

## The effect of drama in the teaching of listening skills

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### Abstract

Phonetics is the study of sounds to read letters correctly. It can also be defined as the ease of communication, if theory and practice both agree about the communicative function when learning a foreign language. Drama has been used in language teaching as a creative tool that motivates and lowers the anxiety level of the learners. This paper seeks the effectiveness of using drama in the teaching of phonetics in an EFL setting. After using drama in education in the teaching of pronunciation, the results show that students are more successful in acquiring the sound system compared with traditional teaching.

Keywords: Phonetics, EFL, ELT, drama, learning through drama.

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## 1. Introduction

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines phonetics as the study of speech sounds and their physiological production and acoustics. It can also be defined as the ease of communication, if theory and practice both agree about the communicative function when learning a foreign language. Theory moves from accuracy to fluency, from deductive teaching to inductive learning in a foreign language learning, and this changes the traditional language teaching focus from a structural view of language to the interactional one.

Phonetics can be taught in different ways such as from textbooks, from recorded or live media or from technology (Ashby & Przedlacka, 2013). The assessment is also done in three ways: the transcription paper, articulatory description and general essays in which students describe the sound organs (Ashby, 2013).

Pronunciation is a kind of language activity during which anxiety is high, depending on students' feeling of less self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-assessment, and general oral performance apprehension, all of which cause the fear of negative evaluation (Lucarz, 2013).

Studies conducted to understand the development of phonetic training in schools have shown different results. Tergujeff's (2012) research shows that although teachers have different ways of teaching phonetics, pragmatic, teacher-led and traditional teaching methods were used in the teaching of phonetics.

The study by Saglamel and Kayaoglu (2013) showed that a statistically significant decrease was found in the language anxiety levels of students who participated in creative drama programmes. Another study conducted by Thirsk and Solak (2012) showed that using plays can also help learners benefit while learning a foreign language. Atas (2014) indicated that the drama technique significantly lowered the speaking anxiety of EFL learners.

Language learners have problems in expressing and understanding the language they are learning, due to several problems, one of which is pronunciation that this study focuses on. The specified problem blocks interactive communication among the learners. It is language teachers who help the learners to overcome this problem. The striking fact is that teachers should be helped: trained to train. Phonetics is a part of Listening Skills Course of Education Faculty programmes in the Turkish higher education system. Pre-service teachers are trained in phonetics before their in-service teaching. The teacher training programme lasts for eight periods. Pre-service teachers are trained in phonetics during the first two periods. They take Listening and Pronunciation Courses I and II, each of which is three credits for a 14-week-long term. The course description for the Turkey wide programme is as follows.

Analysing authentic listening materials and speech samples used in different discourses; basic listening and phonetic skills such as discriminating minimal pairs and formulating phonetic transcriptions of problematic sounds; higher level listening skills and strategies; the fundamentals of listening and phonetics, namely vowels, consonants, stress in words, rhythm and intonation as well as the usage of phonetic alphabets for learning and production. Sub-skills of listening such as note-taking, predicting, extracting specific and detailed information, guessing meaning from context, and getting the gist; phonetics; aural authentic listening materials such as interviews, movies, songs, lectures, TV shows and news broadcasts of different accents of English.

We have two classes taking Listening and Pronunciation Courses I and II in our programme. They have been instructed in two ways, traditional and drama-supported procedure.

### 1.1. Traditional procedure

Students (we will use this term for the pre-service teachers) follow a certain course book for listening and pronunciation. The teaching sequence is as follows: Phonetic alphabet, sound symbols,

voiced and voiceless consonants, connected speech, intonation and sentence stress, single vowel symbols and diphthongs. Drama supported course details are given below after the purpose of the study.

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

This study focuses on two purposes:

1. Teaching of phonetics (sound symbols and pronunciation) inductively in a context of Macbeth, the play written by Shakespeare. The aim is to introduce the students to the authentic language and asking them to practise it as a play to perform for an end-of-the-year project.
2. The learning outcomes were matched with the course descriptions. By studying and playing Macbeth and analysing different samples from Shakespeare's works, this study aimed to help learners:
  - a. analyse an authentic listening material and speech samples used in different discourses
  - b. discriminating minimal pairs
  - c. formulating phonetic transcriptions
  - d. studying vowels, consonants, stress in words, rhythm and intonation
  - e. practice aural authentic listening such as movies and TV shows
  - f. get different accents.

