

Analyzing 3 EFL classes using a skit

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Abstract

Teachers and researchers from around the world have attested to the benefits of using drama-based activities in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. Despite this praise it is believed that the number of Japanese teachers of English using such activities in their classes is very small. There are a number of reasons for this including a lack of confidence in the teachers' English language ability, poor communication skills with their students, a lack of quantitative analysis of drama-based activities, and a perception that drama is not serious learning. This study compares the quantitative and qualitative analysis gathered in a pre- and post-task test (see Appendix A) for 52 university students from 3 EFL classes using a skit to ascertain whether the positive findings of Theobald (2021) can be repeated. Results show that while the quantitative analysis was all positive, the degree of improvement varies depending on the group. The qualitative analysis shows a combined average increase in confidence in overall English skills of 17%, replicating the 2021 study.

International research on the use of drama in the EFL classroom

This paper recognizes that there are cultural differences between nations when learning EFL. However, these differences should not be overemphasized because any student learning a new language, regardless of age, ability or nationality, has the same feelings of embarrassment, frustration, social anxiety, peer pressure etc. For a more detailed list of anxieties students of a new language face see Atlas (2015).

In 1978, Vygotsky said the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development takes place when speech and practical activity come together. Such a statement reads like a definition for what happens when drama activities are used in the EFL classroom.

Research throughout the world on the use of drama in the EFL classroom has looked into a wide range of learning activities. The following papers are just a small example of these diverse areas of research: a psychological understanding of drama in second language learning (Stern, 1980); using drama techniques in Malaysian EFL classes to encourage oral interaction (Chamkaur, 1996); Hong Kong students' perception of learning English through drama (Lee, 2007); content and language integrated learning in English language schools across Europe (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010); fostering a positive EFL class environment in Colombia through drama (Guerreo, 2017); the effects of drama activities on Turkish EFL student's speaking skills was studied by (Akyüz & Tanış, 2020); and teaching methods to improve Japanese students' English ability and promote emotional maturity (Nishikawa, 2021).

All these studies show that using drama activities in EFL classes can produce many positive effects.

Background

In 2020, the author of this paper used a drama-based activity over 6 weeks in an EFL class for the first time. The lesson was very successful and the student reaction was very positive.

Looking into the research surrounding the use of drama activities in EFL classes, it became clear that previous studies had focused on qualitative rather than quantitative analysis. One possible reason for this imbalance could be the ease with which qualitative analysis can be gathered, i.e., simply by asking questions in a multiple-choice questionnaire. In the EFL classroom, doing quantitative analysis that results in data that can be analyzed to assess the student's improvements in the subject, commands a little more imagination and lateral thinking.

There followed a study entitled *Assessing a drama activity in the EFL classroom using quantitative analysis*, Theobald (2021) which included data from one class of

19 university students who worked on a 4-page skit (Appendix B) for 3 weeks. For the 2022 paper, the same methodology was followed with two more classes.

Planning the Evaluation

The 3-step framework for task evaluation from Ellis (1997) used in Theobald (2021) was followed here. This involved choosing a task to evaluate, describing the task and planning the evaluation. A big advantage of continuing the study from a previous paper is that most of this work has already been done. However, in reviewing the past study it became obvious that a few improvements in the evaluation process were necessary. These are listed below:

- (i) In the 2021 study, five questions focused on the acquisition of culture. It did this by asking questions about cultural knowledge that had been explained by the teacher during the classes, e.g., *The Twilight Zone* and *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. The questionnaire had been originally developed for a 6-week drama activity where these particular questions' inclusion felt more natural. However, in the new 3-week setting, the information required to answer the cultural questions felt like they had to be shoehorned into the limited time that was available. Furthermore, the results were not so significant. Consequently, these questions were omitted.
- (ii) The quantitative analysis was originally split between vocabulary (21), colloquialisms (4) and katakana to English spelling (4). However, it did not seem necessary to split them up into sections where there were only 4 questions. One correct answer amounting to a 25% score did not appear to be helpful to the analysis. So, all three scores were collected together giving an overall vocabulary score from 29 questions.
- (iii) In the 2021 study, a couple of changes were made following a pilot test. In this new study, expanding the number of students who were tested brought up more alternative answers that needed to be considered in the evaluation. These are as follows:

- a. **Kimchi** can also be spelt **kimchee** and **gimchi**.
- b. **Packed lunch** can be described as being a **bento**.
- c. **Capital city** can be described as being for the nation, or for the prefecture or state.
- d. Answers in Japanese, although rare, were accepted as it showed an understanding of the question even if the student did not explain the answer in English.
- e. In Japanese culture, **first name** refers to the family name, but in England it refers to ones' Christian name. Both answers were accepted and the question continued to be included because a significant number of students did not recognize it as any form of name.
- f. **Colombia** is the name of the country in the skit, but **Columbia** is also a city in America and a global sportswear brand.
- g. For 3 students, it was easier to draw a picture of a **tuning fork** than to describe it.

