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The Effect of Using Mini-Drama on Writing Proficiency among Iraqi EFL Secondary School Pupils

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the effect of mini-drama to enhance the writing proficiency of Iraqi EFL secondary school pupils. To achieve the aim of the research, the following hypothesis has been put in. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group, taught using mini-drama to improve writing proficiency, and that of the control group, taught using the traditional way in the posttest. The data has been collected from Iraqi EFL secondary pupils at Al-Qabas secondary school for girls during the academic year (2023-2024), through a pre and post-test. The study is quantitative and experimental design and the results are analyzed through descriptive statistics of the data through the SPSS 22 software program. Finally,

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the research ends with some conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: EFL, English Language, Mini-Drama, Writing Proficiency.

أثر استخدام الدراما المصغرة على كفاءة الكتابة لدى تلاميذ المدارس الثانوية العراقية في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى معرفة تأثير الدراما المصغرة في تعزيز كفاءة الكتابة لدى تلاميذ المدارس الثانوية العراقية الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ولتحقيق هدف البحث، تم وضع الفرضية التالية: لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات المجموعة التجريبية التي تدرس باستخدام الدراما القصيرة لتحسين كفاءة الكتابة، ومتوسط درجات المجموعة الضابطة التي تدرس بالطريقة التقليدية في الاختبار البعدي. تم جمع البيانات من تلميذات المرحلة الثانوية العراقية اللاتي يدرسن اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ثانوية القبس للبنات خلال العام الدراسي (2023-2024)، من خلال اختبار قبلي وبعدي. الدراسة هي تصميم كمي وتجريبي وتم تحليل النتائج من خلال الإحصاء الوصفي للبيانات من خلال برنامج SPSS 22. وأخيرًا، ينتهي البحث ببعض الاستنتاجات والتوصيات والمقترحات لمزيد من البحوث.

الكلمات الدالة: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اللغة الإنجليزية، الدراما المصغرة، كفاءة الكتابة.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PROBLEM

In this era, the English language has become the international language, and its proficiency is essential for effective communication and global integration. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iraq faces many challenges that affect the

proficiency of the language. Many times, the traditional methods don't succeed in promoting the development of pupils' language skills, especially the productive skills, speaking and writing. Prior research has shown the potency of mini-dramas in promoting language learning outcomes (Maley & Duff, 2005). Still, there is a rarity of researches that have investigated the effects of mini-drama on the proficiency of EFL Iraqi pupils.

1.2 THE AIM

the research aims to investigate the effect of mini-dramas on writing proficiency among Iraqi EFL pupils.

1.3 THE HYPOTHESIS

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group, taught by mini-drama, and the control group, taught by the traditional method in the post-test.

1.4 THE VALUE

The value of the research can be summarized as the following:

1. For EFL teachers, this research can be useful because it provides them with a new technique and way of teaching language and gives them the opportunity to choose their own mini-drama selections according to the level, environment, and the learners' culture.
2. It helps learners by creating an attractive, enjoyable, and useful environment for learning.

1.5 THE LIMITS

The research is limited to:

1. Fourth preparatory school pupils at the scientific branch, in Saladin Governorate, at Al-Qabas Secondary School for Girls.
2. Using mini-dramas in teaching the pupils the writing language skill.
3. The academic year (2023-2024).

1.6 Definitions of the Basic Terms

Effect : Effect means a change caused in someone or something by someone or something else. (Collins,1987).

Mini-drama : Mini-drama involves creating and enacting brief dramatic scenarios within an educational context. It allows learners to use language creatively and interactively while assuming different roles and engaging in authentic communicative situations. (Gaskill,2004).

Proficiency : The American Heritage Dictionary defines proficiency as "a high degree of skill or mastery in a particular area or activity" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2011).

2. THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Concept of Mini-Drama

Drama is defined as "a story told through dialogue and action, performed by actors in front of an audience." Cuddon (1991), Mini-drama involves creating and enacting brief dramatic scenarios within an educational context. It allows learners to use language creatively and interactively while assuming different roles and engaging in authentic communicative situations. (Gaskill,2004)

Mini-drama is a drama designed to be shorter than audience expectations; most audiences consider any drama that is less than twenty minutes short. For more than 125 years, the discovery of concise theatre confirms the subjectivity and historical contingency of conciseness as a concept. Now, after our sense of time became linked to the second hand, a fifteen minutes' drama seems to be heavy for us (Muse, 2017). In some debates, some people put forward opinions about full-length drama that it provides more space for the characters and more time to develop a plot. But the mini-drama still needs to provide the same thing. Another virtue of mini-drama is that it is suitable for beginners, requires a short time to practice, and can be performed at social events without monopolizing the whole time (Dolley & Walford, 2015).

Using stories and tales as a source of drama makes students responsible and improves their ability to solve problems, have critical thinking, and have a deeper understanding. It also increases their vocabulary by allowing them to be sympathetic, increasing their emotional vocabulary (Somers, 1996). To compose drama, the composer/pupil needs to draw lines of the physical boundaries of the story world; these boundaries are the space of drama that specify the composer and avoid him/her drama distraction. This single space makes it easier to maintain the drama limited to theatre (Truby, 2008).

2.2 Mini-drama and Teaching English Language

Educational drama, according to McGregor (1976), is classified into two categories: learning through drama and conception of drama. Learning through drama focuses on the discovery of people and concepts through drama; this includes both teacher and pupil and can be used as a method of teaching specific subjects. While the conception of drama puts the responsibility on pupils to work on the incentive given by the teacher, the pupils have to produce ideas, discuss, and decide the details of the scene and characters.

In the 1980s, there were many challenges faced by the community of drama teaching. Since then, writers like Cecily O'Neill, Michael Fleming, Jonathon Neelands, and others have tried to reframe the process of drama in education. By looking to the works of influential writers in other fields of inquiry, school drama writers start to improve and develop a more conceptual model of drama by adding legitimacy to drama in education, clarifying its relationship with other types of theatre, stating that drama curriculum should be balanced, emphasis on the outcomes that produced through teaching drama and clarify the nature of learning through drama and theatre (Lewis & Rainer, 2005).

Using drama in education is an exciting and creative way of teaching and learning by which the teacher and the pupils learn from each other while the piece of drama develops. Drama has a remarkable role in relating pupils with reading and writing; drama techniques can reach pupils into deeper places of understanding and meaning. The linguistic and social skills that pupils possess enable them to see their real possibilities by

being a part of the lesson, so greater growth can be achieved in proficiency and communication skills (Prendiville & Toye, 2007).

Through role-playing in drama, students can express themselves from others' points of view and imagine themselves in others' places and positions to experience different ideas, feelings, and experiences (Ragnarsdóttir and Björnsson, 2020). Kristmundsson (2000) suggests that to make an effective and rich lesson, the teacher may use drama and stories to enrich students' vocabulary. Acting drama is different from hearing or reading a story; they live through the story and interact with each other by taking roles.

2.3 Language Proficiency

Language proficiency describes pupils' processing and use of language within and throughout the four language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Proficiency presents a comprehensive description of pupil competencies through level of performance (Gottlieb, 2016).

There are five performance indicators used to assess language proficiency: accuracy, which refers to one's ability to produce language from where grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Capacity refers to the degree of the knowledge that can be used to write and discuss about variety of subjects in formal and informal settings. Fluency indicates the ability to use language smoothly to express ideas and avoid communication breakdowns. Appropriacy is about the extent to which the language used is related and suitable to the topic, audience, context, and situation. The last indicator is complexity, which means the ability to use complex language and a wide range of grammar formulas and vocabulary (Renandya et al., 2004).

In teachers' education literature, there is a confirmation of the importance of the essential role of proficiency in both general and classroom English for effective performance as an English language teacher. Classroom English is a competent language skill that the teacher needs to be effective and to teach English through English proficiently (Richards, 2017). Because of the limited proficiency, many non-native English-speaking teachers rely on their first language when they teach English to their

students who have low proficiency. It is common for teachers and students to use their first language most of the time in English lessons (Young et al., 2014).

