

Creative Dramatics: An Extra Motivational Strategy in the Algerian EFL Literature Classroom

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Article info Abstract Received/..../2020 Within modern education, students are no longer seen as passive recipients of knowledge Accepted often supplied by teachers. Instead, they are encouraged to actively participate in a/2020 variety of activities conducive to promoting their communicative and thinking competencies. As a result of this new educational paradigm, the role of teacher has Reyword: shifted to acting as a facilitator carrying the task of assisting the students in monitoring their intellectual development. This task imposes on the teacher to attach special Creative drama attention to students' needs, motivations, preferences and expectations. Within this EFL literature course of thought, educational psychologists strongly agree that drama is largely Motivation concerned with the individualities of individuals and with the uniqueness of the human Modern education essence. Its immeasurable and multidimensional benefit in educating students is an irrefutable reality, particularly in a non-native context. The present paper, therefore, argues for the necessity of reinforcing the use of creative dramatics in the Algerian EFL literature classroom given the multidimensional merits of such activities. It seeks to sensitize teachers to the significance of exploiting the different literary genres to involve the students in creative dramatics.

1. Introduction

One of the most prominent arguments that support the inclusion of literature in the EFL classroom is the adequacy of the literary text for the exploration of students' inner feelings and the potential increase of their motivation (Duff &Maley, 1990). The artistic delight of literature (drama, fiction, poetry) serves a powerful tool and a driving force to evoke in the students distinguished emotions and feelings. The specificities of the literary text and its aesthetic qualities have the power to trigger the students' interest and attention to the extent that they can experience a greater sense of achievement and personal involvement when engaged with it. Better than any other text, the literary text is highly motivating and pleasurable because apart from its pedagogic merits, it reaches the students' imagination, dreams and fantasies (Carter McRae, 1999). Through reading, responding and performing literary texts, the students will become increasingly confident about expressing their own ideas and emotions. Literature indeed places the students in an active interactional role and helps them reach independency to make sense of its language. This is another way of saying that the literary text paves the way to creating a rewarding interactive and discursive classroom environment; an environment within which the students consider literature as being something vivid and relevant to their real-life experiences.

Within this vein of thought and in an attempt to maximize the benefit of literature in general and drama in particular in the Algerian EFL literature classroom, the present paper argues for the necessity of incorporating creative dramatics activities in teaching literature, particularly at the undergraduate level where literature is supposed to be adequately exploited to engage students in creative activities that in turn will boost their linguistic and literary competencies. Taking the findings of some investigative studies of literature teaching in the Algerian context as a basis for a plea for reinforcing dramatic activities, the paper exposes, in its preliminary part, the significance of drama in the literature classroom. It, therefore, highlights the merits of drama at the linguistic, literary, and motivational levels. At a second phase, an endeavour is made to respond to the neglect of dramatics by advocating the use of creative dramatics that stem from an adequate exploitation of both poetry and fiction.

2. The Merits of Drama in an EFL Context

Drama is a powerful tool for engaging the students in learning. Its active and constructive nature has the very potential to provide the students with learning opportunities within which they are exhorted to think, talk, manipulate materials and share viewpoints with each other(Smith&. Herring, 1993). Dramatic activities involve the students in building up an active identification with imagined situations and roles. In such a dynamic process, they are likely to draw up on their personal backgrounds and experiences, making the dramatic setting a vehicle for self -expression and self-development. The artistic delight of drama is also meant to promote the students' creative skills through performance and role playing. This is, indeed, a learning context that significantly

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contributes to developing their communicative, intellectual, and emotional abilities (Galazka, 2017). In a rather detailed account on the benefit of dramatic activities in the literature classroom McMaster (1998) stresses the following:

✓ Literacy benefit: Involving the students in performance activities stimulates their eagerness and curiosity in reading. The students will pay careful attention to their reading as they know that they will be involved in role plays and simulation. They will feel more motivated to read and follow along with the play in order not to miss their lines with it.

✓ Linguistic benefit: Because dramatic activities necessitate repetition, rehearsal and practice, the students' will read and re-read. This in turn will help them achieve fluency in language as they pay attention to tone of speech and expression. Their communicative skills, verbal and non -verbal will be improved.

