

## DRAMA AS AN ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY TO TEACH ENGLISH MORE EFFECTIVELY

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**APA:** Kapcı, M. S. (2020). Drama as an alternative activity to teach English more effectively. *Journal of Academic Studies in World Languages, Literatures and Translation (WOLLT)*, 1(2), 139-149.

### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the foreign language teaching process can be more effective and applicable by associating drama with The Communicative Approach. Foreign language teaching is a field that has been discussed a lot for many years and on which different studies have been carried out, and this field is still subject to improvements. Although there are many studies carried out for foreign language teaching, some students still cannot gain the ability of using the language that they learn in real-life situations. To obtain this ability is important because using the target language in real life is accepted as one of the most important indicators of being able to speak a language. Through the method of literature review, this study was carried out and it was tried to demonstrate that “The Communicative Approach” is approved as an effective method in foreign language teaching. The Communicative Approach’s main aim is to make the students competent in speaking target language. To prepare the most useful and effective content in teaching process, drama activities meet the requirement of students’ being competent in speaking target language. This study includes the clarification of relation between drama activities and The Communicative Approach, the benefits and four different examples of drama activities. As a contribution to the field, this study tries to demonstrate that being able to communicate in target language is an important issue and with drama activities, the problems confronted in the process of foreign language learning such as motivation, attendance to class, forgetting the new words learned, and practicing can be solved.*

**Keywords:** *Foreign language teaching, drama activities, the communicative approach, speaking skill.*

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**Geliş Tarihi:** 25.09.2020

**Kabul Tarihi:** 23.12.2020

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## ETKİLİ İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETİMİ İÇİN ALTERNATİF BİR ETKİNLİK “DRAMA”

### Özet

*Bu çalışmanın amacı, drama ile İletişimsel Yaklaşımı ilişkilendirerek yabancı dil öğretim sürecinin nasıl daha etkili ve uygulanabilir hale getirilebileceğini göstermektir. Yabancı dil öğretimi geçmişten bu yana üzerinde çok tartışılan, farklı çalışmalar yürütülen ve ayrıca uzmanların çok fazla fikir ayrılıklarına düştükleri bir alandır. Bu konuda fazlasıyla çalışma yürütülmesine rağmen halen bazı öğrenciler öğrenilen dili gerçek hayatta kullanabilme yetisini kazanamamaktadır. Bu yetiyi kazanmak önemlidir çünkü öğrenilen dili gerçek hayatta kullanabilmek bir dili konuşabiliyor olmanın en önemli göstergelerinden biridir. Bu çalışma alan taraması olarak yürütülmüş ve İletişimsel Yaklaşımın yabancı dil öğretiminde etkili bir yöntem olarak kabul gördüğünü açıklamaya çalışmıştır. İletişimsel Yaklaşımın temel amacı öğrenciyi öğrenilen dilde yetkin hale getirmektir. Öğretim sürecinde en etkili ve faydalı içeriğin hazırlanabilmesi için drama etkinlikleri bu ihtiyacı karşılamaktadır. Bu çalışma, drama etkinlikleri ile İletişimsel Yaklaşım arasındaki ilişkinin açıklanmasını, drama etkinliklerinin faydalarını ve dört farklı uygulama örneğini içermektedir. Bu çalışma, alana bir katkı olarak öğrenilen dilde iletişim kurabiliyor olmanın önemli bir durum olduğunu ve drama etkinlikleri ile yabancı dil öğrenim sürecinde karşılaşılan motivasyon, derse katılım, kalıcı öğrenme ve uygulama yapma gibi problemlerin çözülebileceğini göstermeye çalışmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Yabancı dil öğretimi, drama etkinlikleri, iletişimsel yaklaşım, konuşma becerisi.*

### 1. Introduction

Drama has many different definitions and it is viewed differently by many scholars. “The term drama was lexicalized from Greek” and it has the acceptances of doing, making and operating. Additionally, it means summarized and abstracted acts for Theater Science (San, 1990: p. 573). Miccoli points to the opportunity of drama involving motivation and fun “as a way of bringing the real life situations into the language classrooms” in foreign language teaching process (2003: p. 123). The processes of using imagination, implementing anything learnt in real life situations and communicating with others in an effective way are difficult circumstances for people, but drama is one of the most important factors making all these processes easy for them. Dervishaj states that drama guides people to explore and directs them to create meaningful and cognitive processes for their understanding through visionary contents and cases (2012: p. 89).

