



Developing Literary Competence in ELT through Drama Texts

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Abstract

This paper, in fact, is an analytical and experiential approach based on techniques to teach language use through drama texts; therefore, an emphasis on the implication of language learning through drama texts is put forward. In doing so, some relevant methods are administered to see the extent to teach the drama text and its benefits that can be replicated on the language teaching/learning process. Thus, it has been hypothesized that drama texts provide a constructive contribution to the teaching of literature, enhance the literary competence and affect the relationships between subject matter and its teaching methodology.

Résumé

La décision de se lancer dans des textes dramatiques évoque le point d'un sujet laborieux qui est l'enseignement de la littérature en général et le théâtre en particulier. Dans une première tentative initiale, cet article établit comme objectif «une convention de la signification réelle de l'apprentissage des langues par des textes dramatiques. A ce niveau là, deux fronts peuvent s'associer : la langue étant comme un processus d'apprentissage et le texte dramatique comme un genre littéraire technique. Cependant une représentation exploratoire de texte dramatique est menée sur le plan pédagogique dont certaines méthodes et approches sont utilisés pour exploiter le potentiel des textes dramatiques. Il est également noté certains des avantages qui peuvent être apportés au processus d'enseignement et l'apprentissage de la langue.

Keywords: Drama texts, literary competences, Language, Learning methods.

توظيف المهارات الأدبية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال النصوص الدرامية

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الملخص

يتطرق هذا البحث بطريقة عقلانية عموماً إلى وضع استراتيجيات تعليم وتعلم مادة الآداب في ظل منهجية التدريس بالكفاءات وكذا التعرض إلى صعوبة التعامل مع هذه المادة. والهدف من هذه الدراسة خصوصاً هو تبيان الطرق الناجعة لتطوير المهارات الأدبية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية من خلال مجابتهم بالنصوص الدرامية وتحليلها تحليلًا يتوافق والطرق الحديثة التي تتماشى والتركيز على امتلاك كفاءات عالية واكتساب مهارات في لغة التدريس لأن تعلم الآداب يفرض على الأستاذ مضاعفة مسؤولياته اللغوية تجاه الارتقاء وتطوير عملية تدريس وخصوصاً حين تكون اللغة أجنبية عليه. فلماذا يتمحور المقال عموماً حول ماهية النص الدرامي، طرق تدريسه وفائدته في تحسين القدرات اللغوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النص الدرامي، المهارات الأدبية، اللغة، طرق تدريس الأدب.



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Introduction

The decision to embark upon drama texts project represents the starting point of a challenging topic which is the teaching of literature in general and drama in specific. This paper, in its preliminary attempt, establishes as its goal “a convention” of what the true significance of language learning through drama texts is. Here, two distinct facets may associate: language as being superposed and drama as a technical literary genre; but at this point a prior concentration is on drama text and how it is conducted pedagogically. In another position it identifies some of the differing methods and approaches that can be utilised to fully exploit the potential of drama texts. It also provides some of the benefits that can be brought to the language teaching / learning process. In order to spell out the differing methods and approaches that can satisfy the language teaching / learning process; I see it very relevant and significant to walk around the three basic questions:

- How can drama texts make a valuable contribution to the teaching of literature?
- How can drama texts promote the literary competence?
- How do drama texts affect the relationships between subject matter and teaching methodology?

1- Purposes of Drama Texts

First of all, the purpose of this initial note is to illustrate how drama text can create an important involvement and positive contribution to the language learning / teaching through literature. Thus, the studies made by Collie and Slater¹ confirmed, indeed, that literary texts constituted valuable authentic material as it exposes the learner to different registers, types of language use.

1 - Collie, J. Et al (1987), *Literature in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press.



Similarly, writers such as Maley and Duff², and Wessels³ have pointed to the values and uses of drama: ‘Drama can help the teacher to achieve ‘reality’ in several ways’:

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To put it simply, it can be noted that drama is a depiction of the societal issues through which any playwright finds channels to portray the social happenings with its hostility, bitterness or joyfulness.

2- Drama Texts as a Pedagogical Tool

A drama text shapes entirely the characters’ interaction by means of ‘dialogues’ (a dialogue is the lines spoken by the characters; however, non-drama text - on the stage – is unsuccessful without being assisted by the plot and the action of drama. Barnet⁴ affirms this idea: the author of a story usually integrates dialogue (conversation) in which the characters are heard directly rather than through the voice of narrator. Subsequently, this course of action may apply positive attitude towards the literature learners, and therefore enhance them to recognise and start to develop personal skills relevant to the acting profession such as: self analysis and criticism, tolerance of others, patience, physical fitness, endurance, and self-discipline. They are implicated in group-works

and understand the discipline of group activity and its requirements. They also develop their ability to research further texts for public performance. They, additionally, understand the roles of, and interactions with, such bodies as: managerial organisations, casting directors, agents, unions, professional bodies, accountants, co-operative agents and the press and will be familiar with touring, repertory theatre, theatre criticism and publicity. And as an ultimate aim, students are prepared for employment as professional actors in theatre, film, television, radio and related fields.

3- Enhancing Literary Competence through Drama

The pedagogical implications of teaching drama can help the students to overcome their resistance to learning the new language by evolving them in setting realistic targets, for the students to aim for:

- creative ‘slowing down’ of real experience.
- linking the language-learning experience with the student’s own experience of life.
- making the learning of the new language an enjoyable experience.
- Being aware of the learners’ preference: A learner may prefer drama/fiction/poetry.

- using different linguistic codes.

