

Improving Students' Functional Writing Through Drama

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Abstract: The present study investigates the influence of teaching English subject using drama on the development of intermediate students' functional writing. The sample population of the study comprises two randomly selected first year intermediate classes of Alsafwa School in Cairo. One class of 20 students has been assigned to be control group. The other class of 22 students has been assigned to be experimental. Upon review of related literature and previous studies, Drama activities workshop was prepared. Validity and reliability of the tools have been measured. Applying the pre-test of functional writing for both control and experimental groups. The control group has been taught using the traditional way of teaching whereas the experimental group has been taught using drama. The post-test of functional writing by the end of workshop. Data was statistically analyzed. Results have been discussed. Based on results, recommendations and suggestions have been reached.

مستخلص:

هدف البحث الحالي إلى دراسة تأثير تدريس مادة اللغة الإنجليزية بإستخدام الدراما على تطوير مهارات الكتابة الوظيفية لدى طلاب المرحلة المتوسطة.تكونت مجموعة البحث من مجموعتين تم إختيارهم بشكل عشوائي لطلاب الصف الأول الإعدادي في مدارس الصفوة في القاهرة. قوام المجموعة الضابطة ٢٠ طالب بينما تتكون المجموعة التجريبية من ٢٢ طالب.و بعد مراجعة الأدبيات ذات الصلة و الدراسات السابقة تم إعداد ورشة الأنشطة الدرامية. تم قياس صحة و ثبات الأدوات.كما تم تطبيق اختبار كتابة وظيفية قبلي و بعدي لكل من المجموعة الضابطة و التجريبية. تم التدريس للمجموعة الضابطة بالطريقة التقليدية بينما تم التدريس للمجموعة التجريبية بإستخدام الأنشطة الدرامية. تم تحليل البيانات الإحصائية و مناقشة النتائج التي أدت إلى التوصل للتوصيات و المقترحات.

Introduction: Language is the most important area of human development. It is a vital tool of communicating thoughts and ideas. Language educators point out that language involves four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The skills are related to each other by two parameters:

1- The mode of communication:

- Oral skills (listening and speaking).
- Written skills (Reading and writing).

2- The direction of communication:

- Receptive skills (Listening and reading).
- Productive skills (Speaking and writing).

Writing is a major cognitive challenge because it is a test of memory, language and thinking ability (Kellog 2008). Writing is a language skill that is grounded with intellectual cognitive skills such as comprehension, analysis, synthesize and evaluation. Writing gains its importance from being an eternal communication tool. Moreover, writing is a crucial skill at the level of academic life, social life and business life.

Urbanova and Oakland (2003) stated: “The written language has nowadays an important social and educational function and its status has a high social prestige”. Banat (2007) indicated that the skill of writing is invaluable for helping students communicate and understand how the parts of a language go together, adding that writing is one of the four major language skills that need to be mastered by language learners. Thus, intensive efforts have been exerted by researchers and educators to study the nature of this skill as well as the best methods that can be followed to teach it effectively and communicatively. Writing is no longer viewed as a simple linear activity consisting of several stages that are independent and sequenced. In contrast, writing

is now recognized as a complex and integrated set of processes that are interactive and recursive. Al Souqi (2001) noted that writing involves the creation of ideas as well as the ability to express them logically and coherently.

At the level of academic life, most of assignments and exams are done in written discourse and must be presented in a concise and accurate written form.

Consequently, helping students master the skill of writing and enabling them to write effectively and interactively is one of the main objectives of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), especially that the communicative goals are the top priorities of the current trends in English language teaching field. Lindsay (2000) noted that producing a coherent, fluent and extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing to do in a language, regardless whether the language in question is a first, second or foreign.

EFL students face many difficulties and stresses in their academic writing, including those caused by distinguishing between spoken and written styles in English texts (Mudawy and Mousa 2015). Arabic is also quite different from English in both its spoken and written forms. Factors attributing to these differences include: a) differences in alphabets and b) differences in writing styles, in that Arabic tends to have more metaphoric phrases and lengthier sentences than English does.

Modern and networked life nowadays requires developing a pragmatic competence of the English language that facilitates a functional-purposeful use of it, something which is not always supported within formal learning settings. More specifically, learning functional English that takes language further into a more realistic/contextual realm that involves everyday-life situations has become a pressing prerequisite. Besides, learners need to find practical purposes that should encourage them to use English to meet specific communicative and survival needs (Nunan, 1999; Street, 2009). This way, they might find it meaningful and relevant, and hence feel motivated to learn it.

