

# Teaching English through Shakespeare's Plays on EFL Classes

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to discover drama an effective and powerful tool while applying it in EFL classes. This study showcases the significance of drama as not be underestimated particularly in EFL classes. This course of action is only possible if the teacher is able to link literature to the language. Conducting drama in an EFL classroom is considered to be the best link between language and literature. In modern English teaching classroom, the learner is on the focus so instructors are asked to provide a proper way to facilitate the learning process. Working on learners' practical abilities through using drama can facilitate this process easily. Hence, this research aimed to put drama into practice on learners while conducted in an EFL classroom. That is, the benefits of implementing Shakespeare's drama and discovering its value while worked on students in an EFL classroom is the target of this research. It is considered as transformation from theoretical approach to practical approach.

**Keywords:** teaching, language, literature, students, drama, and Shakespeare.

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

As English language instructors, it has been amazing for us that how drama is effective to get the attention of learners in an EFL classroom. The level of this effectiveness would increase in degrees of the conducted drama from Shakespeare. As a matter of fact, drama activities would have surprising and unexpected results if acted in a proper approach. Applying drama in EFL and ESL classes as a tool for language development is considered to be a link between literature and language.

EFL instructors extremely need to learn the usage of this medium and to move the learning process toward real language situation. Drama can truly help teachers transform the amount of information that cannot be transformed at any other possible way. William Shakespeare claimed that the whole 'world is a stage', and all the 'men and women' are players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts as well. That is why; drama is one of the best ways of engaging students to learning and teaching process. That is to say, this engagement absolutely benefits students and teachers as well.

Drama develops the students' imagination as well as their world views. Students can go beyond the here and now. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for independent thinking. That is to say, students are encouraged to express their own ideas, feelings, and be involved in learning process. Creative drama will offer exercises in critical thinking and the chance for the students to be creative. A good example of this is role-plays in small groups. The EFL group will have many situations where they can develop their own ideas as well as skills of cooperation when interacting with their fellow members.

### 1.1. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Shakespeare's plays as an influential and authentic tool in EFL classes. Actually, this study highlights that literary genre especially drama can be appropriate for language teaching in EFL classes. Indeed, some students do not have tendency toward literature; this study makes literature interesting by applying role plays or play – acting learning process. To state the point simply, the researchers aims to change the students' bias toward literature as well as developing their critical thinking skills. Simply this study looks for:

- Students' needs while involving in learning process.
- Discovering the effects of using Shakespeare's plays on EFL classes
- Finding the students' reactions while applying drama in language classes.
- The development of students' communicative abilities

### 1.2. Study Hypothesis

Certainly the aims of this study could not be achieved without referring its hypothesis. Hence, founded on the main purpose of this study, the following research hypotheses were made to conclude the study's goals:

- It is believed that implementing Shakespeare's dramas provide a real language situation and new way of learning to enhance students' abilities.
- Learning language through drama or linking language with literature can make the learning process easier than any other regular method.
- It is the best method to involve students to practical ways of language learning which can be conducting role play in the class and make them act as they are in a real situation.

### 1.3. Research Questions

This research intends to respond to the following research questions:

- How does working drama in EFL classrooms effect on students learning?
- What are major benefits of implementing Shakespeare's drama on English students?
- How can instructors facilitate learning process by working on students' capacity through implementing drama?
- Why working Shakespeare's drama is considered to give students a better opportunity to learn language better and easier?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW :

Shakespeare was a playwright, a poet, an actor, and a shareholder in his theatre company as well. He was a skilful playwright in creating the script of tragic and comic themes. That is why; he is famous in all over the world. He was a writer in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but his works are appreciated from those times up to now. Knight (2011) states that:

*Shakespeare was just one writer amongst many on London's thriving sixteenth and seventeenth century stage – but he's certainly one that has lasted! His work is at the center of Britain's twenty-first century theatre industry, is constantly adapted for film, has been translated into hundreds of languages and is performed throughout the world today. (p.6)*

Shakespeare invented some new words and phrases in his works that we still use them today as well. It all shows that he didn't acquire this much of popularity without a significant reason. According to Knight (2011), "When young people watch or read Shakespeare today, they are pulled into a world that is both alien and familiar to them" (p.6).

