

USING DRAMA IN EFL CLASSROOM FOR EXPLORING STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

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Abstract: This paper reported a research project on using drama in English as foreign language (EFL) classroom for exploring students' knowledge and learning. The exploration aimed at understanding the students' interests, abilities and motivations. Then, we also observed the teacher's perceptions in the classrooms during the implementation of the drama for the students. In the study, we find that students show their good engagement and comprehension abilities. However, the perceptions of the teachers varied on the several aspects of the students' preparation and performance. Further, their perceptions reflect the pedagogical context offering possibilities for cultural production in language learning. The research results underline how the drama can be used to construct the abilities for early language learners especially for social engagement and language comprehension.

Keywords: *EFL classroom; drama; learning; social engagement; language comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is considered as a foreign language and taught in every level of education from primary school to university level. Unfortunately, the Indonesian education system does not have the distinction between second and foreign language studies. However, the system has the distinction among national, ethnic, and foreign language. As a foreign language in the country, English is only learnt during formal and non-formal education and not used on a daily basis. In English foreign language classroom, various pedagogical techniques and innovations have been applied to drive the students' four language skills such as reading, listening, writing, and speaking. To develop those skills, the teachers can use drama-based pedagogy which employs creative and fun activities in the classroom. With the pedagogy, students may acquire rich experiences in learning English.

There are some studies in relation to teaching drama in EFL classroom. Uysal and Yavuz (2018) discussed language learning through drama by discussing the importance of integrating drama into the second or foreign language learning process and the role of teachers and students in the process.

They found that teachers who utilized drama-based pedagogy became aware about students' mistakes. Then, the teachers were able to overcome the mistakes in learning the language. Further, by introducing the pedagogical and linguistic aspects of using drama techniques in the language classroom, the teachers might focus on the drama-oriented verbal and nonverbal exercises. Kondal (2016) discussed drama as a teaching tool for the integration of language skills. He described how dramatic techniques could be integrated in teaching language skills. For him, the techniques could involve and stimulate the feelings and visualization of the learners, providing them various stimuli and elevating their learning knowledge.

In learning a foreign language, each individual may have different interests, abilities, and motivations (Liu & Chen, 2015; Sansone, Smith, Thoman & MacNamara, 2012; Tsai & Chang, 2013). Understanding the knowledge and learning of these differences can be explored to generate and articulate ideas as in the context of foreign language learning. For the exploration of students' differences in learning foreign language, an interaction framework may transform into creative dialogue such as that in utilizing drama for an

explorative way. In the exploration, sharing ideas and opinions among students and teachers can introduce performance outcomes, skills, and knowledge.

In many cases, especially in the province of Lampung-Indonesia, the students' language skills do not develop as expected in the designed curriculum. Since then, it has been a debated problem of the education system in Indonesia especially with the EFL learning achievement. One of its central ideas deals with the students' differences in interests, abilities, and motivations in learning foreign language. As an alternative to respond the problem, we propose an insight into English drama pedagogy as a teaching tool to explore and understand the students' interests, abilities, and motivations. In exploring and understanding students' interests, abilities, and motivations, we conducted a research project on utilizing drama as an exploration of knowledge and learning for primary schools in teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia. Then, we observed the teacher's perceptions in the classrooms during the implementation of the drama for the students.

Featuring trends in English teaching for primary schools in Lampung-Indonesia

In the province of Lampung, Indonesia, primary schools are allowed to prepare their students for the growing influence of English as foreign language competence. Models for English teaching in primary schools have been used, but the effectiveness of the models is being debated comparing with their counterparts, with two standing out in particular. The first is national language education (i.e. Indonesian language), which is a core subject strengthening the national identity. The second is ethnic language education (i.e. Lampung language) which has the emphasis on preserving the cultural based knowledge (see Table 1). Therefore, models for language teaching (i.e. English, Indonesian and Lampung languages) are potential to compete each other. The competition affects the public policy for reducing the foreign language education. Implementing drama pedagogy offers the compensation of the reduction by teaching English through extracurricular activities (Nanda, 2016; Nanda & Susanto, 2020). Besides, the resources in national and ethnic languages can be used for drama activities, e.g. ethnic stories.

