The Use of Drama and Dramatic Activities in English Language Teaching

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to discuss the use of drama and dramatic activities in English language teaching and learning. The paper highlights the benefits that students will derive if they are exposed to the learning of English language through drama and dramatic activities. It explores the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygosky, which serves as the theoretical basis for the use of drama in language teaching. The paper also brings to the limelight different kinds of dramatic activities that could be used to teach English language and the strategies for integrating them into English language lesson. Finally, the paper emphasizes the fact that drama and dramatic activities are indispensable tools in English language teaching and learning.

Introduction
The use of drama and dramatic activities in foreign and second language teaching is not new. It has lasted for over a century but it came to the forefront in last three decades. However, this aspect of language teaching is neglected here in Nigeria by English language teachers, curriculum developers and course book writers. The inclusion of drama based activities in language teaching is not so evident in current English language teaching course books, resource books, supplementary teaching materials and teacher training courses.

Dramatic activities offer students a wide range of opportunities to enhance their communication skills, motivation, confidence, problem solving skills, etc. Teachers need practical guidance on how to incorporate drama and dramatic activities into their teaching.

Drama and Dramatic Activities

Drama can be defined in a number of ways. In a broad sense, it could be defined as an umbrella term covering "a wide range of oral activities that have elements of creativity, (Hubbard et al 1986). In this case, it includes dramatic activities, such as improvisation, role-play, simulation, and mime. Drama is an activity involving people in a social context. It requires the oral communication and other forms of communication, such as use of gesture, body movement and intonation. Holden (1982), defined drama as a kind of activity, in which students portray themselves in an imaginary situation.

Why Dramatic Activities should be used in English Language Teaching
There are a number of reasons why the use of drama is a powerful tool in the language classroom. Desialova (2009) outlines some of the reasons for introducing English language learners to drama. They are listed below:

1.   Drama is an ideal way to encourage learners to communicate for real-life purposes.

2.   To make language learning an active motivating experience.

3.   To help learners gain the confidence and self esteem needed to use the language spontaneously.

4.   To bring the real world into the classroom.

5.   To make language learning memorable through direct experience.

6.   To stimulate learner' intellect, imagination, and creativity.

7.   To develop students' ability to empathize with others and thus become better communicators.

Benefits of Dramatic Activities to Students
Godfrey (2010), stated that using drama in a language course provides active, stimulating, and creative environment in which students can develop their language learning potentials. The use of drama enables students to explore their imagination and creativity as well as express themselves through English Language and other forms of communicative activities, such as actions, movement,

dance, etc. Dramatic activities help students to improve themselves in the following aspects:

8.   Positive motivation and self confidence.
9.   Oral and communication skills
10.   Authentic language use
11.   Accuracy and fluency of expression
12.   Proper pronunciation
13.   Multisensory and whole-personality learning.
14.   Learner-centered approach to hearing.

Positive motivation and self confidence: Participation in dramatic activities fosters self awareness and awareness of others. It enhances one self-esteem and confidence which in-turn boosts motivation.

Oral and written communication: Dramatic activities integrate language skills in a natural may. It involves careful listening and spontaneous verbal expression. Some of them required reading and writing.

Authentic language use: Through the use of drama, students engage in authentic language use. It becomes a means of practicing real-life language in the classroom. Drama puts language into context and gives the students experience in real life situations.

Accuracy and fluency of expression: Drama creates ample opportunities for conversational use of language which promotes fluency of expression. For instance, while students are practicing a play, they are encouraged to repeat words, phrases and sentences several times. By so doing, they become fluent in using such expressions.

Multisensory and whole personality learning: Dramatic activities provide opportunities for students to involve their whole personality and use all their senses, (sight, hearing, feeling, etc.). Drama activities also involve the whole personality and not only the mental process.

Learner-centered approach to learning: Dramatic activities make it possible for students to take charge of their own learning. It

enables for students to test out various situations, registers and vocabularies.

Proper pronunciation: Godwin (2001) stated that drama is particularly effective for pronunciation teaching, because various components of communicative competence can be practiced in an integrated way. Some of these components are discourse, intonation, pragmatic awareness, non verbal communication, etc.

There are several research studies that support the benefits of drama in second and foreign language learning (Brumfit, 1991; Richard, 1987; Maley and Duff, 2001). All these researchers agree that dramatic activities are useful in helping students to develop oral communication skills as well as reading and writing skills. They also help students to communicate in the English language.