✓ Affective benefit: Performing drama develops affect in the students as it creates interest and heightens motivation to learn. It sustains learning because it has a positive impact on the attitudinal aspects such as self confidence and self esteem to use language in unfamiliar situations. Thus, the act of performance trains the students to trust their ideas and abilities. The students will consider literature as something vivid and relevant.

✓ **Cooperative effect**: The very nature of performance activities supports all students. Assigning roles to a big number of students will encourage them to help each other. Even slow learners can participate taking on small roles. The students work together combining their ideas and abilities to achieve quality performance.

✓ Retention of knowledge: Performance activities train and improve the students' memories. This will help them retain basic plots of literary works.

On their side, Parkinson & Thomas (2004) praise the boundless benefit of introducing dramatic activities in the EFL literature classroom at different levels. Motivationally, the students can have fun with the materials they are learning. This, in turn, will heighten their motivation and make them consider literature as something alive, vivid and yet relevant instead of being merely words on pages. Therefore, the students who are required to read and play different roles feel more motivated to follow along with the play so as not to miss their lines with it.

Language wise, performing drama will help the students achieve fluency in the target language. Additionally, their communicative skills are likely to be improved.Furthermore, performance increases the students' retention of a literary work as it becomes more familiar to them, and making it easier for them to remember basic plots.

At last but not least, performance makes place for "differentiation" in the classroom. The latter term is used by educators to refer to employing different types of teaching methods to appeal to students with different aptitudes and learning styles. Hence, dramatizing a work of literature instead of simply reading it can serve an effective tool to actively engage students with literature through both action and motion.

3. The Predominance of Transmissive Approaches to Teaching Drama in the Algerian EFL Context

As stated earlier, modern education seeks to enhance students' active learning that in turn entails involving the students in challenging and creative learning contexts. Yet, in the Algerian EFL context, this orientation is less favored in many literature teaching settings (Kheladi, 2017). In fact, many investigative studies of literature teaching in the Algerian EFL context (Guerroudj, 2015, Kheladi, 2017, Rogti, 2020, Mokeddem, 2021) have remarkably pointed to the predominance of transmissive approaches to teaching literature, not least dramatic literature. Therefore, it seems that much is awaiting teachers, as agents of change, to promote dramatics in the Algerian EFL literature classroom.

The heavy impact of the traditional approach to teaching literature has recurrently led teachers to deal with drama texts in an informative manner through which they tend to provide students with inclusive surveys of contents, discussing distinctive features of particular characters, major plots in plays and recounting the playwrights' biographies (Kheladi, 2017). Within such a traditional approach, the teachers' very concern seems to be much more placed on coverage, in the sense that attention is devoted to the what to teach question rather than to how to teach. As such, pedagogically speaking, running drama courses seems to rest on theory rather than on practice and experiment (Rogti, 2020). Commenting on such teacher-led practices, chon, (1983) rightly argues that in a total contrast with the objectives of modern education, the teacher centered approach fosters a culture of learning which limits and discourages self-directed and autonomous learning, and contributes little to empower life-long learning skills.

Teaching "drama as text" has been a predominant approach in many EFL literature classrooms though teachers undoubtedly are well aware that drama texts are usually written for the purpose of being performed on stage. They are generally meant to be transformed into another different mode of presentation, i.e. performance (Abrams, 1998).

Yet, as argued by Showalter (2003) the advocacy of a performative approach to teaching drama does not exclude other approaches that emphasize the primacy of reading over acting. Reading and interpreting textual formats are also of capital importance because of the presence of a theory, and more importantly, a careful and active reading that triggers critical thinking and liberates the reader's imagination. Furthermore, developing the students' competencies in studying the narrative structure, the portrayal of characters and themes in a play are vitally important for interpretation. She therefore admits that "the performative approach which emphasizes the dialog in a play does not, of course, preclude or exclude other ways of teaching at the same time. Many teachers of drama actually prefer to emphasize the reading of plays, which give s value to every detail of the text." (Showalter, 2003, p.86)

Likewise, Olive (1995) thinks that other approaches to teaching drama such as a sound lecture on Shakespearean imagery followed by a detailed discussion in which students are fully prepared and adequately equipped to tackle the different angles of Elizabethan drama would also be of great benefit. Yet, he strongly endorses the potential of involving the students in performance activities.