It is claimed that in one scene, his treatment of love, jealousy, racism, mourning or power can seem strikingly relevant; in the next moment, the audience or reader might have to engage with concepts of religion, or family, or fashion completely different from their own. All these above reasons make it clear that Shakespeare was unique in the history of English literature.

The study of Shakespeare's plays can and should be active and exciting like the plays themselves. It should challenge and engage both students and teachers intellectually, physically, and emotionally. Effective teaching of Shakespearean drama recognizes that through active processes (such as performance, response and reaction, collaborative investigation, questioning, representing meaning, etc.), students gain a much more comprehensive understanding of the plays as well as a greater appreciation of the beauty of Shakespeare's language. As Madsen (2001) observes, "Being a student of Shakespeare is like being a student of life; you never finish learning" (p. 55).

### 2.1. The Benefits of Using Drama in ESL/EFL Classes

Teaching English language through drama can develop students' imagination. That is to say, students contribute to language learning process by sharing their life experience, their feelings, and ideas. Boudreault (2010) explained that:

*Drama puts the teacher in the role of supporter in the learning process and the students can take more responsibility for their own learning. Ideally, the teacher will take a less dominant role in the language class and let the students explore the language activities. In the student centered classroom, every student is a potential teacher for the group. (p.2)*

The ESL/EFL group will have many opportunities where they can develop their own ideas as well as the skills of cooperation when interacting with classmates. As a matter of fact, the group work builds social awareness and understanding and they can walk in the 'shoes of one another' as well. To state the point differently, drama can be an excellent method for the study of human nature and working in harmony. Indeed, the play - acting process provides opportunities for communication and relieves the tension of learning in a second language as well.

There are also some students who do not like literature class; they say instead of learning all about literary periods and its genres it is better to learn how to speak and communicate. That is to say, these students think that literature is an irrelevant subject in EFL classes. Whereas, there are many ways that teachers can teach language through literature. Actually, what to teach is not very important for a teacher but how to teach and how to attract the learner's attention in a subject is very important. In other words, teaching language is also possible through literature if the teachers use varied methods and styles in EFL classes. Carter and Walker (as cited by Hassan Khandoker, 2016) stated that "Today teaching

language through literature is essentially viewed as teaching language through any other written material. Therefore, any standard activity that is used with non – literary texts can be used with literature as well, such as re- writing, prediction activity, role- playing and so on (p. 2).

## 2.2. Drama as a Tool for Improving Speaking Skill

Communication is considered as one of the most important skills of students in EFL classes. Receptive and expressive language abilities constitute a significant aspect of effective communication in terms of language skills. Both of them are equally important for having an effective communication. One of the expressive language elements is speaking skill. Speaking is the most common and important means of communication among human beings.

The key to successful communication is speaking fluently, efficiently and articulately, as well as using effective voice projection. Furthermore, speaking is linked to success in life, as it occupies an important position both individually and socially. As in the case with many basic skills, one of the important periods to improve speaking skill is, incontrovertibly, during primary education. Speaking skills acquired and developed during primary education are significant with regard to both acquisition and permanence. Therefore, it is essential that efficient and effective teaching methods are employed in order to improve speaking skills during primary education. Actually, drama can be used as a tool for improving speaking skills in EFL classes as well. According to Cakir (2010):

*Using drama and drama activities has clear benefits for language learning and teaching, especially in speaking skill. It encourages children to speak and gives them the chance to communicate, even with limited language, using non-verbal communication, such as body movements and facial expressions. There are also a number of other factors which make drama a very powerful tool in the language classroom. Drama involves children at many levels, through their bodies, minds, emotions, language and social interaction. (p. 28)*

Considering Cakir's idea, we can say that drama is a mode of learning to make learners use their imaginations to explore issues, events, and the relationships. Actually, Shakespeare was the only playwright who introduced the world through English literature under the title of drama. As discussed before, drama has an important impact on language learning. Drama can ease language learning process through engaging students to practical use of language in a real situation and provide them a great way of learning.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

This study was a field research; a couple of tools have been used in order to collect data from participants. The tools included questionnaire and voice recorder, but the questionnaire was more focused. This study was guided through descriptive method to find out the hypothesis of the study. Therefore, the researchers considered students' opinion to find out sufficient and appropriate answers to the research questions as well. There were 60 participants in this study; included 27 male and 33 female students of senior and junior classes from the English department of Balkh University. They were selected randomly or without prior planning. Moreover, each participant received a questionnaire to fill up their own opinions and views. Besides, the participants 'age, language, and customs and traditions varied from one another. That is, the researchers meant to include a variety of participants in this study.