Although the word 'proficient' is used as a synonym for words like 'fluent', 'good', 'knowledgeable', and others in applied linguistics literature, it does not always reflect what speaking proficiency means exactly; the term is used in different ways according to the researcher (Galloway 1987; McNamara 1996). The teacher's role is helper and organizer more than an expert since they need minimum grammar and task design. Students need a teacher who uses the second language effectively, not a native teacher; they need to see that they can use and operate in a language that is not their own. Students prefer to join a teacher who has gone through the same stages of learning as the students (Cook, 2016).

Many studies show that using different strategies of learning by students may increase their language proficiency. Social conditions affect learning a second language and motivate learners to improve their language; convergence with native speakers' standards and speaking with native speakers will achieve a high level of proficiency, and when conditions make learners communicate more with the original community will achieve less level of proficiency (Ellis, 1997).

2.4 Writing Proficiency

Many educators identify writing as the area where learners struggle most due to the intricate interplay of linguistic knowledge, critical thinking, and creative expression required for effective writing (Wang & Zhang, 2017). While writing can be seen as a straightforward task of building text, it's crucial to remember the deeper motivations and influences that shape it. Understanding these social and cognitive factors is key to truly understanding writing (Deane et al, 2008). Proficient writing is typically the last of the four fundamental language skills acquired by both native speakers and foreign language learners. Additionally, many EFL students find it challenging to practice writing tasks under teacher supervision, which can negatively impact their motivation (Redha & Ali, 2024).

Writing is used as a dynamic tool that clarifies ideas and allows for communication, fusing thoughts and messages that transcend geographic and temporal boundaries via written texts. Effectively conveying meaning through writing holds immense significance for achieving academic and professional goals. Research shows that college freshmen's writing skills consistently predict their academic success, and even after entering the workforce, strong writing remains an essential attribute of professional competence (Geiser & Studley, 2001). Writing involves using symbols to convey ideas and serves as a reflection of one's language proficiency. It is regarded as a cognitive process because it assesses memory, language skills, and thinking capabilities. Without mastering writing, students will struggle to achieve the clarity that is essential for any writing tasks (Al-Jiboury, 2024).

The enduring power of writing lies in its ability to transcend time and space, facilitating communication across generations and cultures. This makes it particularly valuable for learners in today's internet-driven world, equipping them with tools for both learning and knowledge dissemination. Additionally, writing serves as a bridge between educational and cultural realms, allowing for the preservation and development of key societal aspects (Raofi et al, 2017).

2.5 Assessing Language Proficiency

Teachers need to know what the learners learn through a course of instruction in a long or short period of time, they need to know the strengths and weaknesses of the learners in order to plan the instruction appropriately and give feedback to the learners to improve. The tests given by the teachers usually have poor quality and the information about strengths and weaknesses is very limited in comparison with the national and international examinations (Alderson, 2005).

English Language Proficiency is a term used for years to refer to standards and levels of efficiency of English language learners in the four skills of language learning, while the term English Language Proficiency Standards became common after the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), many states adopt and develop special standards to compliance with the provisions of the NCLB title (Abedi, 2007).

One of the major issues in assessing proficiency is how to identify the constructs of language ability, assessment tasks should authentically reflect real-world language use within a designated context. Proficiency tests usually test overall ability, not a single skill or limited course. Language teachers cannot take an overall proficiency test by themselves because it is time-consuming, they can use one of the commercial proficiency tests available. Most of these commercial tests include oral and written production performance. Proficiency tests usually norm-referenced and summative and the results take the form single scores (Brown, 2010).

The crucial challenges that teachers and language testers face is the language proficiency which is the degree to which the learner gains enough linguistic cognitive for a communication situation using the necessary skills; speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It combines core and terminal components. Core components include linguistic cognition like phonetics, phonology, etc. whereas terminal components refer to metacognitive components such as strategic competence and metalinguistic knowledge (Leclercq, 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Experimental design

Experimental design is a systematic framework researchers use to manipulate independent variables and observe their impact on the dependent variables, drawing statistical conclusions about the relationship between them (Best and Khan, 2006).

Seltman (2012) describes designing an experiment as balancing competing priorities like statistical power, broad applicability, different types of validity, feasibility, and budget constraints. The experimental design includes two groups. Both groups are pretested while one receives the experimental treatment, and both are posttested (Wallen & Fraennkel, 2001).