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He accordingly posits that "students can gain so much if they are encouraged to regard a play as a script, a blue- print for a performance, as well as a text." (Olive, 1995, p. 9)

Conventionally, playwrights penning scripts do not write for the audience to see their words or to give the audience the complete details of the story. They, instead, write for actors, stage crews, and directors whose role is to interpret dialogues and stage directions to shape a performance. That is why, compared to other genres, reading a play is approached differently, in the sense that the reader takes on the roles of the actor, the stage crew and the director. Besides he/she has to supply other missing parts that do not appear on the script. Explaining this difference in reading drama and other texts, Danson (2000,) stresses the active role of the reader to supply missing things and proposes performance as a supplement to reading. He rightly posits that:

The difference between teaching a novel and teaching a play is that students have to be active in supplying the thing the novel supplies for them. The novel will tell them 'he said angrily'. But so much of the drama has to be supplied. You [teacher] have to help them [students] think of a play not just as a book but as a script for possible performance.

(Cited in Showalter, 2003, p.84)

Most often, EFL literature teachers hesitate to engage the students in performance activities holding the assumption that it is too hard to turn the classroom into theatre. This reluctance, in turn, deprives the students from the social, intellectual and linguistic development that this activity is likely to provide. The experiential nature of performance demands cooperation among students; it increases their interaction and triggers their creativity. Rogti& Guerroudj (2018) investigated EFL students' attitudes towards learning dramatic texts through an interactive approach. Their experimental study proved the positive outcomes of the performance pedagogy in terms of students' motivation and active engagement with drama.

It is quite ironic that literature teachers in many English departments have relegated dramatic performances to other modules such as oral production (Kheladi, 2017). Therefore, it is suggested that drama performances should be further encouraged in the literature classroom given its numerous benefits at different levels of learning.

4. A Plea for Reinforcing Creative Dramatics in the Algerian EFL Literature Classroom

In an endeavour to promote dramatic activities in the Algerian EFL literature classroom, the present paper seeks to encourage teachers to incorporate and reinforce creative dramatics in their teaching given the boundless benefit of such activities. Yet, before going any further, it seems wiser to wonder what creative drama is. Creative drama is a type of improvisational drama that is fundamentally process oriented. It stresses the creative role of the participants. This is indeed what makes it a student-centred activity. Feinberg (1976) refers to creative drama as being any kind of 'acting out' that brings part of the person's imagination and/or physical self into action. It envelops pantomime, improvisation, rehearsed skits, performed plays and anything wherein the actor, child or adult, has incorporated something of self into the movement, expression and dialogue.

Incorporating creative drama in the classroom stimulates the students' exploration of their personal experiences as well as those embedded in the literary text. Ross &Roe (1977, p.383)

similarly assert that "creative drama includes all forms of improvised drama, such as dramatic play, pantomime, and story dramatization. It is created spontaneously by the players themselves as an expression of their feelings or an interpretation of the characters in a story."

Creative dramatic activities are typically dynamic in the sense that they entail the students' sense of innovation and imagination. In other words, within such activities, the participant's role is not restricted to the memorization of the scripts, but it transcends to fuse his/her knowledge, understanding and feelings. Clarifying this idea, Mayers &Frasher (1984) accordingly write that:

Creative drama consists of activities that involve the playing or acting out of feelings, ideas, and events by the individuals who experience or generate them. It includes rhythmic bodily movement, with or without music, pantomime, spontaneous improvisation, role-playing, or any other type of dramatization. It is creative because the participants do not just memorize lines from a script; rather, they apply their own knowledge and experience and thus their own understanding of whatever they dramatize. (p.11)

As its name suggests, then, creative drama entails creativity, an aspect which has become an established part of modern education. Creative drama, therefore, is an opportunity for the students of literature to express their creativity. It sustains their creative growth as it makes them well aware of the significance of their own imagination, voices, feelings and intellect. Creative drama activities do not require too much formal preparation; they are spontaneous in nature. This spontaneity, in turn, promotes originality. Put differently, the ultimate goal of creative dramatics is not the play itself. Instead, the focus is rather centred on involving the students in aesthetic experiences through which they can develop their creative, communicative, and thinking skills. Endorsing the use of creative dramatics in EFL classrooms, Rizaoglu (2006, p.117) advances the following:

- ✓ Creative drama does not require formal setting;
- \checkmark It does not necessitate too much preparation;
- \checkmark It is creative (based on a self –shaped text, inspired from an idea, story, etc);
- ✓ It is spontaneous ;
- ✓ It is natural ;
- \checkmark It is flexible and informal ;
- \checkmark It involves evaluation, discussion and reflection;
- ✓ It requires taking risks (essential for new learning experiences);
- ✓ It is process- oriented (sharing, exploring and experimenting);
- ✓ It encourages cooperation among peers;
- \checkmark It places emphasis on the students' roles, the teacher acts as a facilitator;
- ✓ It resembles life.