## 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS:

The main concentration on this research has been on questionnaire as a tool for collecting the data. There has not been used any other thing as a tool for collecting data except questionnaire due to its ease of use and applicability for participants. Actually, seniors and juniors at English department have been a rich source of data for this study. This is, the participants provided sufficient data for this research.

After the questionnaires were distributed and collected, they were all saved and stored safely. Then the researchers analyzed the questionnaires by using computer specially Microsoft Excel program. In addition, for making the results clear, concise, and comprehensible the researchers used figures for each single part of the questionnaire as well.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: DEMOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS :

This demographical information shows that among 60 students, who participated in this research, 45% of them were male students and 55% were female students at the English Department. As it appears, female students have shown more interest in the research. It was not

Obligatory for participants to take part in the research; they were asked if they were willing to participate or not.

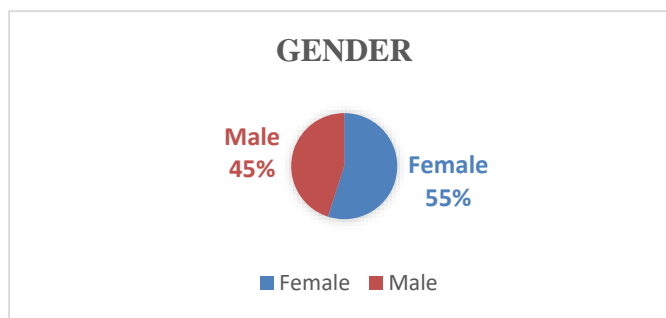


Figure 1. Gender of participants

Students who participated in this study were from two different classes of English department. Of those participants, 60% were senior students and 40% were junior students at English Department. The reason behind this sampling is that senior students have been involved in drama activities more than junior students. Each participant was given the questionnaire individually that's why it can be claimed that these answers are pure opinions of the students.

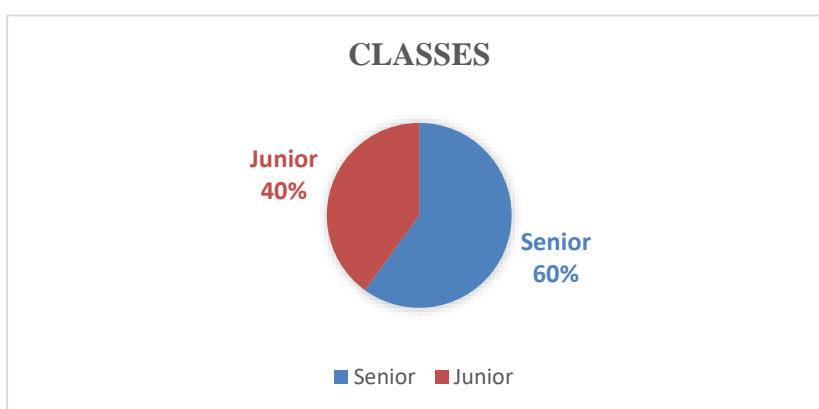


Figure 2. Classes

The figure below shows the level of students' English knowledge. Their English language knowledge has been categorized to advanced, upper-intermediate, intermediate, and lower-intermediate. Participants have selected their English knowledge themselves. Based on the results, 40% of students were in advanced level, 20% of students were upper intermediate but 30% of students' English knowledge was intermediate. Furthermore, 10% students mentioned their level as lower intermediate.