Concerning the current research, the use of aims and hypotheses demands the non-randomized experiment group pretest-posttest design. Consequently, the two groups of the fourth preparatory pupils are the sample of the research. The experimental design of the research is shown in table (1):

Table (1) The Experimental Design of the Research

Groups	The test	Independent variables	Dependent variables	The test
Experimental Group	Pre-test	Mini-drama strategy	Improving Proficiency	Post-test
Control Group	Post-test	Traditional teaching strategy	Improving Proficiency	Post-test

3.2 Population and Sample of the Research

Triola (2017) defines population as “The entire set of individuals or objects that are of interest in a statistical study.” The population of this study consists of (242) EFL Iraqi secondary pupils of the forth-year pupils in Al-Alam, Salah Al-Din Governorate.

Since the population is often very large to study, the researcher has to collect data from a sample of the population. Weiss (2015) defines a sample as "a subset of a population. Samples are used to collect data from a manageable number of individuals or objects and make inferences about the larger population." The sample of this research is (50) pupils from Al Qabas Secondary School for Girls, (25) pupils have been selected from section (A) as an experimental group (25) pupils from section (B) represent the control group. Therefore, the total number of the involved sample is (50), representing (20%) of the original population.

3.3 Test Construction

The post-test is used to determine the performance of course objectives at the end of a period of instruction, so the researcher designs a test based on the topic that has been chosen at the beginning of the study to measure whether there are statistically significant differences between the performance of control and experimental groups in the proficiency of pupils' in learning English language. To measure the four skills of learning language, the post-test is divided into two parts: oral test and written test. The oral test

contains three dialogues, and the written test contains seven questions, each question consisting of different elements.

3.4 Face Validity

Face validity is defined as the idea that a test, at first glance, seems relevant and appropriate for its intended purpose, based on subjective judgments about the format, content, and questions. In other words, it is a subjective judgment that the test precisely reflects the thing tried to be measured (Bobko, 2001). Bayens & Roberson (2010) state that to determine face validity, the researcher depends on personal judgment rather than empirical grounds; the question of what extent the test strikes a balance between individual perspectives and a common conceptual framework should be answered. To confirm whether this test reflects pupils' proficiency progress, it was shown to a jury of members of English language specialists. The jury members have agreed on the questions of the final version with a percentage of 100%

3.5 Content Validity

Content validity is a process that evaluates the degree to which the test content aligns with the intended curriculum domain and adequately represents the expected learning outcomes. Putting a careful plan of test construction can help in achieving content validity. These plans take many forms; one of them is Bloom's taxonomy, which is popular in the education field and based on educational objectives (Domino & Domino, 2006).

3.6 Reliability

Joel (2021) defines reliability as the correspondence that a test measures what it is supposed to measure relating to the correspondence and accuracy of a test in different conditions and forms. In other words, reliability answers the question of if we measure the same thing more than once under the same conditions, will the result be the same?

The alpha- Cronbach formula is used to measure the reliability of the post-test. The coefficient is found to be (0.74), which is considered acceptable.

3.7 Pilot Study

Neuman (2006) defines the pilot study as a primary study that aims to improve research questions, data collection techniques, and analytic methods for a larger study. Whilst Babbie (2018) states that a pilot study is a mini-research project applied before the large study to test the feasibility of the research project and make adjustments where necessary.

Conducting a pilot study is strongly preferred for the current study. For this purpose, (10) pupils were chosen randomly from the fourth scientific class at Al-Qabas Secondary School for Girls. On January 10, 2024, the pilot test was carried out in a normal situation and in classroom conditions. Then, the testees' papers were collected and corrected by the researcher herself. Then, the researcher and another teacher of English applied the oral test.

3.8 Item Analysis

Item analysis is a process of analyzing the testees' responses to find out the difficulty level and discriminating power of each item included in the test as follows:

3.8.1 Difficulty Level

The difficulty level is specified as the ratio of the pupils who answer the test items correctly (Rosas, 2000). Item difficulty refers to the extent to which an item appears to be complicated or facilitated for a given number of tests. It reflects the percentage of the pupils who respond correctly to the test. The most suitable test item will have the items difficulty varying between (0.15) and (0.85) (Brown, 2010). The DL of the present test items varies from (0.32) to (0.72).