As Gee (2007) argues, language has its true home in action, the world, and dialogue, not in dictionaries and texts alone. In other words, language should take its appropriate place in tangible practices that mimic natural use. Thus, there should be a context in which linguistic segments, competencies, and skills are called upon and functionally employed. Foreign language learners might show mastery of the vocabulary and grammar of the target language, but without possessing a comparable control over the pragmatic uses of it: they might know, for example, several forms of thanking or complaining, but without being able to identify when it is appropriate to use one form instead of another (Juan & Campillo, 2002). When learners fail to express their intentions or understand others', a 'pragmatic failure' occurs (Zhuge & Wu, 2005).

Functional English or Functional Linguistics has come to the fore to refer to the pragmatic use of English to accomplish a variety of realistic (personal and social) purposes. In order to be functional, language must be used in a communicative interaction and must influence the listener or the reader in specific deliberate ways. This way, it relates closely to the meaningful/realistic use of language while it is employed for meeting certain communicative needs.

With regard to functional writing, in the present study, it is a short piece of writing which has certain standards and accepted ways of writing that should be mastered by vocational students. Thus in functional writing it is essential to use the language that is appropriate to the task.

There are several requirements of functional writing. First the students have to use language with an appropriate register. This means that they must write in an appropriate tone and with appropriate vocabulary for the specific task and audience. They must always keep in mind the purpose and the audience of the letter and include the reason for writing. They should also write with a strong sense of purpose. Moreover, they must write in a clear, concise style, aim to avoid long rambling sentences, punctuate accurately and observe the rules of grammar. Finally, they should keep the content relevant to the question while using the appropriate structure of the letter.

Functional writing in the current paper is usually addressed to close friends or family. Functional writing includes various themes such as making a complaint or request, inviting someone to a formal event or applying for a job.

Writing thus becomes an effective means of communication with others, not merely a means of displaying academic knowledge. Further, writing is strongly enhanced when instruction is explicitly designed to address learners' specific needs and objectives; it becomes a main device for self-expression, shaping ideas, and convincing others (Salem, 2013).

Subsequently, functional writing relates mainly to communicative-pragmatic uses of English while writing to accomplish some realistic goals/needs. That is, the writing activities carried out resemble those done in real life for practical purposes. Hence, functional writing is about applying writing to real examples, situations and tasks, and accordingly, learners should produce realistic and meaningful documents. It is also about 'quality' rather than 'quantity', and learners should be able to work on a piece until they are satisfied with it (The Functional Skills Support Programme, 2007).

-Drama in Teaching:

Drama has been used over the course of history from the time of Aristotle, who believed that theatre provided people a way to release emotions, right to the beginning of the progressive movement in education, where emphasis was placed upon “doing” rather than memorizing. (Cornet et Al 2001).

William Shakespeare claimed that:
 All the world's a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players;
 They have their exits and their entrances,
 And one man in his time plays many parts,
 His acts being seven ages.

As You Like It Act 2, scene 7, 139–143

If so, then maybe we need to use drama more in the schools. Using drama in the ESL classroom is not a new concept. Drama provides an excellent platform for exploring

theoretical and practical aspects of the English language (Whiteson,1996). The improvisation aspect of drama gives students opportunities for developing their communicative skills in authentic and dynamic situations. By using drama in the English classroom, we can use English with our students in intriguing and useful ways. The language can be used in context and makes it come to life. Drama has the potential of making the learning experience fun for the students and even memorable because it is interactive and visual.

Recently, technology has brought a drastic change in the world and now is revolutionizing education. Technological innovation is providing a range of possible solutions that can develop teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The incorporation of recent technologies in the face to face classrooms has changed the way people teach and learn. Consequently, multimedia -based programmes in traditional EFL classes has proved to be a powerful teaching medium (Harstell & Yuen 2006; Shephard 2003) as it proved to be a successful technological medium to grab the students' attention and motivate them to learn, in addition to be able to present authentic situations that the students will not have the opportunity to see in real life situations.

The infusion of some short films in EFL instruction has considerably changed the way teachers teach and students learn. According to Kurt (2011) the incorporation of multi-media programs in traditional learning environments has widely benefited both learning and teaching. This incorporation has increased active participation among students, fostered the quality of the learning outcome and offered opportunities for learners to have control over their learning time and place.