Theoretical Basis for using Drama in English language Teaching
The use of drama in language teaching has its theoretical basis on the socio-cultural theory proposed by a Russian psychologist, Lev Vygosky (1896-1934). Vygosky believes that children construct their own knowledge. One of his assumptions is that cognitive skills are mediated by words, language, and forms of discourse which serve as tools for facilitating and transforming mental activities. In his view, children's cognitive skills are ignited and stimulated by social interaction and are embedded in a socio-cultural background. Vygosky argued that a child's language is a tool that helps him/her plan activities and solve problems. He explained that a child's development is inseparable from social and cultural activities. He believes that language is vital to the development of a child's memory and reasoning. In Vygosky's view, knowledge is situated and collaborative. By this, he means that knowledge is distributed among people and the environment which include: objects, artifacts, tools, books and the community in which people live. As a result, knowledge can be facilitated through interaction with other people in cooperative and collaborative activities. Vygosky articulated some unique ideas about learning and development some of his concepts are zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding, (Vygosky, 1962; Santrock, 2001).

In relation to the use of drama in language teaching, Vygosky proposed that play which is a form of activity is important in a child's cognitive development and that through the process of internalization, social activities become mental activities. He believes that children's' play is based on their unrealized needs; when their needs are not met, they enter into an imaginary world through play (in which the unrealizable desires can be realized). So, the field of play is a mediator between situations in thought and situations in reality. Therefore, social meaningful activities, such as drama serve as a generator of thought and thought generates speech.

Haught (2005) asserted that drama-based language teaching is a further support for Vygoskian view of learning and development. In relation to language teaching therefore, Vygosky provided the theoretical foundation for teaching language through drama. He emphasized collaboration between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves. He also emphasized the kind of learning that occurs authentically, within a collaborative environment. This means that the learning environment should be such that enables students to play active roles. The teacher and the students should collaborate with one another in order to create meaningful learning.

Using Dramatic Activities in English Language Lessons
Dramatic activities include a wide range of activities that give students the opportunity to use real-life language in the classroom. They include the following: mime, role-play, simulation and improvisation.

A Scripted Play
A scripted play could be use for English language teaching, but the teacher should ensure that the language of the play is within the ability of the students and relevant to their needs. The theme of the play should be interesting and humorous. The language of the play should be communicative. The scenes should be short and the characters should not be too many. Davies (1990), suggested that to work on a play, it should be done in stages as indicated in the following guidelines proposed by Byrne (1986: 124-25)

Step 1: The students should familiarize themselves with the text by reading it through on their own.
Step 2: They should listen to a recording of it.
Step 3: The teacher should discuss the text with the class before assigning roles.
Step 4: The teacher should play the recording the second time, pausing intermittently to draw their attention to particular utterances, attitudes, or emotions.
Step 5: The teacher should divide the class into groups and ask them to discuss the setting and the characters.
Step 6: In a later lesson the teacher should ask the students to choose their roles, and rehearse the play.
Step 7: The play should be performed.
Step 8: They should discuss the outcome of the performance. The discussion will help them to assess the performance, so as to know the aspects that need improvement.

Mime
It is a type of physical activity in which somebody acts out an idea or a story through gestures, bodily movement, and facial expressions without the use of words. Through action, the person communicates his/her ideas to his/her audience. Dougill (1987), defined mime as a non-verbal representation of an idea or story, through gestures bodily movement, and facial expression. The aspect of communication emphasized through miming is non-verbal communication.

Many linguists support the use of mime in language teaching. For example, Savignon (1983) stated that it mime helps learners to get used to the idea of acting. Other uses of mime in language learning are outline below:
15.   It can generate language use where explanation is required.
16.   It is a way of reinforcing memory and recalling language items, by means of visual association
17.   It can be used to learn and practice vocabulary items.

The example below illustrates how mime can be used to teach and practice vocabulary.

Step 1: The teacher writes a list of words on the chalkboard or whiteboard.

Step 2: The teacher mimes the action associated with a word on the chalkboard and asked the students to identify the word, out of the list of words on the chalkboard.

Step 3: The teacher calls out some of the students to mime their own words while others guess the correct words from the list.

This activity continues until the list of words is exhausted.

