

Dramatization in Higher Education: An active strategy to foster speaking skills in EFL learners.

Dramatización en la Educación Superior: Una estrategia activa para fomentar las habilidades orales en estudiantes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera.

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Abstract

Oral expression is one of the difficult skills that students must master in English. In oral expression classes, students have several problems, such as a lack of enthusiasm and motivation when speaking. This study explores the effectiveness of using dramatization to develop oral skills in second-semester language students. Dramatization, which involves active participation and emotional involvement, offers a unique and compelling method for improving language proficiency. Using thematic dramatizations has many advantages, one of which is encouraging students to speak. This study will use a mixed method to collect data. The results show that the teaching technique of dramatization can significantly improve students' oral expression skills in the classroom.

Keywords: Oral expression, Dramatization, Role-playing.

Resumen

La expresión oral es una de las habilidades más difíciles que los estudiantes deben dominar en inglés. En las clases de expresión oral, los estudiantes tienen varios problemas, como la falta de entusiasmo y motivación al hablar. Este estudio explora la eficacia del uso de la dramatización para desarrollar las habilidades orales en los estudiantes de idiomas del segundo semestre. La dramatización, que implica una participación activa y una implicación emocional, ofrece un método único y atractivo para mejorar la competencia lingüística. El uso de dramatizaciones temáticas tiene muchas ventajas, una de las cuales es animar a los estudiantes a hablar. Este estudio utilizará un método mixto para recopilar datos. Los resultados muestran que la técnica de enseñanza de la dramatización puede mejorar significativamente las habilidades de expresión oral de los estudiantes en el aula.

Palabras clave: Expresión oral, Dramatización, Juego de roles.

Introduction

Developing speaking proficiency remains a central challenge in English language learning, especially in EFL contexts where authentic exposure is limited. Dramatization, understood as a pedagogical strategy that combines active participation with emotional involvement, is an effective teaching resource for enhancing oral expression. This approach encourages students to leave their comfort zone, take on different characters, and engage in meaningful dialogue, which promotes the practice of real-life interactions and stimulates the ability to think and respond spontaneously.

This article analyzes the potential of role-play as a tool for developing oral skills in language teaching contexts. The motivation for this study arose from reflections and conversations with students who expressed their dissatisfaction with traditional methods such as memorization or repetitive exercises, which they found less attractive and effective. In contrast, they expressed interest in more dynamic and interactive learning experiences. These testimonies prompted the exploration of methodological alternatives and directed attention toward dramatization as a strategy for acquiring communication skills.

Several authors have shown that dramatization contributes to meaningful communication and the appropriate use of language in the classroom (Mwangi, 2016). In addition to stimulating oral expression, it promotes comprehension and retention of content by engaging students in active learning. Biegler (1998) demonstrated that participants in dramatized storytelling activities achieved higher levels of comprehension than those who limited themselves to traditional reading activities. Similarly, recent research has highlighted that this resource also strengthens social, emotional, and creative dimensions, establishing itself as a comprehensive active learning strategy applicable to different areas of knowledge, including history teaching (Uguma, 2018; Obiekezie, 2018; Pascarella, 2022).

Dramatization can take many forms, such as role-playing, puppet theater, or pantomime (Haruyama, 2010; Lamsal, 2011; Harvey, 2018; Pascarella, 2022). These practices encourage the use of the body and voice as means of expression, intensifying student engagement and promoting more meaningful learning. As Biegler (1998) points out, this method awakens critical thinking, problem solving, and emotional expression, while encouraging students to demonstrate their knowledge orally, moreover, students develop cooperative learning by participating as a small group and preparing a play, which is later presented. (Hu & Shu, 2025).

In teaching subjects such as history, dramatization allows students to connect emotionally with characters and events, which enriches their understanding of their complexity. Drake and Corbin (1993) highlight that this method provokes emotions, encourages students to take a stance, and generates greater involvement with the content, while Shusterman (2001) emphasizes its ability to broaden perspective and appreciation of historical processes. In the field of teaching English as a foreign language, recent studies show benefits in active listening, meaningful interaction, and the construction of authentic communicative contexts (Greenfader, 2013; Brouillette, 2013; Uguma, 2018; Obiekezie, 2018).