Table 1. *Philosophical outcomes in language education for primary schools*

Curriculum	Outcomes
National Language Education	Strengthening the national identity
Ethnic Language Education	Preserving the cultural based knowledge
Foreign Language Education	Preparing basic skills for globalized world with foreign language competence

Drama pedagogy

Drama pedagogy can be defined as a collection of drama-based teaching and learning strategies to engage students with the content they are learning (Lee, Patall, Cawthorn & Steingut, 2015; Uysal & Yavuz, 2018). Researchers have explored the advantages of the pedagogy for primary students (Strakšienė, 2015) and elementary students (Cremin, Gouch, Blakemore, Goff, & Macdonald, 2006; Demircioglu, 2010; Dupont, 1992). It has also been explored for secondary learners (Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho, 2008; Certo & Brinda, 2011; Rothwell, 2011) and adult learners (Dawson, Cawthorn, & Baker, 2011). In the exploration, it is highlighted that using drama pedagogy as teaching tool can improve the students in learning English. Not only does it help to learn language but it can improve their literacy skill such as understanding

and learning the lives, culture, and wisdom. Further, Norris (2000) confirmed that using drama in educational context is effective to help students to understand live experiences that they do not have.

Drama pedagogy as a teaching tool is an integrated form which is useful for language learning. However, for language teachers, involving students in drama activities is a challenging task. When drama pedagogy activities, e.g. role-play, are conducted in classroom, the students are invited to engage in the content discussion, share their thoughts and opinions about characters and motivations. Besides, they are encouraged to rethink and explore their perceptions about a situation. It can draw their attention and drive discussion among them. Then, they are eager to play. As the result, the activities can speed up

the learning process and enrich the classroom environment (Robinson, 2015). Hence, considering its advantages, we utilized English drama pedagogy as a teaching tool in language learning classrooms for primary schools in Lampung, Indonesia. Then, we tried to explore the teacher's perceptions of using the pedagogy.

METHOD

The research was designed in qualitative method. It focused on the description of implementing drama pedagogy in English learning classrooms of 10 (ten) primary schools in Lampung, Indonesia. The drama was derived from Indonesian ethnic stories which are converted into English. The research was also designed to study the perception of the

teachers when they used English drama pedagogy for their students in the classrooms (Fig.1). In the study, perceptions are defined as the sensory experiences which involve both the recognition of environmental actions as well as the response to those actions (Yates, 2007). The participants are 30 English teachers from the primary schools, both public and private, in Lampung. The schools are located in the town and rural areas. The teachers are experienced and certified for their teaching service. Data were collected from audio recorded interviews. The interviews were conducted in relaxed and open settings after they implemented drama activities. The responses gained from the interviews were transcribed and coded based on the themes.

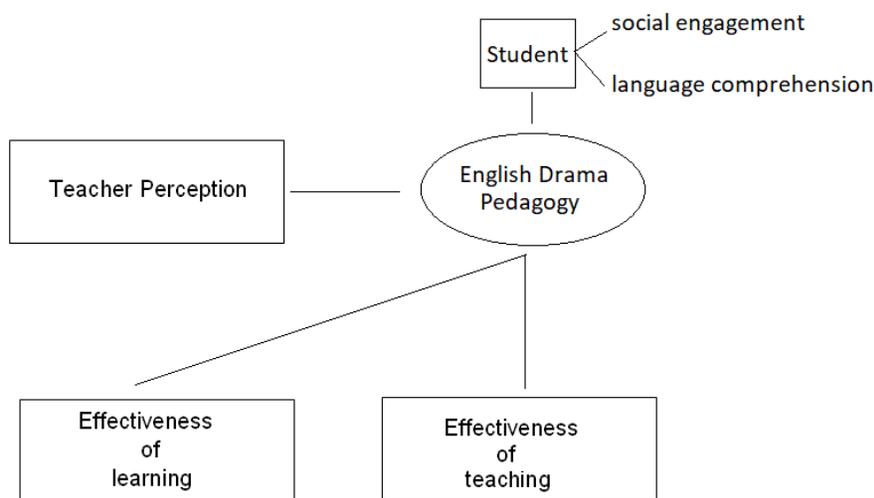


Figure 1. A design for acquiring the teachers' perception on the implementation of English drama pedagogy