“The abilities of problem solving, critical and creative thinking, interpretation, evaluation and forming cause effect relationships are important in a human life because they affect directly quality of life” (Gelen, 2002: p. 105). Accordingly, at the end of an educational process, the students are asked to have these abilities, yet due to rote-learning based education system, both students and teachers should take more responsibilities. Especially, when we think of the process of foreign language learning that necessitates reading, writing, listening and speaking in the target language, to be able to speak, communicate, think and interpret in that language become vital. In addition, some factors such as the students’ motivation, shyness, attendance to lessons, communication between them, readiness and the way of in-class training may influence the students’ socializing processes by removing them from social circle and in this way; drama meets the need of socializing with its opportunity of learning by means of living.

## **2. The communicative approach and drama activities**

When we think of the beginning of drama activities, Harriet Finlay-Johnson, a teacher in a village school, is accepted as the pioneer in this field and she was the first to implement drama in history lessons at the beginning of the twentieth century. After using drama activities for students’ permanent learning, she set some objectives for drama activities: The students will be disposed to learn and they will learn from each other, they will be self-confident and the teacher will be a guide in courses for them (Bolton, 1999: p. 5).

For many years, the processes and outputs of foreign language teaching have been criticized and scientists have tried to offer many solutions to guide foreign language teachers. The basic principles in foreign language teaching as Demirel clears below can guide all the teachers responsible for teaching foreign language. Demirel clarifies these principles as developing four basic skills, planning teaching facilities in advance, teaching from simple to complex, using audio visual aids, using mother-tongue if necessary, teaching just one subject at a time, giving students the opportunity of using language learned in daily life, encouraging students attend the lessons, considering personal differences and making the students motivated for learning (1990: p. 23).

As Doğan states in his study, today’s conditions require a person to know a commonly used foreign language in addition to his/her mother tongue, be effective and emotional while communicating with others and look for solutions for the problems regarding the society (1996: p. 100). Although the importance of a commonly used foreign language is an accepted fact by most people, teaching and learning processes, foreign language teachers’ views and methods and materials used for teaching are matters of debate. Most foreign language teachers try hard to provide the most effective learning area for the students, but considering the learning outcomes, they are thought to be far from being satisfactory. For teaching and assessment of a foreign language, four skills (writing, speaking, listening and reading) should be used and if the learners are unsuccessful in any one of them, they are regarded

inadequate in target language. Even though these four basic skills meet the needs of understanding and self-expression in any language, the skills of speaking and listening in other words, communicating with others is more important than others. Fonseca-Mora, Toscano-Fuentes, and Wermke attach-importance to listening skill by asserting that “in first language acquisition, babies start receiving stimuli in their mother’s womb by listening” (2011: p. 101). Similarly, Emiroğlu promotes this by stating that “in a mother’s womb, a baby starts to learn a language just by listening. After birth as the baby gets older, s/he starts to learn how to speak and communicate with other people” (2013: p. 271-272). A human is a social being and in both social life and education process, the ability of speaking is used widely. Therefore, both foreign language learners and teachers should be careful about a fact that to be able to speak in a target language is more important than other skills (Göçer, 2015: p. 22). These ideas point to “The Communicative Approach” for foreign language teaching.