However, the implementation of dramatization poses challenges. Some students may feel self-conscious or experience anxiety when acting in front of their peers, which can lead to unequal participation (Haruyama, 2010; Shusterman, 2016). To mitigate these difficulties, teachers should foster inclusive and supportive environments that encourage progressive participation, considering alternatives such as illustrated storytelling or puppet shows (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Gasparro, 1994).

In this context, it is essential that dramatization be articulated with student-centered teaching principles. This approach places the student at the center of the learning process, promoting authentic interaction, collaboration, and creativity (Lamsal,

2011; Uguma & Obiekezie, 2018). In this way, dramatization not only contributes to the development of oral expression but also encourages the construction of meaningful learning linked to real communication experiences. Dramatization develops imagination, contributes to the automatic understanding of rhymed language phrases, and the development of the student's sensory and emotional sphere. (Biynazarova et al., 2024).

The global expansion of English as a lingua franca in fields such as education, science, business, and media reinforces the need to strengthen oral skills in this language (Avila & Dack, 2023; Bahrani & Soltani, 2012). Although speaking is the most valued skill in real-life contexts (Rao, 2019), it is still often taught using traditional techniques focused on repetition and memorization. In light of this limitation, dramatization offers an innovative approach to transforming the teaching of oral expression into a motivating, meaningful, and effective experience. In short, dramatization is an appropriate tool for understanding and putting into action the potential of our future teachers and educators as speakers, using techniques of interpretation with dramatic texts. (Del Moral-Barrigüete & Massó Guijarro, 2022).

Within this framework, this article examines the benefits and challenges of dramatization in language teaching, as well as the main activities associated with oral expression in the classroom. Drama indeed provides more benefits in the process of language teaching and learning. One of the most prominent benefits of drama is the increase in students' speaking skills Rahmawati Astiandani, Fitri & Mustofa, Ali. (2021). In addition, practical examples and case studies are presented to illustrate its pedagogical application, with the aim of providing guidance for teachers seeking to promote more authentic and participatory communicative learning.

Materials and Methods

The research was conducted with a sample of university students selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling, who had an intermediate level of English according to the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). To assess oral skills, an instrument designed according to CEFR standards was used, consisting of a pre-test and a post-test that included oral production activities, evaluated using an analytical rubric with criteria for pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, a satisfaction survey with closed-ended questions and a Likert scale was administered to gather participants' perceptions of the use of dramatization as a strategy to strengthen oral expression. The procedure consisted of the initial application of the pre-test, followed by the intervention based on dramatization activities such as role-playing and stage performances developed during a previously established period, and finally the application of the post-test under conditions equivalent to the initial ones. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, employing parametric or non-parametric tests depending on the distribution of the data, with the aim of identifying significant differences between the pre-test and post-test results, as well as interpreting the students' assessments collected in the satisfaction survey.

Analysis of results

The rubric applied in the initial and final assessments allowed the students' progress to be measured in five criteria: pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, language use, and vocabulary. In the pre-test, the results showed intermediate levels, with greater limitations in pronunciation and fluency. However, after the intervention, the scores increased significantly in all criteria, reaching values close to the maximum (3 points).

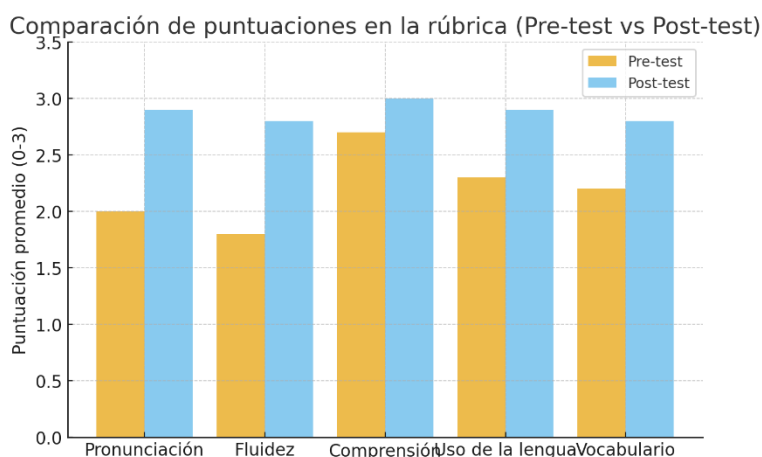
Table 1.

