

**Benefits and Challenges of Teaching a Dramatic Text through Role-Play**Maroua Rogti<sup>1,\*</sup>, Noureddine Guerroudj<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** This study seeks to explore the prospection of the use of role-play activity in teaching drama to EFL learners and view its impact on developing the learners' communicative skills and competence. Indeed, it tempts to demonstrate the practical handling of dramatic acting by transposing a dramatic text on stage in class. For getting a clear understanding of the impact of dramatic text teaching through acting, we tempt to prove the extent to which the suggested activity can be effective for students through the different methodologies used in class using a case study method with a questionnaire designed for teachers of drama collecting their views about the possibility of achieving efficient results. Thus, it has been investigated that there were good responses from students regarding the use of role-play as a substantial activity for teaching dramatic texts in class.

**Key words:** dramatic text; role-play; communicative skills; effective teaching; Drama teachers

**الملخص**

تسعى هذه الدراسة الي استكشاف إمكانية استخدام نشاط تمثيل الأدوار في تدريس الدراما لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية و معرفة تأثيرها على تطوير مهارات التواصل و الكفاءة لدى الطلبة. في الواقع البحث يسعى لاطهار المعالجة العملية للتمثيل الدرامي عن طريق نقل النص الدرامي على خشبة المسرح في الصف. للحصول على فهم واضح لتأثير تدريس النصوص الدرامية من خلال التمثيل ، فإننا نحاول إثبات مدى فعالية النشاط المقترح للطلاب من خلال المنهجيات المختلفة المستخدمة في الفصل باستخدام طريقة دراسة الحالة مع استبيان مصمم لمعلمي دراما جمع وجهات نظرهم حول إمكانية تحقيق نتائج فعالة وبالتالي ، فقد تم التحقيق في أن هناك ردود جيدة من الطلاب فيما يتعلق باستخدام لعب الأدوار كنشاط كبير لتدريس النصوص الدرامية في الصف .

**الكلمات المفتاحية** نص درامي؛ دور تمثيلي؛ مهارات التواصل؛ التدريس الفعال؛ مدرسي الدراما

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## 1- Introduction

It has been argued that drama as a literary genre has recently achieved a more persistent place in the English language teaching class. Many researchers and scholars have recently denoted the role of teaching drama to EFL learners as a source for communicative skills and cultural developments. Indeed, the pedagogy of teaching drama has witnessed a remarkable change since the beginning of European theatre because drama in modern times has become very rich and has multiple and distinctive styles including an immense level of musical lighting, acting aptitudes, impressive and very intriguing writing.

Literally, teaching a dramatic text may demand the use of certain methods such as improvisation, role-play and acting in class which can be in line with the teaching process. Notably, teaching plays needs a certain collaborative approach that can render all the teaching and learning obligations because it differs from teaching other literary genres. It is determined as a piece of literature for reading that would be transposed on stage using performance which focuses more on the learner's material interpretations.

Furthermore, American dramatists of the Modern era usually offer directions for detailed scenery and visual imagination needed by early European theatre is nowadays appealed predominantly by the radio drama in which sound effects, words, and musical accompaniments are very well interpreted. Unlike a novel or any narrative poem, a play raises our visual imagination through actions and dialogue which take place before our eyes; all actions can be described by characters on stage.

### 1.1- Problem of the Research

Interactive drama teaching is opposed to traditional drama teaching and can eloquently be determined as a creative and inventive art-based device in which scenes are performed live by role-playing actors before a learner's audience which in return can interact with actors, as it has the role of enhancing the experiential teaching and learning processes. The learner indeed can interact by discussing the scenes, replaying the scenes by suggesting some changes, and finally joining the scenes as performers.

The interactive teaching process of a dramatic text in the classroom often has certain useful targets such as raising knowledge in the learner's mind by recognizing the role of theories attributed in class is conducted in real life, and how to exercise this knowledge to deal with real disputes, as well as to raise and expand the learner's perspectives and confidence in the self. (Styan, 1965, 05-06)

Teaching drama and theatre in the classroom may need an enormous theoretical framework and practice. These dynamic assumptions demand an experiential approach to the teaching and learning processes in how to construct a drama course in the classroom and how to transpose a dramatic text on stage. Absolutely, in a course of drama; teachers should have a satisfying relationship with the class and should be able enough to intervene with the teaching and learning situations.