## **3. Drama Supported Procedure: What We Have Done**

The course was planned for two terms (each 14 week long). From the beginning of the course, students were asked to study all phonetic sounds thoroughly and they were instructed that they would practise the vowels and consonants through the play. The first two weeks were phonetic alphabet analysis and introduction to Shakespeare's work, Macbeth. The students watched the movie, Macbeth. They were asked only to watch and have a gist of the play. After they were given the original and modern script of the play, they were asked to read the play for critical reading.

Later, one week was for general information about Shakespeare and his works and the logic for theatre and basic movements in acting. The fourth week was asking the students to transcribe the first act of the play after which they studied and compared their transcriptions during the course. This part was peer-learning and teacher supported.

The following two weeks had the same procedure for the other acts of the play. During this term, they were assessed according to how well they could produce and transcribe the words in the play. They were informed that they would be asked to transcribe the most frequent words in the play. The frequency count was decided as ten or above.

The frequency of the words in the shortened version of the play was analysed using the concordance software (AntConc 3.2.4). Private names, old-fashioned words and non-context utterances were excluded from the concordanced text.

They were given a formal written and oral examination. For the final exam, the frequent words that take part also in the play were asked to be transcribed phonetically and a listening exam was also conducted for the students. The second part of the course was different from the first part, that is, this time students were asked to choose the character that affected them and quote three sentences from that character while watching. After they had decided, they were asked to mention the character and read the sentences. Next, they were asked to play one of the characters. As there were 35 students, more than one student got the same character for the play.

In the following weeks, the students who had chosen the same character gathered and practised together the lines of the play in groups. The character groups were: Lady Macbeth, The Three Witches,

Banquo, King Duncan, Macduff, Malcolm, Hecate, Fleance, Lennox, Ross, The Murderers, Porter, Lady Macduff and Donalbain.

While they were memorising the lines for their characters the teachers helped in the intonation stress and rhyme. The practice lasted for four weeks in the classroom and four weeks in the rehearsal building. During the rehearsal practices, the students were asked both to utter and play their lines. They were also supported by the teachers and again they were asked to watch and listen to the lines that their characters in the play uttered.

The second-term assessment was two examinations. The Midterm examination consisted of questions about the play. The final assessment was watching the recorded video and assessing the students based on their performances in the play. Assessment was based on phonetic course principles which were explained at the beginning of the course. Their scores are given in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Comparative table of the first and second term overall exam scores

	First term	Second term
Standard deviation	10.00	10.00
Group standard deviation	16.80	16.81
Group cumulative score means	55.09	81.92
Norm referenced means	50.00	50.00

As seen in Table 1, the second term score is remarkably higher than that of the first term.

Table 2. Comparative table of mean scores for midterm and final examination of two terms

	First term	Second term
Final	58.35	74.97
Midterm	33.38	80.68

Table 2 shows the average achievement scores of the students. There is again an outstanding difference in the second term.

#### 4. Conclusion

Although it was not easy to make the learners to get involved in the play rehearsal process as for the initial stage, they lacked self-confidence, found the lines too long to memorise and were not sure about which character to choose for the play; the success was observable over the weeks. Even for the teacher, this kind of teaching was more tiring and needed patience and investment compared with the traditional teacher-centred teaching for the first two or three weeks.

However, the results of the study showed that learners are more motivated; therefore, they were eager to perform when the instruction was more implicit and inductive. As they were not alerted to learn directly, it was easy and fun to do the task the teacher had given them. Traditional teaching focuses on accuracy while the drama supported course directed them to fluency. As they were highly concentrated on performing the play, every struggle to perform the play helped in the aims of the course. Their scores, as seen in Tables 1 and 2, show that if language learning is given as task based and cooperatively, the results are more satisfying. This has four benefits for the language teacher:

1. He can teach subconsciously in a game-like atmosphere, covering the needs of his syllabus
2. As learning will be student-centred, students will not have barriers for learning
3. The teacher will have the chance to observe the class and assess them appropriately
4. Students can transfer what they have learned outside the classroom.

The whole rehearsal can be watched at:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0WOgl\\_l0f5ueUdQd3lSeG1zMk0/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0WOgl_l0f5ueUdQd3lSeG1zMk0/view)

As a result, it can be concluded that effective teaching occurs in a relaxed, non-threatening and low-level anxiety atmosphere, with the help of indirect or implicit tools. It is hoped that this study can give a clue to teachers for their teaching.

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