The data collected in the 2021 study was marked again using the new evaluation criteria to facilitate valid comparisons.

Method

Participants

Three groups of university students (n=52) undertook the 3-week drama activity. Groups A and B were from one state university, all majoring in education, where the English ability is generally high. Group C were students from an independent university, all majoring in English, where the standard of English ability is generally lower.

Table 1*Participants split by gender and EIKEN passes*

Group	Sex		n=	EIKEN grade passed					Average grade*
	m	f		Pre-1	2	Pre-2	3	No grade	
A	9	10	19	2	10	1		6	Pre-2 (low)
B	9	12	21	4	11	2	1	3	Pre 2 (high)
C	4	8	12	1	2	4	1	4	3 (high)
Total	22	30	52	7	23	7	2	13	Pre-2 (low)

* The average EIKEN grade was calculated by giving points for passed grades as follows: no grade (0), grade 3 (1), grade pre-2 (3), grade 2 (5), and grade pre-1 (7). The points awarded are intended to reflect the size of vocabulary and extra months study needed to pass that grade.

Procedure

The 3-week (3 x 90 minutes) drama task used in this study involved a 4-page skit containing 5 characters and, if needed, a narrator.

Week 1

- (i) The drama project was explained to the class (5 minutes).
- (ii) Students were asked to complete a 33-item pre-task test (20 minutes). They were told that a considerable number of words in the vocabulary test may be unknown at this point in the task, and also that their grade for the course would not be affected by the test.
- (iii) All participants were given a copy of the script to keep and they were asked to take notes on unknown vocabulary and colloquialisms throughout the project.
- (iv) The teacher chose five students to read the script aloud for the first 'dry run'. The teacher then acted as the director, providing background to the characters' characteristics, explaining some jokes, emphasizing gestures and

intonation of specific lines (30 minutes).

- (v) In groups of 5 or 6, students read the scripts in circles. With students spread out around a wide space. This had the advantage of making students speak a bit louder. Furthermore, covid restrictions on mask wearing and social distancing were no problem (35 minutes).
- (vi) For homework the students were asked to study the script for unknown words and meanings, and to be ready for the next weeks performances in new groups.

Week 2

- (i) Class began with a listening test that included vocabulary taken from the pre- and post-task test. Sentences were checked in pairs and then written on the blackboard (20 minutes).
- (ii) Four students were chosen to sit on the stage on chairs behind desks and play the 4 student characters in the skit. One student was chosen to stand to the side of the stage behind a podium and play the role of the teacher character. The skit was directed by the teacher in detail, emphasizing gesture, intonation, stage direction, and props. The rest of the class watched the performance and made notes on their scripts (30 minutes).
- (iii) Students were mixed into different groups of 5 and asked to take on the role of a separate character from one they had previously played. They were told that this was a group activity relying on members to help each other (20 minutes).
- (iv) Part (iii) was repeated (20 minutes).
- (v) Students were placed in a new group and asked to choose a role they had not previously played, study the words, intonation, gestures and prepare to perform the skit the following week.

Week 3

- (i) Each group performed on stage using props (waste paper thrown at the beginning, a megaphone, 4 chairs on the stage with bags underneath containing the paper and packed lunches, a pencil to break, and a podium to the side of the stage). Once each performance had finished the audience applauded and gave encouragement (45 minutes).
- (ii) The post-task test was handed out and completed (20 minutes).
- (iii) The teacher led a group discussion reviewing the 3-week activity.

Results

(a) Results from the quantitative analysis are shown in table 2 below.

A State university	X	2020	(n=19)
B State university	X	2021	(n=21)
C Independent university		2021	(n=12)

Table 2

Quantitative analysis results from the pre- and post-activity test

Question	Average pre-task score for class			Average post-task score for class			Average score increase for class		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Vocabulary (29)	8.58	8.95	6.42	20.6	16.4	14.4	12.1	7.47	7.98
As a percentage	30.0	30.1	22.1	71.0	56.6	49.7	41.0	26.5	27.6

(b) Results from the qualitative analysis are shown in table 2 below.