The Communicative Approach is based upon the fact that the students can use the foreign language that they learn in any different situation. For this approach, how the foreign language will be taught is an important issue, and to communicate with others in the target language is more substantial rather than teaching grammatical rules. According to Akay, The Communicative Approach refers to having essential skills and knowledge to communicate in a society speaking in the target language for learners (2013: p. 310). Similarly, Richards explains this approach as *communicative competence* that draws attention to the capacity for using the target language in any different situation for various purposes in real life, writing and understanding particular contexts and continuing the communication in spite of limitations in that language (2005: p. 3).

The Communicative Approach necessitates the use of the communicative activities since it is based on the ability of communicating effectively in target language. According to Wan, drama used by the foreign language teachers in the lessons can be accepted as a communicative activity because it encourages the students to communicate between them by using the target language in different situations (2017: p. 3). By means of drama activities, while teachers are teaching a foreign language via this approach, students acquire the abilities of expressing themselves and understanding the others. Also, these activities give them chances to reason, solve problems, think analytically and continue the communication in the target language. Additionally, Demirezen attaches importance to drama by stating that drama is one the basic activities for The Communicative Approach (2011). Similarly, Dodson asserts that drama is a communicative language teaching method because it is student-centered and meaning based by showing its effects of encouraging fluency and problem-solving skills (2000: p. 129).

### **3. Why drama?**

During the recent years, The Communicative Approach has been preferred more by foreign language teachers in lessons because it makes the learning process more practicable, comprehensive, and functional for students. It is a clear fact that The Communicative Approach should include many

communicative activities since this approach focuses on communicative skills in the target language and at this point, drama activities provide applicable, motivating, funny and functional lesson contents. Wan emphasizes the use of drama in foreign language lessons for these reasons: Thanks to drama activities, the foreign language lessons become efficient and enjoyable; it supports oral communication skills; the use various word and sentence structures increases, and lastly drama combines the use of language in both real and imaginary situations (2017: p. 6).

The Communicative Approach establishing a warm environment and making most of the students active in the classroom is in need of constructs to make the foreign language applicable in different situations. From this point of view, drama activities including real life and imaginary situations meet this requirement. Moreover, while using this approach in lessons, foreign language teachers tend to complain about students' shyness leading to reluctance to speak in the target language. With drama activities, students realize that for real life situations, they will need the use of target language and this will make them more motivated. In addition, when the texts in course books for teaching the foreign language are used for drama activities, students can get information about the culture that uses this foreign language as mother tongue. In other words, the drama activities based on the texts in the target language familiarize them with the opportunity of being informed of social life, situation and problems, cultural elements and living. Davies promotes these ideas by giving four reasons for the use of drama in the lessons: Drama offers the opportunity to associate the texts in course books with the use of the texts in real life, likewise it associates the linguistic performance with a person's thoughts. Students want to be understood clearly in the target language and drama activities ease this, and finally it increases the students' motivation and self-confidence (1990: p. 96-97). Sano asserts five reasons for using drama activities while teaching English: Thanks to these activities, learners start to have fun while learning and improve their listening and speaking skills, they understand via non-verbal elements, they express themselves in English for a particular situation and lastly they control their psychological states while communicating with others (1990: p. 11-15). From a different viewpoint, Tombak asserts that drama activities are student-centered (2014: p. 373). It can be concluded that the students are responsible for their own learning via these activities while the foreign language teachers are just guides directing the students. As a result, this responsibility makes the students more active in the lessons.

#### **4. Types of drama activities for EFL classrooms**

Types of drama activities are not restrictive. A student can play a role in a text or perform by being inspired by any song. Therefore, the accurate number of drama activity types is not clear. In this part, four certain types of drama activities are examined since most foreign language teachers tend to use these activities because of their being functional and easy to apply in courses: Simulation, Role-play, Mime and Improvisation.