Some teachers use the traditional based activities to promote the students' writing skills, rather than incorporating the multimedia with its online and downloadable items as a powerful tool for developing writing skills and students' interest in EFL (King 2002, Lin 2000). New learning and teaching approaches have suggested that teachers of English as a foreign language should encourage their students to use technological innovations within EFL writing classes using every

available technique such as cell phones, digital cameras, laptops, projectors and televisions.

Videos can be an effective tool for teaching and learning English (or, for that matter, any academic subject) if used strategically and not as a "babysitting" device. There are many popular television shows and movies that can be great tools for English-language development.

Music is a great language-learning tool too. Popular songs can be used with English-language learners especially when the video shows the lyrics in time as the song is sung. Teachers can specifically look for songs that reinforce the thematic unit they are teaching. (Ferlazzo,2015)

Within this framework, studies conducted in this field suggested innovative techniques and strategies for teaching English in general and writing in particular especially that the traditional English language programs regard writing as a means of a language study more than as a means of communicating ideas.

The Study:

The Pilot Study:

The researcher went through the following steps:

A test in writing for some students:

To specify the areas of weakness in functional writing among college students, the researcher conducted a pilot study. Therefore, she randomly collected 30 functional writing sheets from two intermediate schools in Cairo. She analysed them according to a rubric that incorporated the following:

Content & Communicative Achievement, relevant content is to the task.

Organization, connected text and the usage of basic linking words.

Vocabulary, use of everyday vocabulary with accurate spelling.

Grammar, use a range of grammatical forms and punctuation.

Results:

The researcher marked the functional writing out of 25. The scores of the students ranged from 2/25 to 9/25, while 63% of the scores were less than 6/25. This result emphasized severe weakness in functional writing.

The Researcher's Observation for students

When preparing for the proposal, the researcher drew inspiration from her own experience in teaching students at both intermediate and secondary level. Most of the students show enthusiasm towards learning English, but their expectations decline after they score low grades in their initial tests especially in writing.

Interviews with students:

The researcher interviewed a group of six students: "What do you think is your challenge in writing and learning English?". Some answers came as follows:

I don't know enough vocabulary. I always struggle to find the suitable word in English. (Student 1)

I have a big problem with paraphrasing. It is the most difficult thing. (Student 2)

I have many spelling mistakes because the pronunciation is different from the writing. (Student 3)

I keep making the same mistakes as I cannot make a proper sentence in English because of my grammatical mistakes. (Student 4)

Sometimes I don't understand the topic of the writing task. (Student 5)

I like to watch English films and series on my laptop which helped me a lot to improve my writing and speaking. (Student 6)

Observation for some teachers:

The researcher observed 7 teachers while teaching. The researcher found that teachers do not use drama in enhancing the English language skills of the students and the level of the English language of the students was extremely low.

Teachers' interviews:

The researcher met some randomly chosen English teachers at various schools to ask them about their use of drama in their classrooms.

Here are the teachers' initial reflections concerning the use of drama in the classroom:

"Drama in ESL classrooms has more advantages than disadvantages. Advantages include increasing of real world conversations, reinforces

previously taught grammar and vocabulary and if used in the right context it can increase students' confidence in speaking skills.

On the other hand, some students who are socially awkward or easily embarrassed may not benefit at all. It is also difficult to assess or monitor, less effective or not suitable for absolute beginners. In order to teach drama to ESL students, the instructor must receive a thorough training. This training is difficult to get easily.

Overall, it can be beneficial with some groups of students, but instructors should know how to scaffold to students. Teacher should assess the students' readiness before using drama in ESL lessons." (Teachers 1 and 2)

"I think drama is a good teaching method that allows students to explore and get involved in the learning process. They can learn about problems and problem solving and learn to understand each other. They can learn to understand real life situations. It will help them to develop more skills. It can also improve their self-confidence, imagination, critical thinking skills and it can be an emotional outlet for them."

"Drama has the potential to empower the students and give them many opportunities to have pride in their work. It teaches them responsibility, problem solving, management and directing proficiencies." (Teachers 3&4)

A good drama teacher can use the practice with role –playing to contribute to the self-esteem of the students, build their confidence in using the target language (English) as well as develop many of the skills mentioned above which will carry over to real life. Using drama in ESL classrooms extends the emotional range of expressions, develops creativity and spontaneity, and serves fluency activities. On the other hand, it might encourage incorrect forms of language as long as the teacher is not encouraged to correct mistakes immediately so as not to discourage students. Also, activities may not be suitable to all the class. However, these problems could be solved if careful thought and planning are used in the classroom".(Teacher 5)

Statement of the Problem:

Based on the results of the pilot study, the problem of the present study is stated as follows:

Students at intermediate level face a problem of passing the English test, especially the writing part. Thus, in an attempt to solve this problem, some suggested activities are used in this study in a trial to use drama when teaching ESL classes.