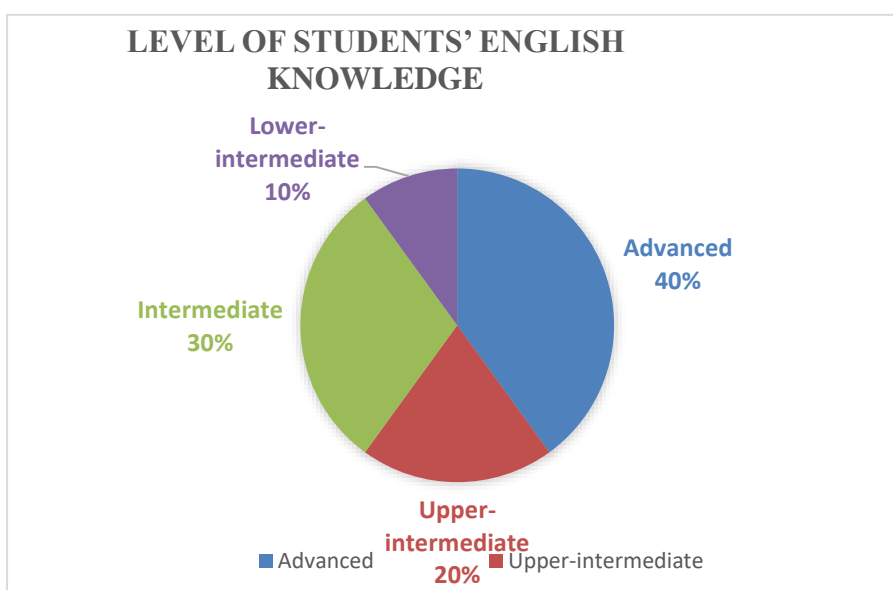


Figure 3. Level of students' English knowledge

### 5.1. Findings

This research was conducted among students amazingly found that 85% of students, who had participated in the research, believed that working drama and drama activities are helpful for them. Amazingly, it also has been discovered that all of those who believed that drama is helpful have information about Shakespeare and his works.

Those with 15% didn't believe that drama is an efficient teaching and learning tool and 10% were not sure that whether drama is beneficial or not; among participants 5% students believed that drama is not beneficial for learning language. Interestingly, this research found all those 15% that don't believe drama is beneficial have no sufficient information about drama and they were not aware of the basics, benefits, and Shakespeare's life.

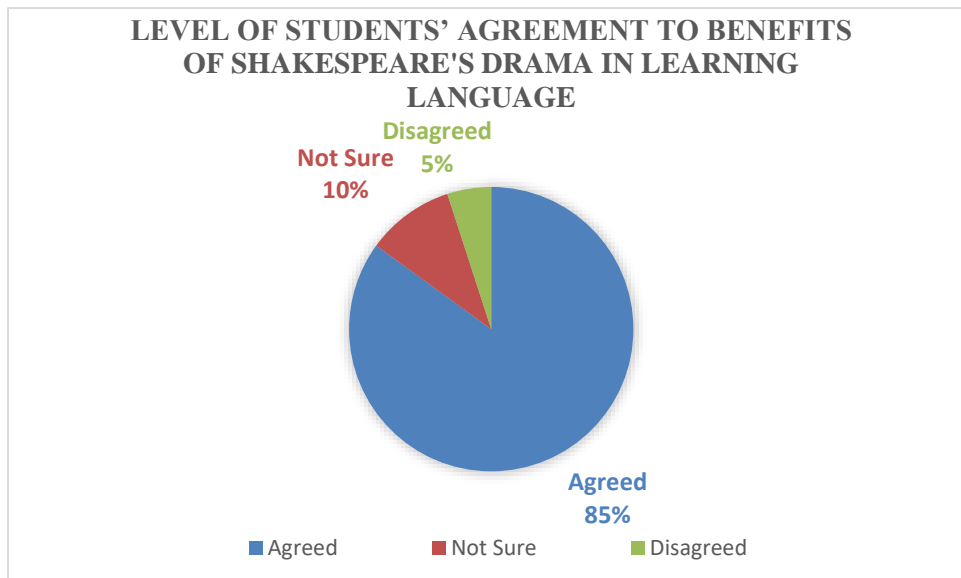


Figure 4. Level of students' Agreement to benefits of Shakespeare's drama in learning language

This information shows that approximately all of the students believe that working drama is beneficial for students. Students who agreed that drama is beneficial also agreed that drama should be used at English department frequently. They even claim that there must be a two-credit subject at English department under the title of drama in which students' are taught drama basics but the most concentration would be on drama application among students. The sample dramas that would be applied in this subject should be 80% Shakespeare's drama or inspired from Shakespeare.