Jones represents two essential characteristics of simulation as a classroom event. “The participants have functional roles and sufficient information is provided on an issue or a problem” (1982: p. 9). The students learn by their mistakes and for the next simulation activity, they make fewer mistakes. García-Carbonell, Rising, Montero and Watts give a relation between simulation and foreign language learning by emphasizing practice and interaction that simulation enables in the courses (2001, p. 482). The technique of Simulation is directly related to real-life situations and as a consequence of this, it has gained importance. Tabak and Göçer represent the aim of teaching via Simulation as to provide the students with real-life situations in an environment that is very similar to real one and enable them to evaluate and experience real-life situations (2014: p. 78). In other words, this technique can be thought as the preparation process for the students to be able to use the target language in real-life situations. Simulation requires intense use of language and students does not play for another character; on the contrary, they perform for themselves. When we think of the process of foreign language teaching, we can link vocabulary teaching with Simulation. To illustrate, take the subject of the lesson as “Adjectives” describing personal and physical characteristics. In such a hypothetical lesson, the teacher makes a group of four students and asks them to talk each other about the people with whom they want to stay in the same house in university life. They hereby learn adjectives with positive and negative meanings giving information about personal and physical characteristics.

In Role-play in contrast to Simulation, learners aim performing for another character or personality instead of themselves. Scott and Ytreberg explain “role-play as the students’ activities of pretending to be someone else like a doctor, a bakery or one of their relatives via dialogues” (2000: p. 40). Likewise, according to Nunan, role-play is an activity for speaking in which the students act out a situation in order to develop speaking and listening skills in the target language and he adds “role-plays are excellent activities giving learners practice speaking the target language before they must do so in a real environment” (2003: p. 57). Demirel states that role-play is a teaching technique to express emotions and thoughts with impersonation (2000: p. 118-119). It is an instructional activity that is used to develop students’ dialogue and speaking skills while learning a foreign language. For instance, take the subject of the lesson as “Expressions used on a feast day”. In such a hypothetical lesson, the teacher gives a dialogue including a conversation between three relatives about the usage of different kinds of season’s greetings, makes a group of three students, and asks them to act it out. Thus, it will enable the students to improve their pronunciation and speaking skills.

Mime is one of the guessing activities including two groups one of them communicating nonverbally and using just gesture and facial expressions and the other one using language to communicate. Doff describes Mime as a guessing game in which “the teacher secretly gives an expression or a sentence that is written in a paper and the student mimes it. The other students try to find it (2000: p. 91). As Hartani claims, there are two types of communication; verbal and nonverbal (2012:

p. 18). Verbal communication consists of using the language in communication while nonverbal one refers to the use of body language. To illustrate, take the subject of the lessons as “Verbs” describing daily routines. In such a hypothetical lesson, the teacher prepares some piece of papers on which some verbs such as clean, eat, sleep, wake up, cook and have a shower are written. One of the students tries to mime the verb given by the teacher and the others try to find by guessing and communicating. This technique is important for the students to control their excitement while explaining the phrases by using the body language and also it can be used while studying the foreign words and phrases covered in lessons.

McNeece states that Improvisation is a dynamic reveal of familiar texts (1983: p. 830). This technique is important to make lessons enjoyable and easy. In addition, it is a good chance for the students to correct their mistakes together for foreign language use in this activity via video record made by the teachers. Likewise, Davies clarifies Improvisation as a play without scenario making the process easy with no dependence on reading skill (1990: p. 94). Gasparro and Falletta indicate “the students compare and contrast cultural behaviors and attitudes, analyze and explore the linguistic and conceptual differences between the written and spoken word” (1994: p. 2).

According to Florea, students’ pronunciations improve, they start to use grammatical structures better and vocabulary learning gets easy for them (2011: p. 48). Additionally, it is important to mention these functions to the students to make them more motivated in drama activities. Improvisation, for which the preparation process is important, improves the students’ creative thinking ability. A topic such as a traffic accident witnessed in an intense city center may be used and the students could be asked to make preparations for the dialogue and this allows the students to think creatively, make a plan for the dialogue and learn new phrases that the students will need.