Research Questions:

The main question of the present study is:
What is the effect of using drama in enhancing the writing skill and the interest in English for intermediate students?

The following sub questions were derived from the above question:

- 1- What is the framework of the suggested drama activities programme used in teaching English?
- 2- What is the effect of the suggested drama on enhancing the writing skill and the interest in learning English for intermediate students?
- 3- What are the functional writing skills required for intermediate students?

Research Hypotheses:

The present study hypothesised the following:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre and post administration of the English test in favour of the post administration mean score.
2. There is a statistically significance difference between the mean scores of the control and the experimental groups in the post administration of the English test in favour of the experiment group.
3. There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experiment group on the components of the English test in favour of the post administration mean scores.

Research Delimitations

The present study is limited to:

- 1- Place:2 first year intermediate female students' classes of Alsafwa school in Cairo.

- 2- Time: second term of the academic year 2019-2020.
- 3- The programme has been taught over 2 weeks - 4 periods per a week. 55 minutes to each period (total 8 periods = 8hours).

Instruments of the study:

1. Interviews.
2. A Questionnaire.
3. A Workshop.
4. A Pre Post-test.

Aim of the Study:

This study aims at: Measuring the effect of incorporating drama in enhancing the writing skills and the interest in learning English for the intermediate level students.

Significance of the Study:

It is hoped that the present study would be useful for:

1. Supervisors and curricula planners.
 - Contributing to modification of teaching methods currently adopted to incorporate drama in teaching EFL classes.
2. Teachers
 - Drawing the attention of EFL teachers to the importance of incorporating drama in ESL classes.
3. English language students.
 - Developing their writing skills.
 - Improving their English test results.
4. Researchers
 - Paving the way for conducting further studies related to Incorporating drama to enhance the writing skill and the interest in English language in ESL classrooms

Research procedures

The present study will follow the following procedures:

- 1- Reviewing the literature and previous studies which are related to:
 - a- Incorporating drama in teaching English as a second language.

- b- The effectiveness of the use of drama in enhancing the writing skill of the students.
- c- The effectiveness of using drama in the interest of the students to learn English as a second language.
- 2- Submitting the instruments to a jury member to test their validity and modifying them according to their recommendation
 - 3- Keeping a log book by the students to record their reaction towards using drama in their learning.
 - 4- Designing activities that will incorporate drama to enhance the writing skill of the students.
 - 5- Choosing a sample of students and dividing them into an experimental and a control group.
 - 6- Administering a Pre English test to the two groups.
 - 7- Implementing the proposed activities related to incorporating drama on the experimental group while the control group receives the regular instructions.
 - 8- Administering a Post English test on both groups.
 - 9- Analysing the collected data statistically.
 - 10- Interpreting results, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Definition of Terms:

Drama:It is a Greek word “Dran” which means “to do”. The term drama is defined as “any kind of activity which includes action” by Adıgüzel (2015) and by considering this definition, drama can serve many purposes. Demircioğlu (2015) states that drama techniques help students improve their skills and reduce their anxiety during the activities. In addition, they provide opportunity to use the target language in a meaningful context and situations which are similar to real life, so learners find it easy to use the target language when they face with real life situations (Schejbal, 2006).

The operational definition:

Drama is an active approach to learning where participants identify with roles and situations to be able to engage with, explore and understand the world they live in. This goes beyond language, as social interaction involves communication on multiple levels that cross

cultural and language boundaries. By being part of a drama ensemble and participating in a fictitious context, the class is experiencing a shared moment of emotions, facial expressions, gesture, movement and a heightened awareness of others, that would not necessarily be experienced outside the drama environment. Students are thus freed from the constraints of precision of language, that may be required in the conventional language classroom, and are equipped with many tools with which to communicate meaning.

Functional writing: Shorofat (2007) defines functional writing, as opposed to academic and creative writing, as that kind of writing which aims at conveying a specific, direct and clear message to a specific audience. It includes several areas such as writing instructions, formal letters, notes, invitations, advertisements, and reports.

