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DRAMA IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM: UNRAVELING MISCONCEPTIONS AND HARNESSING ITS POTENTIAL IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

Building on the observation that drama as a teaching tool is not widely used in Uzbekistan, this paper identifies and addresses three common misconceptions about drama among English teachers in Uzbekistan. Drawing on the notion of Drama pedagogy as described by Even (2008) as well as the large-scale survey conducted by Giebert (2014), this paper delivers a practical approach to adopting drama techniques into the classroom in Uzbekistan. Key words: drama, drama pedagogy, Uzbekistan.

Опираясь на наблюдение о том, что драма как средство обучения не находит широкого применения в Узбекистане, данная статья выделяет и разбирает три распространенных заблуждения о драме среди преподавателей английского языка в Узбекистане. Основываясь на понимании драматической педагогики, описанной Эвен (2008), а также на масштабном опросе, проведенном Гиберт (2014), статья предлагает практический подход к внедрению техник драмы в учебный процесс в Узбекистане. Ключевые слова: драма, драматическая педагогика, Узбекистан.

Uzbekistonda drama o'qitish vositasi sifatida keng qo'llanilmaganligi haqida kuzatishlarga tayanib, bu maqola O'zbekistondagi ingliz tili o'qituvchilari orasida dramaga oid uch ta ommabop xatoliklarni aniqlaydi va ularni yoritib beradi. Even (2008) tomonidan tavsiflangan Drama pedagogikasi tushunchasiga tayanib hamda Giebert (2014) tomonidan olib borilgan katta ko'lamdagi so'rov asosida, bu maqola Uzbekistondagi sinflarda drama texnikalarini qo'llashga amaliy yondashuvni taklif etadi. Asosiy so'zlar: drama, drama pedagogikasi, Uzbekiston.

Introduction

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Drama, as a teaching tool in English language education, has garnered respect for its role in enhancing comprehension, promoting cultural understanding, and engaging students. By embedding language within real-world or imagined contexts, drama aids students in grasping linguistic and emotive aspects of English. However, in the context of Uzbekistan, its adoption in English classrooms appears to be minimal.

To delve deeper into the reasons behind this hesitancy, the author of this paper reached out to English teachers in Uzbekistan via social media. Through informal discussion, numerous responses highlighted teachers' perspectives on the use of drama in their classrooms. In parsing these responses, three common misconceptions became evident. This paper endeavors to address and clarify these misconceptions, aiming to shed light on the potential and benefits of drama-based pedagogy in Uzbekistan's English education system.

Literature review

Drama pedagogy, often referred to as "process drama" or "drama in language education", emerged in the 1990s as an innovative approach to integrate drama study and practice into the realm of communicative language teaching (CLT). This methodology, as described by Even in 2008, isn't merely an application of CLT. Instead, it amplifies it. Drama pedagogy in foreign language learning is, as Even puts it, both a "realization and an extension" of communicative language teaching. It is tailored to hone communicative and interactional proficiencies in a foreign language. The core idea behind this is to shift the focus from mere cognitive understanding to emphasize communication as a dynamic process and an actionable skill.

Exploring further into the merits of incorporating drama in English Language Teaching (ELT), Giebert's comprehensive review in 2014 sheds light on several benefits. Giebert's findings illuminated the multifaceted benefits associated with the implementation of drama in educational contexts. Among the primary advantages identified were its ability to contextualize language, offering learners a secure environment to enhance their linguistic skills. Furthermore, drama fosters a holistic and sustainable learning experience that goes beyond mere knowledge acquisition, serving to cultivate both personal and social competencies. Additionally, the motivational aspect inherent in drama-based teaching methods was noted, leading to heightened student engagement.

In the specific sphere of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), Giebert underscores how drama serves as an effective platform for learners to assimilate specialized vocabulary. It also offers

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an interactive environment for students to practice work-centric oral interactions, including, but not limited to, meetings, appointments, and business dinners. Moreover, dramatic enactments simulating professional settings allow learners to appreciate the subtle role emotions play in the business arena.