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

English drama activities

The drama played by the students was taken from the Indonesian ethnic stories such as *Malin Kundang*, a folktale from West Sumatra, Indonesia. The folktale talks about the retribution on an ungrateful son. It is chosen because the story has local wisdom to learn in the classroom. It is observed that before the students performed the drama, they were directed by the teachers in the preparation of English drama performance (Fig. 2). Further, it is underlined that the teachers designed and organized the drama activities in the classrooms with some difficulties because they did not have the educational background in theater study. However,

in practice, the content of the drama activities was designed based on the teachers' curricula unit.



Picture 1. The students are directed by the teacher in the preparation of English drama performance

The teachers designed and organized each activity into several sections such as description, goals, rationale, guidelines, debrief, and reflection. Then, the activities were combined with reading and writing assignments in the classroom. Some activities were with the involvement of the teacher in a role play. The others involved the teacher as a facilitator. Being involved in the role play and acting as a facilitator, it is found that the teachers welcomed the improvisation by the students and themselves. With the teacher involvement, the drama pedagogy activities were designed with the understanding that the teacher and the students had the shared experience using drama pedagogy in the classroom. It is as suggested in Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek and Singer (2006), and Zigler and Bishop-Josef (2006) that drama pedagogy activities bring the involvement of not only the students but also the teachers.

When the teacher gets involved in the drama activity, we observed that the teacher helps the students discover the ability to explore and understand the situations. It can be useful for the students to develop creativity and communicative competence. The students' creativity in the drama activities helped the students developed their language use spontaneously. The teacher involvement also helps to prepare the students to understand self-knowledge to face real-life situations since the teacher facilitates the activities with the use of academic content and social experiences. As stated in Baldwin and Fleming (2003), creative thinking and self-knowledge can be acquired through the use of drama in education. Moreover, we find that the activities bring the students' engagement in learning situation. They engaged with the content they were learning (Picture 2).



Picture 2. *The students are reciting the text with the supervision of the teacher*

Teacher's perception

The teachers gave various responses after they were interviewed. Basically, what their responses are positive regarding English drama pedagogy as an effective tool for either teaching or learning. Figure 4 shows the scoring values indicate the teachers' perception on the implementation of English drama pedagogy. In one response, they agreed that the pedagogy is a good alternative way to develop pronunciation skill in communicative competence in the target language: i.e. English. But, they opined it is hard for the students as young learners to pronounce the English words as well as the intonation found in the drama that they never listen because they are Indonesian natives (Susanto, 2016).

In another response, the teachers informed that they, in the beginning, did not know what to do with the drama pedagogy especially in English due to no experience in English drama activities. Then, the teachers need much time to learn by themselves and explain the activities to the students. And they continued to struggle with explaining and setting up each activity for students. Despite the struggles, teachers said that by doing drama pedagogy activities they see the students' progress in pronouncing English words as well as sentences.

The teachers also responded that they found the improvement in the students' understanding on the English text. It was shown when the drama activities began, the students understood the information. As an example, they knew how a main character in the drama feels, e.g. the mother of *Malin Kundang*, and they could criticize why she behaves in a particular way when she is not recognized as the mother by her own son. It encouraged the students to learn the moral value in the cultural production depicted in the character.

Moreover, the teachers saw that the students got confident to speak in English and they attempted to make connection with the characters such as *Malin Kundang*, his mother, and his wife. They are eager to give some comments about the characters after the teachers gave the explanation. They pointed out that the students were completely engaged with those activities and the class became more dynamic through active cooperation of the classmates. For the teachers, the involvement of the students in the discussion on the characters shows their growing interest facilitated with their confidence to use and speak English.