Average scores on the rubric in the pre-test and post-test.

Criterion	Pre-test (Mean)	Post-test (Average)
Pronunciation	2.0	2.9
Fluency	1.8	2.8
Comprehension	2.7	3.0
Language use	2.3	2.9
Vocabulary	2.2	2.8

Figure 1.

Comparison of scores in the rubric (Pre-test vs. Post-test)



The comparison shows a uniform increase in all indicators. Pronunciation and fluency, which initially represented the greatest weaknesses, achieved substantial improvement, approaching the level of a competent speaker. Comprehension remained high from the outset and reached the maximum score at the end of the intervention, indicating that students were able to convey clear and understandable messages. Likewise, both language use and vocabulary showed consistent progress, with a reduction in grammatical errors and an expansion of lexical repertoire.

Overall, these results demonstrate that the role-playing activities helped to strengthen the participants' confidence and communicative competence, validating the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategy implemented.

Satisfaction survey

The survey administered after the intervention gathered students' perceptions of role-playing as a methodological strategy. In general, the responses revealed a highly positive assessment, with a majority rating the experience as satisfactory, engaging, and appropriate to their learning needs.

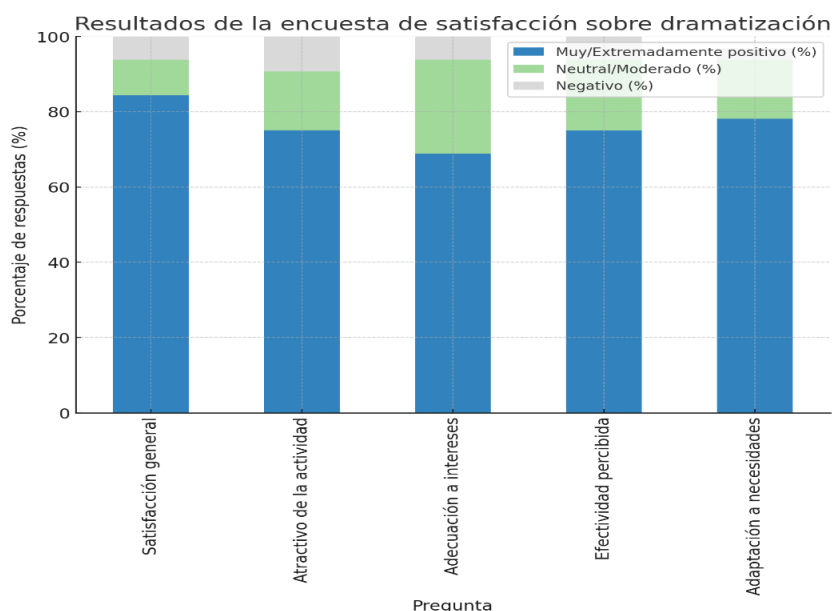
Table 2.

Satisfaction survey results (in %)

Question	Very/Extremely positive	Neutral/Moderate	Negative
Overall satisfaction	84.4	9.4	6.3
Attractiveness of the activity	75.1	15.6	9.4
Suitability to interests	68.8	25.0	6.3
Perceived effectiveness	75.0	18.8	6.3
Adaptation to needs	78.1	15.6	3.1

Figure 2.

Percentage distribution of survey responses



The analysis shows that more than 75% of students perceived the role-play as very positive or extremely beneficial in terms of overall satisfaction, appeal, effectiveness, and adaptation to their needs. Only a small percentage expressed neutral

or negative assessments. These results suggest that role-playing generated motivation, dynamism, and confidence by placing students in realistic communicative contexts that encouraged spontaneous use of the language.

Observational analysis

Qualitative observations made throughout the process corroborate the quantitative results. In the initial phase, students showed insecurity when speaking in public and had difficulties with fluency and pronunciation. However, as the role-playing activities progressed, there was a gradual increase in confidence, a more varied use of vocabulary, and a greater willingness to interact in English.