In a drama course, teachers should also create an atmosphere which must be created or enacted in which he and the learner can feel safe in the knowledge and expectations they will relish and benefit from the activities of the drama course. In fact, teaching drama may require more active exercises, performance and interactive activities. These dramatic activities could be the practical core of the lecture and could be used in all stages of the lecture giving the learner the maximum amount of talking time.

### 1.2- Review of Previous Studies

Certain scholars of dramatic literature of multiple critical backgrounds have agreed on stressing performance. Oliver Arnold, a new historian who trained with

Stephen Greenblatt at Berkeley and who challenges the trend amongst early modern literary scholars to amalgamate theatre and power. Indeed, Greenblatt managed to restrict the interest he makes for theatrical power. He intentionally asserts that theatrical power is a primary expression and a crucial agent.

On the other hand, some unnamed critics argue that there is nothing outside of theatrical power. In fact, Greenblatt's review has the endeavor to make this amalgamation of theatrical representation a puzzle. For instance, through the examination of Shakespearean drama, this affords a significant disciplinary to the new historicist outline of early modern culture by assessing the interchanges between theatrical performance.

In fact, in the classroom; Arnold raises the problem of whether a drama text is a transcript or a record of performance and the problem of how to make plays first created as writing into performance. He indeed insisted that the learner should have experience of theatre so they can understand its power. Arnold once contends:

As scholars, we have an affinity for a certain form. I felt powerfully that although I loved novels I wasn't good at writing about them, and I felt an affinity for thinking and writing about drama, that is partly connected to the challenges of teaching a form. At this stage, I think literary pleasure can be taught and conveyed. (qtd in. Chowalter, 2003, 84)

Variably, Arnold believes that it is interesting to have the learner act things out and they should know what particular acting effort is. Indeed, theatre is determined as an art form which depends on the human being and its needs. He in fact is a spontaneous performer in class when he often team-teaches drama with other instructors: "*We have mutual levels of anxiety.*" (Chowalter, 85) and "*With a kinetic colleague I can feel quite staid.*"

Additionally, another scholar of dramatic literature named Larry Danson, a Shakespearian scholar, who is interested in the form and language of the play, usually declares that a play is not just a book or a piece of reading but a text for a possible performance. In fact, Danson is an honored performer. He yet emphasizes on the learner's performance. He asserts that the major problem with inexperienced learners who are not coming from their own experience as audience involved on stage is to get them over the unease and confusion.

In his courses, Danson usually emphasizes on reading Shakespeare's plays out loud and read the characters' roles before transposing them on stage. Literally, he has once been interviewed about his profession as an instructor of dramatic literature on performance teaching in class, he has answered:

I'm not an actor, but I'm a ham, my students tell me, and I think a certain degree of modeling, both in lecture and in small groups, is helpful. I perform to the extent that I am asked every year whether I am a frustrated actor; I'm a frustrated teacher. I don't formally act things out. I have too great respect for those who do it professionally. (Showalter, 85)

In part, in her PhD thesis; Mary Putos (2008) is well interested in constructing opportunities for interaction in drama class. Putos' study is conducted through examining two varied drama activities in different classes. She finds out that the learner

can have discussion environment with the teacher which benefits the learning process. (qtd in Savela, 2009, 14) On the other hand, Professor Timothy J Viator, a lecturer of modern American drama at university of Rowan, usually tends to outline his drama courses using constructivist approaches.

In fact, Viator (2009) explains that through a constructivist approach, the teacher affords structure and guidance by administering a context by asking questions, but allows the learner to choose and then support their enactments from the benefits the class progresses. Indeed, constructivist teachers often provide academic obstacles that threaten the learner to deal with the varied ideas and beliefs. (Viator, 2009, 57) Variably, he often relies on a book entitled *The American Dream* by Jim Cullen which examines the different types of the American dream that most of the modern American plays he uses to teach revolve around.

Indeed, Cullen's book has a great role to help the learners to study modern plays which are centered on the American dream theme. Literally, the works that predominantly dramatize the clashing ideologies of the American dream of the time are Arthur Miller's and Lorraine Hansberry's. In his essay entitled: "Which American Dreams?" A Constructive Approach to Teaching American Drama," Professor Vitor (2009) adheres that he uses to handle the ideas and concepts explored by Cullen in his history to delve into American drama. He believes that using a constructivist approach is profitable and advantageous.