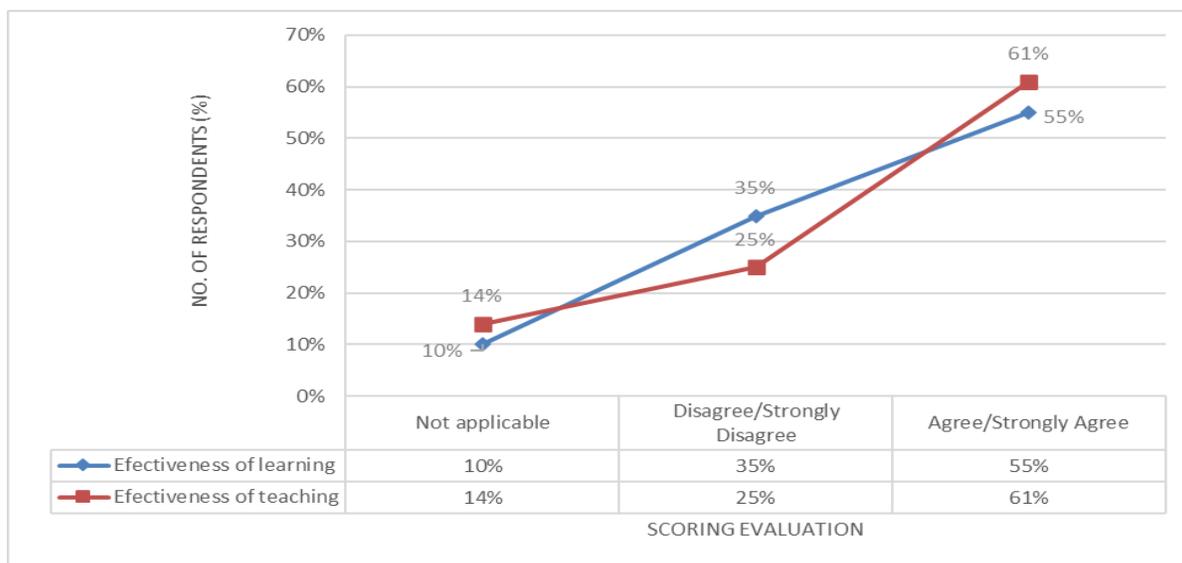


Figure 2. The scoring evaluation of the teachers' perception on the implementation of English drama pedagogy

Among those advantages, the teachers also responded about the difficulty for implementing English drama pedagogy as a teaching tool in language learning classrooms for primary schools in Indonesia. It is about the policy that English is not a core subject in the school. As the consequence, the subject gets less class meetings. For teachers, it is difficult to set the time to implement the pedagogy especially for the students involved in the activities.

Limitations of the study and future research needs and possibilities

This work is an exploratory study on the implementation of English drama pedagogy as a teaching tool for primary schools under the Indonesian context in Lampung Province and the teachers' perception of using the pedagogy in the classrooms. The number of schools involved may not fully represent the primary school population. In this respect, for the future research projects, we need more schools to observe and we will expand the exploration by looking through the dimension of multilingual context. We believe that by studying the dimension, we will have good opportunity to accommodate educational issues of multilingualism in Indonesia, i.e. minority as compared to majority language students (Festman, 2020) and ethnic in contrast with national and foreign language attitudes (Bartram, 2010; Dailey-O'Cain, & Liebscher, 2011). Therefore, our future projects can contribute insights into multilingual approach dealing with utilizing drama pedagogy in EFL

classroom.

CONCLUSION

Studying the implementation of English drama pedagogy as a teaching tool for primary schools, we explored the drama activities in the language classrooms and the teacher's perceptions. In our observation, the pedagogy contributed for building the students' abilities for social engagement and language comprehension. Those abilities were enhanced in drama activities with the involvement of the teacher in role play and as a facilitator. Although some difficulties were found in designing and organizing the activities due to lack of theatre education, but in practice they could work based on the curricula unit.

Meanwhile in the perceptions of the teachers, we could examine how various their responses which are basically positive, i.e. the pedagogy can be effective for teaching and learning. The pedagogy is regarded as a good alternative for teaching pronunciation. Although the students face that English words are not easy to learn because of its difference from Indonesian, the teachers saw the students' progress in pronouncing English words as well as sentences. Besides, the teachers responded that they found the students' improvement in understanding English text, e.g. by explaining and criticizing the characters. For the teachers, these made the class more dynamic with the students' involvement in the discussion and their confidence to speak English. Unfortunately, with the current

policy treating English as not a core subject in the school, time constraints are the problems for implementing the pedagogy.

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