3.8.2 Discrimination Power

Discrimination power means calculating the degree to which a particular item's results correspond with the results of the entire test (Alderson, 1995). This means that an object is deemed to have weak power of discrimination if it is correctly scored by high-skilled pupils as well as low-skilled pupils.

Item discrimination refers to the degree to which an object makes a difference between good and poor testees. An object has good power of discrimination if it collects

the right answers and the wrong answers. It is worth noting that the high power of discrimination will be close to (1.0), and no power of discrimination will be nil at all (Brown, 2010). The obtained results indicate that the test item DP ranges from (0.28) to (0.68).

3.9 Test Administration

After verifying the pilot administration, the validity and reliability, the test is finally applied in the 15th of January (2024) on two groups of pupils. For the two groups, the experimental and the control, the posttest was performed at the same day but in different time and separate locations.

The duration of the exam is limited to (60 minutes) to answer the test completely and apply the oral test. The researcher has got help from two teachers of English to monitor the classrooms while explaining the questions to the pupils. At the end of the time, all the test papers have been collected to be scored according to the designed scoring schema.

4. DISCUSSION

To confirm the study hypothesis, the mean scores of the two groups are calculated to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Statistics show that the mean score of the experimental group is (67.60) and that of the control group is (50.32). By using the t-test formula for the two independent samples, the calculated t-value is found to be (5.49). In contrast, the tabulated t-value is found to be (2.11) at the degree of freedom (48), and the level of significance (0.05). This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups, which are in favour of the experimental group.

Table (2) Means, Standard Deviation, and T-values of the Two Group in The Post test

Groups	No. of Pupils	Mean	SD.	T-value	DF	Level of Significance
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EG.	25	67.60	12.39	Calculate d	Tabula ted	48	0.05
CG.	25	50.32	9.68	5.49	2.11		

The goal of the current research is to determine whether mini-drama affects EFL Iraqi pupils' proficiency or not. It also aims to determine whether there are any differences between the experimental and control groups regarding pupils' proficiency. The results indicate that the English language proficiency of the experimental group, which is taught using mini-dramas, is higher and better than the control group, which is taught using the traditional methods.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the results of the present research, the following points have been concluded:

1. Mini-drama proves advantageous, suitable, and successful in enhancing the proficiency of the writing skill.
2. The participants in this study's experimental group, who engaged in mini-drama, demonstrated elevated interest levels, interactivity, and motivation.
3. Utilizing mini-drama in the classroom proves valuable for enhancing social interaction among students, as it enables them to freely share information, engage in reading comprehension activities, and construct sentences collaboratively.
4. The research findings suggest that instructing through mini-dramas represents an advantageous pedagogical approach for enhancing students' proficiency. This method fosters a more dynamic and engaging learning environment, leading to notable improvements in the pupils' overall learning, as evidenced by the substantial differences observed in proficiency through the post-tests conducted after the experiment.

5. Employing various tools such as videos, graphic organizers, and pictures to elucidate the meaning of the text enhances students' curiosity and eagerness to broaden their knowledge, increasing their interest and attention.

6. Establishing a dynamic and interactive classroom environment encourages students to actively engage in the educational process through communication, creativity, interaction, and competition.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Recommendations are made based on the research's results:

1. It is suggested that curriculum designers and EFL methodologists incorporate mini-drama into the teaching of the English language in school settings.

2. Teachers should motivate their pupils to comprehend the mini-dramas and guide them to develop an appreciation for the content. The objective should be to cultivate curiosity, encourage an inquisitive approach, and foster an attitude of exploration.

3. When choosing mini-dramas for the language classroom, it's essential to consider factors such as pupils' language proficiency, interests, age, and gender. This ensures that the materials selected are suitable, preventing pupils from becoming disinterested due to inappropriate content.

4. EFL schools should actively promote verbal expression, communication, interaction, and the utilization of the English language for thinking, problem-solving, and comprehension within their classrooms.

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