Accordingly, this framework attempts to show how drama texts can promote the literary competence. But above all affirmation, it is worth mentioning that a literary competence should go beyond the mastery of the literary devices; (themes/topic – characters

2- Maley, A. Et al (1982) *Drama Techniques in Language Learning*, (2nd Edition), CUP.

3- Wessels Charlyn (1987) *Drama* (Resource Books for Teachers) Oxford University Press.

4- Barnet S. (1967) *An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. 3rd ed. Little Brown and Company. Boston , p: 461)



and characterization – plot...) it is the matter of the competency based-approach. In the same token, Brezinka⁵ noted down that competence as a fully human attribute has been reduced to competencies; i.e. series of discrete activities that people possess the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to engage in effectively.

-Key competencies require significant intellectual development: abstract thinking, self-reflection, determination of one's own position, self-assessment, critical thinking, etc.

-Key competencies are multi-dimensional, i.e. they include various reasoning processes and intellectual abilities (analytical, critical, communicative, and other), "know-how". In so doing, an illustration would map out the literary competence into objectives:

Drama provides cultural and language enrichment by revealing insights into the target culture and presenting language contexts that make items memorable by placing them in a realistic social and physical context so that the learners become personally and fully involved in the learning process⁶, in a context in which it is possible for

learners to feel less self-conscious⁷ and more empowered to express themselves through the multiple voices of the differing characters⁸.

3.1. A drama text can widen the student's cultural knowledge

Widening the learner's cultural knowledge instigates writing critical essays in literatures through individual and collaborative approaches and researches; and additionally, exploring collaborative project-based language learning (through action research) in a multi-cultural setting. As an evidence an action research can help students either individually or in groups reflect in/on the learning process of literatures. (Content objective)

Examples: Teaching how old the president of Nigeria was when Chinua Achebe wrote his *Arrow of God*. (Isolated objective)

3. 2. A drama text can widen the students' knowledge and appreciation of the (English) language

Students need opportunities to develop an understanding of how language varies according to audience, purpose, and situation; develop an understanding of the structures and conventions of language; and develop an understanding that language changes over time.

In addition to developing the knowledge, skills, and processes, learners needed to communicate

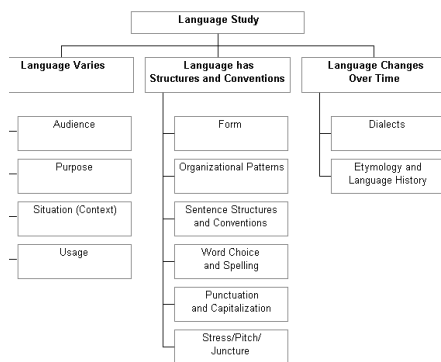
5- Brezinka (1988) 'Competence as an aim of education' in B. Spiecker and R. Straughan (eds.) *Philosophical Issues in Moral Education and Development*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, p: 76.

6- Vygotsky, L.S.1987 *Thinking and speech*. In Rieber and A Carton (eds). *The Collected works of L Vygotsky*. New York: Plenum.

7- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press: Austin, TX.

8- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986) *Speech Genre and Other Late Essays*. University of Texas Press: Austin, TX.

effectively through speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Students need to develop an understanding and appreciation of the (English) language and how it is used. Therefore, in the language study, learners gain control of their language processes. They increase their understanding of three broad concepts of language that can be schematized as: language varies, language has structural patterns and conventions, and language changes over time. (See diagram below)



4- Approaches to Drama texts

Introducing a drama text to a class of EFL learners involves a process for developing literary competence to understand and appreciate literature. This may employ differing methods and approaches. So, there are many techniques to teach language use through drama texts; but for a pure reason of establishing a prolific result on this scope, I have put forward two different procedures: the first is based on analytical approach and the second on the experiential approach.

4.1. The analytical approach to drama texts

Employing the analytical approach, a teacher or course designer would

think of a series of structures, language items that are to be ‘taught’. Therefore, the analysis of a language in a text is just one aspect of its use; the levels of language analysis are advocated such as (phonological, lexical components etc.). A drama text exemplifying these structures is then selected and used in order to practise or raise the learner’s consciousness of it. The “nature of language” is best learned contextually, the learning course comes successfully when students are actively engaged in using real language processes for their communication purposes. It is expected that students will learn about the elements of language- texts, sentences, words, and sounds--and their corresponding concepts.

4.2. The experiential approach to drama texts

This approach identified language as not seen as object but as a tool⁹. Much more emphasis is placed upon, for example, the inductive method of learning through ‘experiencing’ and applying the learner’s experience to the text through encouraging comment, responses and expression based on the text or its theme/topic. The theme / topic-based syllabus is often seen as more relevant to language learning; Gower¹⁰ commented on how he felt more focus on form which meant students understood less of what was going on. Consequently, some observations are made, and from a task-based point of view the learner is faced with several levels of achievement / ability that the

9- White, R.V. (1988) *The ELT Curriculum: Design, Innovation and Management*. Oxford: Blackwell.

10 - Gower, R. (1996) *Can stylistic analysis help the EFL learner read literature?* *ELT Journal* 40: 125 – 30.



teacher can use as a basis for designing multi-level activities for students to identify (the literary devices) as the story, characters, plot (achievable at beginner level), and to identify also the author's / characters' viewpoint, attitude or opinion, to understand the work in relation to its socio-cultural and historical-political context, to give a personal / creative response (e.g. enacting the text), and finally answer the question: "does it work as literature?" (Extended critical analysis of text)

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