Starting a drama course on Miller and Hansberry, Vitor (2009) begins with discussing the ideas the learners extract from Cullen's history, then structures the opinions to the characters from Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and recapitalizes some of the other plays of the time. Indeed, reading *Death of a Salesman* exemplifies the versions of the American dream and how it leads to conflicts. The protagonist Biff is right about his father Willy when he disputes at the funeral, "*He had the wrong dreams.*" (207).

Apparently, Willy persists with relentless faith to what he and his learners call the California dream. On the other hand, *A Raisin in the Sun* is yet an example of the American dream of equality as black characters have the intent to buy a home in a good neighborhood in the 1950's. In addition to Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), and Neil Simon's *Lost in Yonkers* (1990) which share this version of the American dream.

Indeed, reading these plays with the matters that emerge from a study of American ideologies, certain learners manage to be active to blame any character who appears to hold on to the past. Blanche Du Bois is a clear example; she is trapped and disillusioned by the past, and reliant on the kindness of strangers and alcohol. Mary Tyrone is another example; the learner may react for her abuse of to swoop away into a fog where the past when she was happy is real. With a constructivist approach the learner is greedy for happy endings in a study that allows few to praise characters that tend to take control.

Overall, Viator (2009) wishes his examination of the plays, he reads and analyzes with his students to offer the possibilities of using constructivist approaches in any literature class and wants them to recognize and articulate multiple interpretations of the plays that they had previously done. Prosperity of theatrical material on teaching American drama in the classroom prevails.

### 1.3- Aim of the Study

The aim of our study is to depict the impact of teaching a dramatic text through acting roles to EFL learners; yet to investigate the learners' attitudes towards dramatic text teaching through a co-operation. We tempt to expose a case study for dramatic text teaching and learning to students at ENS of Laghouat through introducing a model of incorporating an interactive approach to teaching drama by questioning teachers of drama about the responses and attitudes of students towards using certain teaching methods along with role-play.

Ideally, the main questions we seek to find answers for in this study are to what extent can teaching drama through role-play improve EFL learners' communicative skills? What attitudes and responses do EFL learners hold towards dramatic text teaching through role-play activity?

### 1.4- Hypotheses

On the basis of the aforementioned questions, we may hypothesize the following:

- Drama teaching in an acting class tempts to gradually enhance EFL learners' communicative skills, and yet develop their communicative competence.
- It is assumed that a considerable number of EFL learners hold negative attitudes and have passive responses towards dramatic text teaching through role-play in the class.

In order to validate and support the afore-stated hypotheses, we conducted a questionnaire to drama teachers at ENS of Laghouat. The researcher designed a questionnaire to be addressed to three teachers to elicit information for the sake of validating the research questions and hypotheses of this study.

## 2- Method and Tools:

We have opted for varied research tools for the sake of gaining enough and appropriate data in our investigation for both teaching a dramatic text through role-play and the attitudes and responses of learners towards the teaching methods used by teachers. In fact, we tempted to use a questionnaire for the teachers, therefore, we are using a case study research through which we can be conducive to the rigidity of the research design and lead us to adequate discussion and interpretation of the findings.

The questionnaire is a valid research instrument for obtaining worthy information from participants. "A questionnaire is an instrument for the collection of data, usually in written form consisting of open and/or closed questions and other probes requiring a response from the subjects" Nunan (1992, 231) using such an instrument can make the data collected easy to be analyzed, may result in reliable data and valid conclusion.