At the end of the course, most students achieved scores of 4 and 5 in the oral expression test, reflecting a remarkable command of pronunciation, fluency, and linguistic appropriateness. The final drama activity confirmed that students not only strengthened their oral skills but also managed to perform naturally in a structured setting in front of their peers.

The results obtained allow us to conclude that role-playing is a highly effective strategy for enhancing oral skills in students of English as a foreign language. The combination of practical activities, constant feedback, and an inclusive learning environment facilitated improvements in both linguistic performance and the motivation and confidence of the participants. These findings reinforce the relevance of incorporating interactive methodologies into the language teaching curriculum, as they promote more meaningful learning that is applicable to real communicative situations.

Discussion

The results obtained show that dramatization is a highly effective strategy for developing oral expression in university students. The significant improvement in aspects such as pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary use confirms that practice based on simulated situations and role-playing enhances not only linguistic performance but

also students' confidence and willingness to communicate in a second language. These findings correspond to those reported by Alfarwan (2024), who identified substantial improvements in pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and fluency in English learners through the systematic use of dramatic techniques. Similarly, Nguyen (2023) demonstrated that dramatization contributes to the development of discursive skills and the reduction of errors, promoting more natural and contextualized communication.

A relevant aspect is the emotional and motivational impact of dramatization. The present research showed that participants progressively overcame communicative anxiety and showed greater confidence when expressing themselves in public. This phenomenon has been supported by Datskiv (2024), who points out that dramatic activities strengthen both linguistic and socio-emotional dimensions by stimulating creativity, motivation, and cooperation among students. By offering a safe and controlled space for practice, dramatization minimizes the fear of error and encourages more active participation, which is essential in foreign language teaching contexts where inhibition is often a recurring obstacle.

Another noteworthy finding is that dramatization allowed theory to be integrated with practice in a meaningful learning environment. Constant exposure to contextual vocabulary and linguistic structures framed in realistic situations generated deeper and more applicable learning, as pointed out by Humaira et al. (2022), who found that dramatization facilitates the retention and transfer of knowledge to authentic communicative scenarios. Thus, this approach helps to overcome the limitations of traditional methods based on memorization or mechanical repetition, which, as Rao (2019) points out, are insufficient for developing real communication skills.

Furthermore, it is important to add that, apart from the Dramatization in itself, during the period of the First Semester, other activities have been carried out in order to promote an active learning which include cooperative activities within traditional

lectures to keep students engaged, using online materials to analyze in and inside the classroom and case studies. Bruno, Luana & Del-Castillo, Héctor. (2019).

Finally, the discussion of these results suggests that dramatization should not only be considered a complementary resource, but a central pedagogical strategy in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Its potential to integrate linguistic, social, and emotional skills makes it a valuable tool in today's educational environments, where training competent speakers requires more than mastery of grammatical structures: it requires confidence, spontaneity, and the ability to interact meaningfully in diverse contexts.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that dramatization is an effective teaching tool for strengthening oral expression in English language learners. The implementation of role-playing activities led to a progressive improvement in both the fluency and confidence of the participants. At the beginning, students had moderate proficiency and some insecurity when expressing themselves; however, as they became involved in the dramatizations, they expanded their vocabulary, improved their pronunciation, and became more natural in their communication. The final results showed a significant increase in oral expression scores, reaching high levels of performance.

These findings highlight the importance of incorporating active and interactive methodologies into language teaching. Role-playing, due to its dynamic and contextual nature, offers a safe space for oral practice, reduces communication anxiety, and builds confidence, which are fundamental aspects for the effective acquisition of a second language. In addition, this approach helps to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, generating meaningful learning that can be transferred to real-life communication situations.

In this regard, it is recommended that teachers and language program managers systematically integrate dramatization activities into the curriculum. Role-playing, simulations, and dramatized storytelling not only enhance oral competence but also promote an inclusive, participatory, and motivating environment. To maximize its benefits, it is essential to provide continuous feedback and design contextualized activities that allow for the meaningful use of vocabulary and linguistic structures. Likewise, adapting the dynamics to different learning styles and rhythms ensures that all students can benefit from this approach.

Dramatization is a pedagogical strategy with great potential to enrich language teaching, as it promotes the comprehensive development of oral skills and contributes to the formation of more confident, creative, and competent students in authentic communicative contexts.

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