4.1. Dramatization of Literary Texts:

Creative drama is typically characterized by its flexibility and smoothness of approach. Therefore, besides the performances that stem from dramatic literature per se, the present research incites teachers of literature to increase the exploitability of literature by using other genres, namely poetry and stories, in producing drama. This orientation of thought fundamentally aims at encouraging the students to explore deeply the literary texts, find spaces between its episodes, and ultimately, reshape it into something new. Indeed, such an activity is very likely to expand and enrich the fictional context as a whole. The overall objective is not performance itself, but rather the free expression of the students' imagination. They should be prompted to develop new and original ideas, having the fullest opportunity to work together to improvise fictional experiences.

4.1.1. Dramatizing Poetry

Dramatizing poetry and therefore lifting poems off pages and brining them into life through movement to create dramatic plays is an exciting activity in the EFL literature classroom (Gasparro, 1994). It is, in fact, an activity that engages the students cognitively, physically and emotionally, and this in turn, is conducive to attaining a whole literary engagement. Making poetry a source of producing drama is very likely to help students unveil and explore deeply the linguistic and aesthetic aspects of this genre. McCaslin (1990) argues that poetry is full of feelings and images that are likely to capture the students' interest and stimulate their sense of imagination, and this is the reason why it is seen as a satisfactory springboard for introducing creative playing to them. Commenting on the indisputable multidimensional benefits of acting out poems Ferguson (2014,p.1)rightly posits that "Dramatizing poems, which tend to be shorter and denser than stories, may require more unpacking of vocabulary and symbolism, and more thinking outside of the box."

Needless to recall, some types of poems are written in the form of dialogues. As such, they provide the students with multiple opportunities to produce dramatization activities within which they engage in productive conversations and improvisations. It becomes clear, therefore, that conversational poems are to a larger extent more suitable for dramatization than the descriptive or narrative ones. This does not mean, however, that the two latter types are to be discarded in creating drama. On the contrary, the students' investment in all forms of poetry is a challenging endeavour that ideally ought to be sustained by instructors whose role is to stimulate the students' creative potentials. Therefore, despite the fact that the students are supposed to be the central figures in the process by assuming active participatory roles in creating dramatic scenes, the teacher's role is still pivotal in furnishing a supportive environment. The teacher's task may envelop providing the students with an overall account on the background of the chosen poem, reading it aloud for them and even highlighting its predominant stylistics tactics.

Subsequently, the participating students are incited to prepare the dramatization of the poem by selecting the scenes they want to play and deciding character roles. They ought to be granted the opportunity to rehearse the chosen scenes, and thus, do an improvisation based on the poem. The idea may start by dividing the students into small groups taking into account the number of

characters in the poem. Therefore, each member is required to contribute to the conversion of the poem into a performable script (Gasparro, 1994).

This approach of acting out poetry is not only an enjoyable activity; it is rather a driving force that is very likely to spur the students' interest and desire to deepen their learning of both poetry and dramatics. Very similar to acting out theatrical pieces, utilizing poetry in creating drama is considered a motivating tool to encourage and sustain the students' potential to script their own plays. The creative aspect of this activity is what constitutes the nub of the whole approach. It is an activity that develops the students' ability to imagine and manipulate those images (Rosenberg, 1987). While poetry does not seem to envelop much action, it becomes the students' role to come up with their own interpretations. This is, indeed, another way of saying that the students are required to add dialogues and actions that are not explicit in the original text. They may equally incorporate actions/scenes that may precede the dramatization of the poem or even after its ending.