The operational definition:

For the present research purposes, functional writing is defined as " a language practice that fits in with the pragmatic and functional use of English. Functional writing is the practice of expressing specific information meant to mirror real-life scenarios such as how to make or do something, giving advice, inviting someone to something or telling what happened in a specific situation. Functional writing often turns a complex subject into something that is more understandable to the reader.

III. Data Analysis:

The first question: To answer the first question, "What is the effectiveness of teaching English subject using drama on the development of first year intermediate students' functional writing?", data was treated by the statistical program "SPSS" using t-test. Data treatment reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in mean scores of the pre and post-test of the experimental group, the mean and Standard Deviation of pre and post grades of the experimental group is as follows:

Table 1

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre	22	52.36	17.82

Post	22	102.86	22.73
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Table (1) indicated that the mean of post grades of experimental group is more than the mean of pre grades of experimental group. Paired samples T-test was used as in the following table:

Table 2

Experimental	T	df	Mean Difference	Sig.P-value
Pre-post	12.06	21	50.50	0.00

The second question: To answer the Second question "Is there any statistically significant difference between the achievement of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the achievement of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the pre-creative thinking test? ", data of the pre-test was treated by the statistical program "SPSS" using t-test. Data treatment reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean grades of control and experimental groups as the mean scores of experimental group was 54.40 and the mean scores of the mean scores of the experimental group was 52.36. Std. Deviation of pre-test of control and experimental groups is as follows:

Table 3

Groups	N	Means	Std.Deviation
Control	20	54.40	22.20
Experimenta	22	52.36	17.83

Table (3) indicated that the mean of degrees of control group is more than the mean of degrees of experimental group. To test the statistically significant difference between the creative thinking of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the creative thinking of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the functional writing test, independent samples T test was used as in the following table:

Table 4

Pre-test	T	df	Mean Difference	Sig.p-value	
Experimental	x	0.33	40	2.04	0.74

Control				
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Table (4) indicated that there are no statistically significant differences between the creative thinking of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the creative thinking of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the pre-creative thinking test because the p-value is more than 0.05.

The third question: To answer the Second question " Is there any statistically significant difference between the achievement of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the achievement of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the post-functional writing test?", data was treated by using the statistical program "SPSS". Data treatment reveals the mean and Std. Deviation of post-test of control and experimental groups as follows:

Table 5

Groups	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Control	20	54.15	20.45
Experimental	22	102.86	22.73

Table (5) indicated that the mean of degrees of experimental group is more than the mean of degrees of control group. To test the statistically significant difference between the functional writing of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the functional writing of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the post-functional writing test, independent samples T test was used as in the following table:

Table 6

Pre-test	T	df	Mean Difference	Sig. p-value
Experimental Control	x 7.27	40	48.71	0.00

Table (6) indicated that there are statistically significant differences between the functional writing of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the functional writing of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the post-functional writing test because the p-value is less than 0.05.

IV. Results' discussion:

As shown by the results, there is a statistically significant difference in mean scores of the pre and post-test of the experimental group. The mean of post grades of experimental group is more than the mean of pre grades of experimental group. It was indicated that there exist statistically significant differences in students' pre and post grades of experimental group because of the p-value is less than 0.05. That means teaching English using drama is effective in the development of first year intermediate students' functional writing. This is consistent with the results of Comez (2010) and Barreto (2014) Boudreault (2010). On the other hand, data analysis revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean grades of control and experimental groups according to the pre creative thinking test as the mean scores of experimental group was 54.40 and the mean scores of the mean scores of the experimental group was 52.36 (i.e.) there are no statistically significant differences between the functional writing of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the functional writing of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the pre-functional writing test because the p-value is more than 0.05. That means the two groups have the same level of functional writing and ready to start the experiment. No previous differences will affect the experiment. Results also revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the functional writing of control group (those who study using the traditional method of teaching) and the functional writing of experimental group (those who study using drama) according to the post-functional writing test because the p-value is less than 0.05 and this insure the effectiveness of teaching English using drama on the students' functional writing. Thus, results of the present study consistent with the study of Maley and Duff's (2009), Comez (2010), Barreto (2014) and Boudreault (2010).

V. Recommendation and suggestions:

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations and suggestions are made:

1. Teachers should be trained on how to teach using drama in their classes.
2. Foreign language teaching should adopt dramatic activities to help students improve their personalities, achievement and cultural awareness of the foreign language.
3. Further research is needed to investigate the influence of teaching English language using drama on teachers' performance.
5. Further research is needed to investigate the influence of teaching subjects other than English using drama on the development of students' achievement.

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