Another profound contribution of drama is its capacity to spark discussions around identity. As students immerse themselves in various roles and navigate fictional narratives, they metaphorically experience the sensation of viewing the world through another's perspective. This facilitates a deeper exploration of themes such as ethics in business, leadership, and more. By engaging with dramatic literature, students encounter diverse perspectives on these topics, promoting introspection and broadening their understanding.

Lastly, the potential of drama to holistically impart intercultural competence cannot be overlooked. Given the intricacies of our interconnected world, leveraging drama in this manner equips learners with a well-rounded perspective on cultural interactions and nuances.

Misconception 1: Drama is resource-intensive

A prevailing view among many educators is that the integration of drama into the classroom necessitates an arsenal of resources. One teacher remarked “Even if I wanted to, how would I even do that when we don't even have a printer in the school?” Another teacher echoed this sentiment, highlighting a “Lack of adequate resources and facilities.”

However, when stripped to its bare essentials, drama thrives even without material resources. The true essence of drama is rooted in the human capacity for expression: the voice to communicate, the body to enact, and the imagination to create.

It is possible, for example, to lead learners through role plays without using any material resources at all. Role plays in English classrooms serve as a dynamic conduit for students to actively engage with the language, simulating real-world scenarios. Through these structured yet flexible interactions, students are prompted to apply a myriad of linguistic structures, ranging from specific tenses to varied vocabulary, allowing them to internalize grammatical rules and expressions within a context. Furthermore, as participants navigate these scenarios, they sharpen their listening comprehension, develop more fluent speaking patterns, and hone their ability to respond spontaneously, leading to a more holistic language acquisition experience that transcends mere textbook learning.

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Misconception 2: Drama is “not in the Syllabus”

Several teachers expressed the belief that drama is not compatible with their subjects or learning goals. One educator expressed doubts about its relevance in a law-focused ESP course, and another questioned its application in business English classes. Broadly speaking, teachers indicated that they didn’t use drama because they weren’t teaching drama courses.

In fact, drama as a tool is not confined to specific subjects; it is a flexible instrument adaptable to different institutions, courses, and learning goal. Subjects like legal and business English, which might seem disconnected from drama, can greatly benefit from its techniques.

For courses like legal English, students can role-play mock trials, client-lawyer interactions, and mediation sessions to practice common linguistic functions in a more holistic context. In business English courses, students can act out job interviews, negotiations, or boardroom discussions.

Misconception 3: Drama does not Align with Uzbek Cultural Values

Many teacher expressed the belief that drama as a teaching technique is at odds with Uzbekistan's cultural norms. Some educators have observed Uzbek students' reluctance to participate in creative activities, with one teacher explaining, "It's an affective filter problem stemming from both general language anxiety and the student's culture." The traditional educational framework in Uzbekistan, which does not prioritize creative expression, can make drama seem out of place. Further supporting this viewpoint, another educator noted that, “Students in Uzbekistan are very restrained, and the majority are often shy.”

In fact, drama can be shaped to resonate with different cultural backgrounds. For Uzbek students, educators can craft materials rooted in Uzbek traditions, histories, and values. This approach ensures the drama content feels familiar and culturally relevant, steering away from contentious subjects and aligning with the country's norms. Moreover, when students see their culture reflected in their learning, they may feel a sense of pride and ownership. Such culturally tailored drama lessons can also stimulate critical discussions about identity, societal roles, and the evolution of cultural values. As a result, the learning experience becomes more meaningful, empowering, and memorable for students.

Teachers also can and should cultivate a classroom environment that encourages learning through trial and error. This mindset can help alleviate fears associated with making mistakes in language use. By positioning errors not as

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failures, but as opportunities for growth and understanding, students are more likely to take risks and venture outside of their comfort zones.

Lastly, gradually introducing students to drama over time may prove more effective than rushing into complex or demanding activities. Starting with simpler exercises, like storytelling or miming, can set the stage. As students become more accustomed, they can transition to more advanced dramatic activities.

Conclusion

As an English teaching tool, drama enjoys tremendous potential that has yet gone largely untapped in Uzbekistan. This hesitation appears due largely to several misconceptions among English teachers as to what drama is and how it can be used to support learning outcomes. By addressing these conceptions, this paper offers a first step towards promoting drama in English classrooms across Uzbekistan.

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