Table 3*Participant's reported average confidence in specific English language skills*

Confidence in English as a %	Pre-activity test			Post-activity test			% increase in confidence			
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A, B, C average
Speaking	37	39	31	56	59	42	19	20	11	17
Reading	52	51	42	58	69	50	6	18	8	11
Listening	44	47	32	56	63	40	12	16	8	12
Drama performance	32	35	27	63	66	49	31	31	22	28
Combined	41	43	33	58	64	45	17	21	12	17

Discussion

Using this particular 4-page skit over a 3-week period in different EFL classes produced positive results in all of the analyses. Below is a detailed discussion of the findings.

- (i) In assessing the participants' English ability, the EIKEN grade passes were used because this test is the most widely used in Japan. An arbitrary score was given for a pass grade in Pre-1, 2, pre-2 and 3 grade passes scores of 7,5,3,1 respectively. If the score for these grades were 4,3,2,1 then group's A and B average EIKEN grade in Table 1 would have increased, while group C would have remained the same. This working is not shown but it indicates that more time needs to be spent in gathering data about the participants previous English language ability and attainments.
- (ii) In the three groups, the average EIKEN score pass was very similar (see table 1). However, of the 52 participants, 13 said they had no EIKEN grade and this dragged the average EIKEN score down considerably. There is a possibility that some students with low EIKEN passes may have been embarrassed to admit this fact. Also, even though some students had no EIKEN pass, they may have had good TOEIC scores, IELTS etc., but this

was not accounted for.

- (iii) In Table 2, the two state university classes, A and B, average pre-task test score was very similar (30% and 30.1%). However, their subsequent post-task scores were significantly different (71% and 56.6%, a discrepancy of 14.4%). This may be due to a number of factors, eg., the use of different vocabulary teaching techniques, the amount of time spent focusing on the vocabulary.
- (iv) As the pre- and post-task vocabulary test included just 29 questions, it means that each correct word in the test accounted for approximately 3.5%. Consequently, in point (iii) above, the 14% difference only represents an increase of approximately 4.4 words.
- (v) Although this research was extended from 19 participants to 52, it still remains fairly limited in scale. Therefore, data generated from the 22 males and 30 females taking part in this activity was not yet analyzed to assess if gender was a significant factor in results.
- (vi) In Table 3, participants reported an average increase in confidence for three English skills as follows; reading (11%), listening (12%), and speaking (17%). These are all significant increases given the activity only lasted 3 weeks. Some groups reported a higher increase in confidence for particular skills. The combined average increase in confidence was also different between the groups, A (17%), B (21%) and C (12%). It should be noted that the group dynamic and teacher input, both have a great influence on the effectiveness and enjoyment of the task, and on the subsequent reported gains in confidence.
- (vii) Participants reported an average increase in confidence when performing an English drama of 28%. This large number may be misleading because it was perhaps most student's first and only experience of an English drama task. Therefore, their reported confidence for this skill at the pre-task stage was particularly low.

(viii) The combined average reported increase in confidence for the 4 English skills was 17% which replicates the analysis undertaken in Theobald (2021).

Conclusion

Assessing EIKEN scores alone is not an effective measure of a student's English ability. Increasing the number of participants considerably will improve the validity and clarity of any results generated. Continuously assessing the evaluation process is a very important aspect of this kind of repeat study.

The active role of the teacher as director, explainer and motivator during this task is essential. It should also be added, that without good group dynamics the task would not have been as successful.

Despite generating different results from the 2021 study, the positive quantitative analysis results from the vocabulary test in 2022 remained very significant. The qualitative analysis increase in confidence for the 4 English skills was also very significant and exactly replicated the 2021 study. This should provide further sound evidence to support the use of a drama activity in the EFL classroom.

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Appendix A

Pre- and post-activity test

Vocabulary – In simple English, explain the meaning of these words below.

1. surname
2. hare
3. chard
4. lard
5. sultana
6. disappeared
7. megaphone
8. capital city
9. packed lunch
10. spam to eat
11. nan bread
12. poetry
13. applaud
14. mysterious
15. unexpected
16. colloquialism
17. thigh
18. 10 degrees
19. tuning fork
20. relaxing
21. ain't

What do these words mean?

22. erm?
23. hmmm
24. aherm
25. shush

How do you spell these words in English?

26. サティファイケット
27. ヨーグルト
28. キムチ
29. コロンビア

Confidence in

weak

strong

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 30. Speaking English | (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10) |
| 31. Reading English | (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10) |
| 32. Listening to English | (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10) |
| 33. Performing English drama | (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10) |

Appendix B

Skit script

An Unexpected Ending

Classroom. Students are quietly studying. Mr. Karaoke breaks his pencil.

