

Drama Club and Actors Studio: An Innovative Approach for Enhancing English Speaking Skills Among Native Georgian Speakers

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Abstract

This paper addressed the impact of the introduction of drama-based activities as part of English language classwork for indigenous Georgian speakers. Citing international findings as well as recent local experiences at Gori State University and local schools, the paper outlined how engagement with drama performance, from classical to contemporary theatre, can enhance English speech skills and confidence in students. Employing a mix of performance and practice, students were exposed to authentic communicative tasks that transcended memorization, creating major motivation boosters, engagement, and willingness to apply English to real situations. The literature reviewed identified the specific advantages of using drama in learning foreign languages: it builds creative and communicative abilities, provides language use with meaningful contexts, and establishes a casual, caring environment for experimentation and risk-taking. The study also addressed some of the challenges to wider application of drama in Georgian schools, including stringent government policies and lack of institutional incentives for instructors, as significant obstacles. While quantifiable measures of academic achievement provide conflicting results—once again bringing up that ancient question of correlation versus causation—the general direction is towards increased participation and greater verbal skill among students who study drama. The combination of local observation and international research verifies that drama is an excellent supplement to classroom language teaching. Yet, institutional changes must be made in order to maximize its potential in the Georgian context. The article concludes by calling for greater flexibility in policy for education and greater support for innovative teachers, speculating that wider implementation of drama-based learning could yield huge dividends in English language ability for Georgian students.

Keywords: drama, English language learning, flexibility, innovation, obstacles

Introduction

This study found widespread use of outdated methods, including fill-in-the-blank workbooks and CDs for the teaching and learning of the English language in Georgian schools. Indeed, these methods are mandated by institutions outside the control of classroom teachers. Not only do these mandates limit the ability of seasoned teachers with years of experience to apply their knowledge of what works, but they discourage creativity and youthful curiosity, hallmarks of critical and creative thinking.

There is a substantial and growing body of scientific literature supporting drama as an adjunct to the traditional methods. Engaging students in

rehearsals and performances of plays, whether Classical Greek, Shakespeare, or more modern theatre, releases their energy and creativity while practicing their skills of reading, listening, writing, and most especially, speaking.

More than two years of experience with the Gori Drama Club and Actors Studio demonstrates the value of active learning gained in the process of learning how to combine emotional and cognitive abilities to improve students' mastery of the English language with accuracy and nuance. Students earn their characters by varying and projecting their voices, moving about the stage, making hand gestures, and changing facial expressions to bring their lines to life.

Methods

Our method was experiential, with continuing coaching, observation, and evaluation. Malgard et al. (2024) found that well-documented experience can be a valid and useful method of research. In this study, our evaluation experience included oral proficiency practice and performance. One unfortunate case was a member who quit the group because she did not get the role she wanted.

Results

Kawasaki (2021) asks, “Are you looking for new ways to engage your English language students?” That is the central question that motivated this study. Our review found an abundance of literature on the subject of using drama in foreign language teaching and learning. Indeed, Li and Abdullah (2024) noted, “Educational drama has been a longstanding tool in English language education (ELE), and a number of studies have reviewed its applications.” Albalawi (2014) found that, “for more than 30 years, drama has been promoted as a valuable teaching tool for language learning.” Ali (2024) emphasizes the importance of mastering English: “Teaching English is crucial in today’s interconnected world, with English serving as a global lingua franca,” with special attention to speaking. Alkilani and Zhang (2024) take this view back to kindergarten, with drama as storytelling.

Tseng (2021) reports on the results of using groups for projects that combine presentation of drama with other aspects of theatre in “a whole language approach which aims at integrating and applying students’ language skills in an authentic context” (p. 39). While the scene of the play may be fictional, the relationships of the actors are authentic.

Luo et al. (2024) explore the use of “process drama” in English language learning. Learners are placed in “fictional roles and situations,” allowing them to exercise creativity while acting out their roles in the English language and reinforcing both their vocabulary and speaking skills.