Role-play

A role-play could be described as an activity in which students are required to play imaginary role in an imaginary situation. The participants in a role-play are assigned certain roles which they act out in a given context. The context may be a situation in the school, family setting, scenes in the market or restaurant, etc. All these settings provide avenues for students to engage in social interaction and discussion. A role-play involves an imaginary activity and requires somebody to take on a role that is imaginary. It also involves spontaneous interaction of the participants. Teachers can obtain ideas for roles-play from the students' experiences, books, stories, television programme, films, and daily interactions with people.

The main benefit of role-play in language teaching is that: It enables a teacher to teach language use that would be difficult to teach ordinary. It also helps to recreate the kind of language that is used in different natural contexts, especially language use in situations outside the classroom

Byrne (1986) as cited by Davies (1990) explained that teachers can guide the students in carry out role-plays in the following ways:

18. By providing open ended dialogues.
19. By giving them mapped dialogues.
20. By providing functional cues.
21. By giving them role instructions.
22. By providing scenarios.

According to Self (1975) a good role-play exercise should have the characteristics outlined below:

23. Is should have a clear purpose.

24.   It should be relevant to the needs of the students.
25.   It should use a context which is real to the students.
26.   It should include only those students who can actively participate.
27.   It should be conducted in a conducive physical atmosphere.
28.   It should be given enough time.
29.   It should be non-authoritarian in organization and practice.

Improvisation
Improvisation can be described as a play without a script. Landy (1982) defined it as an unscripted, unrehearsed, spontaneous set of actions in response to minimal directions from a teacher, usually including statements of whom one is, where one is and what one is doing. An improvisation involves a spontaneous response and the enactment of an unexpected situation.

Davies (1990) identifies two types of improvisation: the spontaneous improvisation and the prepared improvisation. He explained that spontaneous improvisation is an open-ended process initiated by the teacher. The teacher presents students with a situation and challenges them to respond to it. The teacher does not give them direction on what to do. On the other hand, In prepared improvisation, the teacher and the students choose the theme, the situation. They select the relevant ideas and organize them. The class is then divided into small groups for the purpose of practicing the segments of the improvisation, after which the presentation is carried out.

Improvisation is a useful technique in English language teaching and learning. It prepares the students to respond to impromptu situations in real-life settings. It provides students with opportunities to improve their language skills and build up their confidence. Spontaneous improvisation gives learners practice in language skills and helps them develop their emotional range by playing roles they are not familiar with. Prepared improvisation gives students practice in working together, sharing ideas and making decision, (Davies, 1990). The examples below are improvisations.

30.   You are a football team and you are about to practice in the football field. Decide in which position you will be playing and how you will be playing.

31.   You are a group of students having a meeting with your principal, concerning the poor sanitary conditions in your school. Decide the points you will raise and how you will express yourself.

Simulations

Jones (1982), defined a simulation as "a reality of functions in a simulated and structured environment". Simulation activity provides a specific situation within which students can practice specific communication skills. For example, the situation may be a parents-teachers meeting and the communicative skills may be expressing an opinion, complaining about something, arguing , convincing others, asserting oneself, eliciting opinions, group- problem solving, analyzing situations so.

There are two types of simulation activities. The first has to do with dialogues for socializing, such as greeting, introducing people, expressing compliments, parting, proposing a toast, meeting new people, etc. Through simulation dialogues, students can learn how to exchange pleasantries in specific social situations. For example, students can practice how to accept an invitation to a wedding or how to reject an invitation. The second type of simulation activity is a community oriented task. Here, the students learn how to participate in the community and execute specific tasks. Foe example, going to the market, buying things from a supermarket, buying a ticket at the railway station, posting a letter at the post office, and collecting money from the bank.

The role of simulation in English language is to help the students to practice specific roles, as in the situations mentioned above, so that when such situations occur in real-life, they will be able to function effectively.

Conclusion

Drama is a useful teaching strategy which promotes communication skills, problem-solving skills, multisensory learning, self confidence, social skills, etc. Drama quickens the interest, imagination and creativity of students. It gives students the opportunity to use their natural abilities, as well as their whole personality. It gives students practice in the use of supra-segmental

and prosodic features of language. It creates empathy in students and makes them become more sympathetic and appreciative of other people's problems. Drama is therefore an indispensible tool in language teaching. Teachers should capitalize on the opportunities and resources that are available through drama and use it more often in the English language classroom.

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