The other question asked from students was that in which classes should be drama taught and applied among students. The research found an interesting answer for this question. That interesting answer is that many participants believe that drama should be taught and applied in every class but in different levels. It is found that 50% of students believe that drama should be taught and applied in all four classes at English Department which contains the answers of majority of participants in this research. Least of the participants i.e. 5% of them answered that drama should be applied on first class. 15% of participants believe that drama should be taught and applied on second class and 20% answered third class. Even 10% of the participants believe that drama should be taught and applied in fourth class.

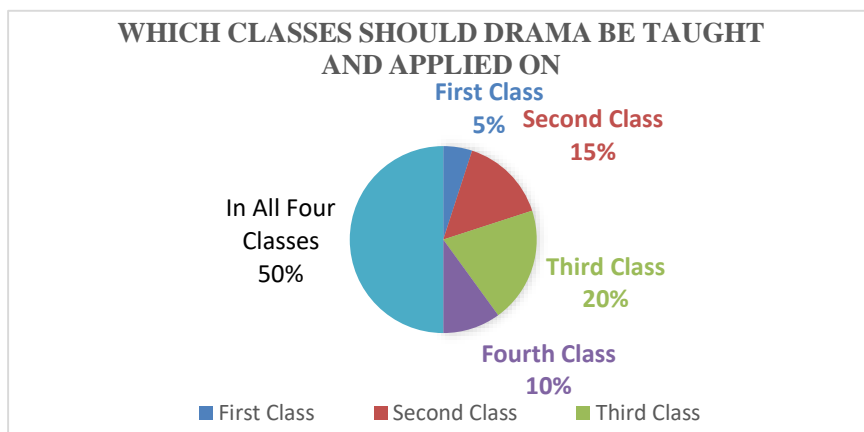


Figure 4.

5.2. DISCUSSION:

Drama is a collection of activities that have an element of creativity in them. This powerful tool has remained as powerful as before. Shakespeare has made much efforts to explore the world of drama that's why his name is prominent everywhere we hear the word "drama". As in literature review part we found that working drama has many benefits. Using drama in education enables learners to:

- Develop imagination: all participants believe that drama can help them improve their imagination skill through engaging them to thinking and imagining. Imagination is considered a very important tool for a learner and drama can improve it easily.
- Increase the potential to speak fluently: according to this study it is discussed that drama helps learners speak fluently because it exposures them to direct speaking. It gives opportunity for learners to speak without fear.
- An opportunity to independent thinking,
- An opportunity for the group to develop its own ideas,
- An opportunity for Cooperation: a good sense of cooperation comes to learners when they cooperate to apply a drama.
- An opportunity to Build Social Awareness: learners will practice dramas which have social subjects and it will definitely help them build social awareness.
- An opportunity for a healthy release of emotion.
- An opportunity to develop better habits of speech.
- An experience with good Literature.
- An introduction to the Theatre arts.

These ten elements show what drama can do in education especially in language teaching for the students. It gives opportunity for students to do a wide range of things. According to findings in this research most of the students are willing to have drama as a separate subject in language and literature classes.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION :

As this study examined and discussed above, there is a need to link language and literature to have students perform better in an EFL classes. By discovering teaching and learning process it is highlighted that teachers need to discover and apply new methods and new tools in language classes. Drama is the best tool to engage students in real language situation to enhance their ability for a better and easier learning approach. The teaching/learning process is growing every day and demands are increasing, so it is needed to widen the learning opportunity for students.

As tested and evaluated in this research, implementing Shakespeare's drama provides a new way of teaching and learning. It gives students the opportunity to find themselves in real language situations. As it is claimed in the research, implementing Shakespeare's drama can be an efficient tool to enhance students' ability in language since it links language to literature. Conducting and using Shakespeare's plays also provide a real language situation for students which make them not only learn linguistic elements of the language but also pragmatic use of it as well. Putting students into real language situation is the best opportunity. As found in the research, approximately all of the students believe that using and applying Shakespeare's dramas can help them learn language better and easier than before, and it would be an improvement for language learning and teaching.

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