##### **5. The benefits of using drama in foreign language teaching**

As drama activities offer the opportunity of learning through practice and experience, a student is not expected to play a role like an actor. According to Carleton, the teacher knows the learners’ capabilities and while assessing and evaluating their performances, they take into account this situation (2012: p. 39). This situation minimizes the feeling of being appreciated by others and offers a favorable learning environment for the students who are in the process of foreign language learning. The students get rid of their concerns and they can be in an effective learning environment using their motivations for learning.

While mentioning the advantages of using drama for foreign language teaching, it is generally regarded as a viable solution to the problems such as lack of motivation, concern, self-efficacy, shyness, and fear of failure common in foreign language teaching context. According to Davies, the most important benefit of using drama for foreign language teaching is that students feel relaxed because they use what they have learnt before in the process and he adds that drama increases the students’ motivation,

develops the feelings of being adequate and contributes to the development of communication skills and fluency (1990: p. 97) while Dodson uses the terms of enjoyable learning, new culture and putting the target language into practice (2000: p. 132). Another researcher Sünbül pays special attention to these advantages: Drama improves the ability of studying together, enables the students to gain insight, develops capacity to understand and communicate with others, makes students feel confident, enables the students to speak fluently and use imagination, and the students become skillful at problem solving and decision-making (2010: p. 309).

#### **6. The disadvantages of using drama**

Although there are many advantages of using drama activities mentioned above in foreign language teaching, it is a known fact that drama activities are criticized in some ways. Lack of an equipped area, shy students, non-proficient foreign language teachers, deficient curriculum, and level differences among students are a few of them. By some foreign language teachers and students, drama activities are evaluated as “artificial” because of the idea they have that drama activities do not serve the purposes of “real life world language needs” (Richards, 1985: p. 86). According to Wan, the main problems encountered in drama activities are students’ shyness, being difficult to monitor the performances acted out in classrooms, not correcting the mistakes simultaneously, timing drama activities and level differences among foreign language learners (2017: p. 10-11)

McGuffee did a scientific study in St. Edward University and tried to find out the effects of drama activities on student success. Students were chosen from the department of Computer Sciences and at the end of this study, she set six principles for implementing drama by taking the problems that are confronted during drama activities into consideration: The students should be informed about why these activities will be used, they should be given sufficient time for planning, they should be chosen randomly, teachers should express how these activities will be implemented and topics should be selected in reasons by paying attention to the students’ interest.

#### **7. Conclusion**

Many studies have been carried out to make foreign language learning process more effective and various techniques and methods have been developed. Although it is a known fact that there are a great number of factors affecting this learning process negatively, some studies are carried out to overcome the obstacles in this process. After applying foreign language teaching methods (Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audiolingual Method, Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Suggestopedia and Natural Approach) for a long time, it is a known fact that most teachers tend to develop an idea that these methods do not serve the modern purposes of foreign language teaching process because of these method’s deficiencies in developing the skill of communication with others effectively. Thus, “The Communicative Approach” becomes more and more important. Although “The Communicative Approach” is evaluated as comprehensive and sufficient, using it more effectively is an

important matter. At this point, drama is emphasized because it provides motivation, attendance, readiness, effective learning environment, and cognitive learning while it also offers the students to put the target language into practice that results in permanent learning. The students learning a foreign language may have an enjoyable learning environment and improve themselves socially. Similarly, thanks to in-class drama activities, they may share their experience and knowledge with the other students. In the light of these opinions, Drama is thought as an essential part of the foreign language learning process.

### **8. Suggestions**

In schools giving foreign language education, there should be special drama rooms. While preparing curriculum, course books designers should include more drama activities. Students should be directed to the drama activities and they should be persuaded that these activities are important for their social development and fluency in target language. Pre-service foreign language teachers should be trained more about how to be a guide for the students in a teaching process. Cultural transmission and practicing the target language in real-life situations are important parts of learning a foreign language and from this point of view; foreign language teachers should explain the importance of drama activities to encourage the students' participation in the activities. Foreign language teachers should contribute to the students' social and mental development through in-class drama activities. In-class communication within the students should be enhanced. Topics that the students are interested in should be preferred for drama activities so that the students can easily be motivated.

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