In our study, the questions are broad so that the participants can shape the meaning of a situation that is ideally rigged in interactions with other people. Open-ended questions are more likely used "the more-open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting" and "qualitative researchers seek to understand the context of setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally" (Creswell 2007, 08-09)

For, in order to collect the necessary data for our study, a variety of research approaches are used for the aim of validating and verifying the problem, questions, and hypotheses of the research. First, due to its empirical nature which is often conducted in classroom contexts, our study uses the qualitative approach because it focuses on a specific local context. Data in our study is typically based on a questionnaire which usually characterizes a qualitative case study research. Merriam (1998, 39)

Qualitative research is often descriptive and it can be used when exploring a phenomenon without recognizing major variables needed to examine. Creswell (2007) claims:

A qualitative approach is appropriate to use to study a research problem when the problem needs to be explored; when a complex detailed understanding is needed; when the researcher wants to write in a literary flexible style; and when the researcher seeks to understand the context or settings of participants (51)

Qualitative research design is an interpretive inquiry in which the researcher interprets what he sees, hears, and understands from the knowledge claims adapted. These interpretations are closely linked to the researcher's background and after setting the research; readers and participants also give their interpretations of the study. Flick (2013, 19-20)

However, our study also makes use of the quantitative approach; that is we seek to mix both approaches the qualitative and quantitative approaches of research to determine the research design and methodology through triangulation data sources in collecting and analyzing data. Thus, the research instruments, methods, and strategies of inquiry we adopt for the study will uncover the results and findings of the questionnaire and classroom observation.

To reach the analysis process, the researcher tempts to identify themes, and then conduct an inquiry of certain aspects for interpreting the results through either peer reviewing or triangulation. (Kawulich, 104) Our study makes use of mixed-methods approach in analyzing data. Johnson et al. (2007) defines it as: "the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration." (qtd in. Almalki 2016,04)

Jick (1979) argues that researchers collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data in a sequential, simultaneous, or rigorous manner which integrates both types of data; they claim that the way in which this data is combined will depend upon the nature of the inquiry and the philosophical view of the researcher.

Ideally, the integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in our research using pragmatic knowledge claims; as pragmatism allows the researcher to use different methods, paradigms, assumptions as well as different forms of data collection and analysis in conducting a mixed methods research. Yin (2014, 19-48)

This can help in understanding the research problem. "Mixed methods approach is one in which the researcher tends to base knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds. It

employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems.” (Creswell 2003, 18)

### 3- Results and Discussion

A questionnaire was designed for the teachers who participated in the study setting is notable to gather both qualitative and quantitative data and come up with solutions to our study problem. The Aim of the questionnaire was to collect information about the participant teachers’ backgrounds and their teaching experience, their motivation and their main targets in drama teaching, and finally to elicit information about role-play as a teaching methods and their evaluation of their students in class. The findings achieved from the questionnaire are introduced and discussed below.

Teachers have been asked a set of open form, close form, and multiple choice questions to collect the desired data which are:

Q 1 was a multiple choice question that asked teachers about how they usually teach drama in the classroom. The answers varied and each teacher gave her opinion by choosing one or more items. The results are illustrated in table 1.

**Table 1 Q. 01 How do you usually teach drama in the class room?**

<b>Reading comprehension activities</b>	<b>/</b>
<b>Work co-operatively for discussion</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Ask questions about characterization, plot, setting, and narrative voice.</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Ask students to make presentations, learn through projects, write essays</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Involve the whole class in discussion and participation</b>	<b>3</b>

Q 2 aimed at eliciting information about stating the reason why performance activities are not useful in nowadays EFL classes. The teachers answered as follow: (T1) stated that it is due to lack of interest in teaching through interaction, use of teacher-centered approach, and lack of interest of students and being passive learners. T2 and T3 summarized their answers by saying just because of lack of interest.

The next question Q3 asked teachers whether their students lack communicative skills, and asked to justify their answer. The answers were all Yes. T1 justified her answer by saying that this lack is due to lack of interest in EFL classes, lack of language skills may lead to lack of interaction and lack of communicative competence. T2 and T3 stated that students are shy, and they fear making mistakes.

**Table 2 Q3 Do your students lack communicative skills? Why?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>T1, T2, T3</b>	<b>/</b>

Q4 was devoted to collect data about drama and its relationship with communicative skills. The question was about the teaching approaches both students and teachers usually relate to drama in the class.