Mr. Karaoke Can I borrow your pencil.

Mr. Donut Of course Mr. Karaoke. Here you are. You can keep it,....
I have 3 more.

Mr. Karaoke Thank you very much.

Mr. Ree Excuse me, does anyone know the capital of Colombia?

Mr. Donut The capital of Colombia is Bogota. B.O.G.O.T.A.

Mr. Ree Thank you very much.

(Continue silently working. Big banging footsteps approach).

Mr. Donut Quick. The new teacher is coming.

(Boys stand up, bang desks and throw paper).

Teacher OK boys. Shush. Shh. Please be quiet! Please be quiet!

(megaphone) BOYS !!! (silence) Please be.... Quiet.

Good. Thank you.

Mr. Chair Thank you sir.

Teacher Thank me?! Why.

Mr. Chair It was very noisy and now it is very quiet.

Teacher You're welcome, erm? What is your surname?

Mr. Karaoke His name is Mr. Chair

Mr. Chair Chair, sir. Marr Chair, sir (stands up).

Teacher First name.... Marr.... as in?

Mr. Ree As in Marr, sir.

Mr. Chair Mark... Anthony... Robert... Rocket... Red-robot...

Rebecca... Relaxing Chair, sir.

Mr. Ree And he is Mr. Karaoke because every time he talks he sings.

Mr. Karaoke I cannot help it.

Teacher OK. OK... please sit down on your chair over there, Mr. Chair.

Thank you. OK, I am your new teacher, Mr. Tifficut.

- All students** Tifficut?
- Teacher** Yes, I know Tifficut is a little difficult....
So you can just call me..... sir. Is that OK?
- All students** OK. Mr. sir Tifficut sir.
- Mr. Ree** (Stands up) My name is Mr. Ree. But I don't know why?....
Are we going on a trip today Mr. sir Tifficut?
- Teacher** I don't know. Please sit down.
- Mr. Donut** Yes we are sir, look..... we have all brought our packed lunches.
What do you have, Mr. Karaoke?
- Mr. Karaoke** I have some nice cheese, I have some green peas, I have tea
and kimchi, and I have custard.
- Mr. Chair** I have jam, ham, spam, lamb on a nan bread.....
And custard. How about you, Mr. Ree?
- Mr. Ree** I have something very strange. Erm? (Reaches in bag.
Bicycle horn sound). I don't know what it is?
- Mr. Donut** I have a barnarnar, sultarnar, chard, lard, and a carton arv
yargart.....
- Teacher** What is your name.
- Mr. Donut** Mr. Donut..... And custard.
- Teacher** Your name is Mr. Donut and custard!!!
- All students** No. Just Donut.
- Teacher** I see... The first lesson today is poetry. Please get out your
poetry homework.
- Mr. Chair** Can I read first please, Mr. sir Tifficut, sir?
- Teacher** OK Chair, stand up there. Voice, nice and clee-air.
- Mr. Chair** Time.... By Marr Chair.... November 21st..... 2012.....
quarter past nine..... in the morning.
- Teacher** OK, please begin.
- Mr. Chair** That's it, sir. I've finished.
- Teacher** OK. Very good. Does anyone else have a poem? (Mr. Karaoke
puts his hand up). Mr. Karaoke.
- Mr. Karaoke** (Stands up. Tuning fork) Happy birthday to you,
happy birthday to me, happy birthday to somebody else,

that makes three happy.

(All quickly stand up and applaud, then sit down).

Teacher Wonderful, Mr. Karaoke.

Mr. Karaoke Thank you very much.

Teacher Mr Ree, would you like to read your poem?

Mr. Ree I put it on your desk recently sir, but it has disappeared
(*Twilight Zone* music).

Teacher Well, it's not here now.... That's very mysterious. It's a mystery,
Mr. Ree. (everybody rubs their chins: hmmm)

Mr. Donut Can I read my poem, sir?

Teacher Please do, Mr. Donut.

Mr. Donut Donuts... by Mr. Donut.... Aged 12.... November 21st...
2012..... 8:57AM.... In the winter time..... about 10 degrees....

Teacher OK, OK. Please begin .

Mr. Donut Aherm..... Donuts are round, donuts are circles,
donuts are brown, but never purple.
Donuts are donuts, they ain't (cowboy thigh slap) nothing
else,
and if I were a donut, I'd eat me for my health.

The skit ends here. It should have lasted approximately 7 minutes.