular activities; the time-consuming activities; the lack of teacher's clarity to give instructions, and the lack of students' disposition to work during the class.

Regarding the implications for the English classroom in this context. First, most of the time students are working independently, and they are taking autonomous decisions. Students choose the topic, create their texts, and rehearse their speeches; having the teacher as a guide that intervenes to solve specific doubts. In this sense, the instructions must be very precise, and the objective of each activity is to be very clear. Then students can find every activity as a necessary step to continue with their projects and avoid getting confused or distracted by purposeless actions.

Second, implementing drama activities implies to previously recognize students' interest and willingness to work on it. It could happen that in any specific classroom students are very shy or they do not have enough contact with performing arts, and so they will not be engaged with the activities, having no positive impacts as expected. In addition, teachers should consider that working on oral production in such an independent way requires that students acquire the habit of using the target language naturally. In this way, it is important that although they work autonomously, the activities drive students to speak in English necessarily.

For further research, it could be interesting to continue deepening in the relevance of art as a tool for EFL teaching and learning. For instance, it would be very meaningful to prove how another art such as cinema could enhance students' oral production as well.

Finally, similar research could be done addressing different objectives. This same methodology could serve to identify if drama activities are also useful to improve students' written production and comprehension, or any other linguistic competence.

Reflection

After 9 semesters of theory about language teaching, the processes of practicum and action research have allowed me to put into practice what I have learned during this time. Besides, it has been a very meaningful experience in the development of my own identity as a future teacher.

First, the teaching practicum and action research have created a space for me to integrate formative investigation and pedagogic and didactic strategies. The permanent research in this process compelled me to reflexively analyze my actions in the classroom. At the very beginning,

I chose a context that is utterly important in my life: the school where I studied for 9 years, and the municipality where I have lived all my life. Having this relevant context, I applied some of those principles that I was more related to during my career such as critical pedagogy, arts-based learning, democratic education, and genre-based theory. Meanwhile, I was supported by my advisor, my classmates, my cooperating teacher, and my students, all of them provided me with information and help to implement better procedures in the context that I chose. But what has been more important in this integrative process of teaching and researching has been the familiarization that I have obtained with the institutional culture, educational policies, curriculum, students' interests, and attitudes.

Second, this experience has enormously contributed to the construction of my identity as a future language teacher. During this time, I have seen that I am especially influenced by critical language pedagogy. Today I am more convinced that education must be emancipatory, and that the classroom is a place to problematize reality. Besides, after listening to my teachers warning us about different hard situations of public schools, the experience in a public school was, in fact, completely rewarding for me. Effectively, there are unsolved wants and needs, but students are very intelligent and enthusiastic once they have engaged to any topic. I really appreciate working in this context, where difficulties oblige teachers to do their best. Moreover, I have found out how important research in language teaching education is. Before, I did not see investigation relevant since I thought about people repeating concepts again and again. Now I understand the importance of creating new knowledge in the field in accordance with the contexts in which it is developed.

As a conclusion, I can say that the process of learning and teaching that I have experienced in the practicum process has been very meaningful. I have tested the ideas and concepts I have acquired during my career, and I have envisioned the teacher that I want to be in the future.

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