Angelianawati (2019) cautions that the process requires more preparation (p. 129), while

Bessadet (2022) focuses on “the means and strategies of creating a learner-centered classroom to enhance English as foreign language learners’ communication skills” using drama as one of those methods.

Our experience was that drama participants in Gori schools and university demonstrated higher levels of engagement and motivation in English learning. They found drama activities more enjoyable and more relevant to real-world communication, increasing their willingness to take risks and experiment with language. “Drama makes us think fast, practice real speaking, and work together. Now I am not afraid to speak English outside class,” noted one school pupil.

These findings corroborate international research, which shows drama not only scaffolds language through meaningful context and emotional investment but also develops creative and communicative competencies that extend beyond the classroom. In their 2002 book, Burke and O’Sullivan identify seven key reasons for incorporating drama into second language teaching:

1. Focus on pronunciation.
2. Students feel motivated.
3. Relaxed atmosphere.
4. Practical language use.
5. Risk-taking boosts retention.
6. Builds a sense of community.
7. Enables open discussion of sensitive topics.

Giebert (2014) similarly summarizes the benefits of using drama in foreign language learning:

1. Contextualizing language and providing a safe environment.
2. Sustainable, holistic learning.
3. Improving personal and social ompetencies.
4. Motivation.

Power (2023) identifies and discusses a variety of activities that might be used to engage students in dramatic performance: Mime, dialogue,

charades, chants, role-play, puppetry, and courtroom drama.

We found in our rehearsals and discussions what Stinson and Winston (2011) concluded, i.e., that drama and language itself are intimately intertwined. As our students learned their lines, and as they rehearsed those lines, they were gaining skills in the English language, especially the skills associated with speaking. They understood the importance of projection and articulate speech.

While there is clearly a consensus among scholars that drama can enhance the process of language learning, it is lamentable that it is not commonly employed in schools. Our informal inquiry suggests that the Gori Drama Club and Actors Studio is unique among the schools of Georgia. As Hughes (2021) puts it,

Drama is a naturally expressive and creative medium that is centered around the communication of thoughts and ideas. It seems obvious that the practical and communicative nature of drama is a natural companion to language learning, yet it is seldom a key component of any language curriculum.

Finally, we asked if it makes any difference. The answer is not clear. Do students who participate in drama do better academically than those who do not, or do students who do better academically participate in drama? In the United States, the College Entrance Examination Board reported that students who took courses in drama scored, on average, 55 points higher on verbal and 26 points higher on math than their non-arts classmates (OTS, 2024). (N.B.: The maximum score is 600. The differences are about 4 to 10 percentage points.)

Discussion

Our real-world experience with the Gori Drama Club and Actors Studio shows that using drama in English language teaching and learning gives students a lively and effective way to learn English, compared to traditional methods such as workbook exercises or listening to CDs. Drama encourages students to use English actively, work

together to solve problems, and engage much more with the language. Because drama involves acting things out and learning by doing, it fits well with modern ideas that language is best understood through honest communication. Plus, the supportive, interactive setting of drama activities helps even quiet or hesitant students by giving them safe, low-pressure opportunities to practice speaking.

There may be several reasons for the lack of drama in English language classes in Georgian schools. Two explanations seem clear: first, the Government of Georgia tightly controls the teaching process in the schools (Ministry, 2025). English teachers are not only limited in the methods and materials they are permitted to use, but they risk losing their jobs if they deviate from the Government's tightly managed central controls. (N.B.: This system is likely a vestige of the period when Georgia was part of the Soviet Union.) Second, even if teachers were allowed to employ new methods and materials, it would require their investing time and energy to develop and prepare those methods. Further to the second point, there are few, if any, incentives for teachers to make those investments; rather, there are disincentives to innovation in methods and materials, including the risk of losing their jobs.

A school drama club or acting studio isn't just a fun diversion; it is a proven way to help Georgian-speaking students become more confident and capable English speakers. This approach gets better results than traditional workbooks or audio lessons in terms of speaking skills, keeping students interested, and building their confidence. Teachers who want to help their students use English in real-life situations would do well to consider making drama-based activities a central part of their lessons.

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