It is also worth mentioning that some characters' roles may not necessitate speaking; in this case the students are incited to recourse to making use of pantomime to add more vividness to their performance. Being performed before their peers, the class is encouraged together with the teacher to discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of the dramatization to improve things further. According to Ward (1933) the criticism that follows the playing of scenes is ideally meant to be the most valuable aspect of the whole dramatizing process in the sense that it induces careful character analysis and enhances a gradual formation of a distinguished literary taste for students. It also puts the teacher in a better position to gauge his/her students' development.

For illustrative purposes, the teacher may assign the students the task of reading and acting out parts of lengthy poems such as the epic poems (*The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer, or *The Divine Comedy* by Dante) as s/he may assign shorter poems such as *The Raven* by E.A.Poe and *The Chimney Sweeper* by William Blake.

4.1.2. Story -based Improvisation

Story based improvisation is a type of dramatic activities that is simply defined as the enactment of stories (Mages, 2008).Within this activity the students are required and encouraged to act out dramatic activities that stem from a story they have already read. The thematic analysis of the story is ideally meant to serve the source of an original performance. On this basis, the students are to be familiar with the plot of the story, its theme(s) and characters. Their empathy with characters and their traits is conducive to creating dramatic scenes that deeply explore the perspectives of the story. Adomat (2009) argues that story -based improvisations are more appropriate for the students of literature as they are basically centered on the act of reading and the active participation of students in producing creative improvisations. It is a motivational strategy for a vivid engagement of students with stories.

Using drama in teaching stories is typically effective in brining differentiation into the literature classroom. Dramatizing a short story or even a sequence from a novel that students would best

appreciate is typically effective in assisting them to understand plot development, main ideas, themes, characters, settings and conflicts and resolutions.

According to Meyers & Frasher (1984) the dramatic enactment of a given story is a creative activity within which thoughts and feelings are drastically evoked. Enacting events requires creative thinking so as to produce realistic imagined dialogues from the story under focus. Creative thinking is thus stimulated by such dramatizations that involve taking a position, making decision and solving a problem.

Improvisation of stories builds up a genuine interactive setting that entails through examination of one's and others' ideas. Along with the increased appreciation of literature which is likely to grow through dramatization of stories, one has to point to finest outcomes of this activity in terms of enhancing students' communicative skills. Owing to the flexible and supportive environment that this activity is likely to produce, the students get much language practice becoming fluent in expressing themselves (Ward, 1933). These dramatizations can be set informally requiring simple materials and humble costumes to produce memorable and fascinating scenes. The students themselves share characters' roles. One of them is assigned the role of a narrator; s/he reads the story while others perform action. The students are allowed to recall the lines they remember well from the original texts, yet they are not compelled to. As mentioned earlier, being well familiar with the gist of the story, the performing students are to be further encouraged to play the story with greater freedom, producing spontaneous speeches that correspond to the enacted scenes. The departure from the original words is rather a sign of creativity that this activity is set to attain. Yet, students ought to be sensitized to the fact that alternative speeches must not completely detract from characters' essence and storyline.

Being a performative activity, a story- based improvisation should be driven by clear learning objectives besides the fun and differentiation it is likely to bring into the classroom. Therefore, the focus on the predominant literary elements of the story is also a priority. As such dramatization becomes effective as a kind of reinforcement of literary knowledge. For instance, if the story is ironic, the performing students have to handle with care the assigned roles to maintain this tone. This is another way of saying that enjoying a great deal of independency in making the scenes, the students are to be made well aware of the fact that their performance is likely to be successful when it appropriately addresses the literary aspects of the story, not least sequencing of events, characters' traits , themes and attitudes.

5. Conclusion

The present paper praised the value of creative drama as a means of stimulating EFL students' creativity, communicative and problem solving skills. Creative dramatics serve a motivating tool that provides the students with a supportive and non-threatening context to challenge their perceptions about the world around them and about themselves as well. In an attempt to reinforce such activities in the Algerian EFL literature classroom, the paper made a plea for maximizing the exploitability of the literary text to create dramatic explorations within which the students are encouraged to recreate and seek for meaning in the different human experiences that literature

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embodies. To this end, the role of the teacher within this process was remarkably emphasized. The teacher ought to assume the role of a facilitator whose primary task is to encourage the students to explore, express and elaborate their feelings and ideas through the medium of dramatic scenes that stem from the different literary genres, not least poetry and stories. In other terms, the teacher should set up a favorable classroom environment that allows the students to organize, articulate and evaluate their creative experiences.

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