**Table 3 Q4. What teaching approaches do you and your students usually relate to drama?**

<b>T1</b>	<b>T2</b>	<b>T3</b>
<b>-Reading workshops -Acting, reading dialogues</b>	<b>-Learner-centered approach</b>	<b>-Reading dialogues -Task-Based approach</b>

The next question was about answering which activities teachers use in teaching dramatic texts in class. Answers can be introduced in table 4

**Table 4 Q 5 Activities used in teaching dramatic texts**

<b>Prediction activities</b>		<b>T2</b>	
<b>Open exercises</b>		<b>T2</b>	
<b>Reading loud</b>		<b>T2</b>	<b>T3</b>
<b>Acting and role-play</b>	<b>T1</b>		
<b>Discussion</b>	<b>T1</b>	<b>T2</b>	<b>T3</b>
<b>Group work</b>	<b>T1</b>	<b>T2</b>	<b>T3</b>
<b>Re-telling</b>		<b>T2</b>	
<b>Gap-filling</b>			<b>T3</b>

Question 6 attempted to elicit information about the elements that are required in learning a dramatic text. The answers to the question are illustrated below in table 5.

**Table 5 Q 6. Teaching a dramatic text in your class shapes:**

<b>Historical review for the text</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The importance of response to the dramatic text</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Thematic and stylistic analysis</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Performance and role-play</b>	<b>1</b>

Q 7 was an open-ended question that tempted to ask teachers whether they can change the negative attitudes in their dramatic teaching class, and how they and their students both can contribute to improve these attitudes in class. T1 stated that they can change those attitudes by interest in learning, motivation, learn by doing, preparing the lecture at home by learners, and encouraging students to read and act.

T2 claimed that there should be a focus on the learner-centered approach so that students feel involved, there should be a way to make students feel related to the plays and if there is a movie adaptation of the play, students should watch it in the classroom. T3 shared the view that students should read the text at home and in class, so that he can be more interested and motivated.

The last section in the questionnaire was addressed to know about the attitudes of teachers towards teaching methods; teachers are asked to rate and answer a set of questions by stating their level of agreement about the following statements revealed in tables 6 &7.

**Tables 6 & 7 Q8& Q9 Attitudes towards dramatic texts teaching methods**

	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly agree
<b>Teaching drama through performance is irrelevant</b>	-	-	1	2
<b>Reading dialogues increases communication among learners</b>	1	1	1	-
<b>Dramatic texts can be authentic materials</b>	2	1	-	-
<b>They increase learners' vocabulary</b>	3	-	-	-

	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly agree
Dialogues can stimulate learners' conventional skills	1	2	-	-
They encourage personal involvement of the learners	1	2	-	-

Data from questions Q8, Q9, Q10 and Q11 revealed that teachers' views varied and this comes back to their personality and interest of the teacher. For, some teachers are familiar with dramatic activities which they usually use in their language class and not only in teaching a dramatic texts, others are using traditional methods and think that those methods are efficient enough to raise learners' literary, cultural, linguistic and communicative competences.(See tables, 6, &7, 8& 9)

**Tables 8 & 9. Q10& Q11 Performing dramatic texts in the class can promote personal development by:**

	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly agree
<b>Encouraging students to work co-operatively</b>	-	-	1	2
<b>Encouraging critical abilities</b>	1	1	1	-
<b>Developing self-confidence</b>	2	1	-	-

#### 4- Conclusion

The achieved results from the above discussion of our questionnaire offered us the ability to lead to the results which are certainly efficient. In fact, traditional teaching, which is typically teacher-centered, is still viewed as an efficient teaching method. This method focuses mainly on classroom activities and tasks. Comparing this teaching approach to modern ones which allow learners to be more active and be exposed to

group work activities and work-cooperatively in the classroom and can be seen as more learner-centered.

Although it is clear that the traditional approaches to teaching drama are more useful and most of the learners are familiar with such as engaging open activities, reading loud in the classroom, and role-play which became a superior teaching approach which attracted learners through classroom interaction.

Further, the teachers acknowledged that the performance of students increases because they had adequate understanding through making roles in the class. This might be due to experiencing the teaching method in a successful way and due to the interactive approach that made learners be more active on stage. This means that learning language and literature can be improved and increased through the use of role-play through an interactive approach to teaching dramatic texts.

Overall, the results of study evoke that performance activities including group work and acting workshops can develop communication in class and provide the learner with cultural knowledge and social skills. Role-play activities also allow learners to use imagination and learn by doing relating to their real life situations. Ideally, this study offered an intuition of the situation of role-play activities in Algerian EFL classes. Finally, the results of study are apparently not plentiful since they are the researcher's own point of view, expectations, and suggestions even though they are centered on previous research.

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