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A REVIEW ON THE USE OF DRAMA ACTIVITIES IN THE DESIGNING E-LEARNING MATERIALS TO DEVELOP THE SPEAKING SKILLS OF PRIMARY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Currently, the creation and usage of E-learning materials in the process of teaching English in general and primary schools, in particular, is still fairly limited. Traditional approaches are used to teach the majority of the modules. Less use of E-learning materials causes learners, particularly at the primary level, to lose interest and to spend less time studying English. As a result, learning outcomes are unsatisfactory, and only a small percentage of primary students have excellent communication abilities. Based on a literature review, the authors of this study clarified the role of E-learning materials and primary English teaching in allowing teachers and educational administrators to use technology to design and build lesson plans, in the form of drama activities, to make the teaching of speaking skills interesting and appealing to primary students. Based on the findings, the authors make several ideas to include drama activities in designing E-learning materials to help primary students improve their English speaking skills.

Keywords: *Speaking skills, primary students, E-learning material, drama activities.*

1. Introduction

The use of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching activities is critical to closing the gap between the quality of foreign language teaching in Vietnam and that of developed countries across the world. E-learning materials (for instance: presentations, datasheets, audio files, photos, videos, electronic lectures, teaching software, etc.) are one of the most advantageous ICT application solutions in the external training language [1]. This allows English learners to be as flexible as possible in terms of time and money. This can assist English learners in determining their own study time and being

more proactive in their learning processes. Moreover, smart technologies (laptop, smartphone) allow learners to study and practice English from anywhere. Likewise, the cost of learning facilities is reduced, resulting in greater educational equity and learning chances for many learners. E-learning products are typically incredibly intuitive, which stimulates learners' curiosity and excitement when learning foreign languages too [1, 2].

The Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020, affecting all aspects of socio-economic life, including the educational sector. In response to global change, the trend of online teaching or online education has grown, and

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changes in educational system management, as well as changes in teaching methods, are inescapable. When the internet and smart devices are everywhere, the key benefit of online learning is “Learn anything, no matter what, anywhere, anytime,” which has enticed a growing number of foreign language students to enroll in online courses [1].

In reality, the integration of practice exercises utilizing multiple-choice forms such as Quizzes or multiple-choice examinations, or drama activities with the guidance of teachers, would allow primary learners to speak English anytime, anywhere using various types of smart gadgets. Dramatic activities in the language classroom allow students to express themselves by developing content for various parts of the language session. These activities allow the teacher and students to deal with real-life issues in a safe atmosphere, and to facilitate learning through the acquisition of real-world information and experience. As a result, this will aid in improving self-study, teamwork, cost reduction, and time and effort savings. Furthermore, in the offline class, teachers and students will be able to spend more time developing speaking skills under the observation of teachers and other members.

However, the invention and use of E-learning resources in the process of teaching foreign languages in general and English in particular (especially speaking abilities) at the primary schools is still very restricted, and the majority of the material is still taught via traditional methods. One of the reasons for inefficient learning outcomes and primary pupils who are less engaged in learning English is a lack of utilization of E-learning tools. Traditional teaching methods include elements such as a greater emphasis on accuracy than fluency, an initial emphasis on reading and writing skills, and a lack of possibilities for communication [1, 2].

Therefore, our main hypothesis is “Increasing the use of drama activities

in the design of E-learning materials to improve the English speaking skills of primary students”. The article summarizes research on improving primary students’ English speaking skills through the creation of E-learning materials, particularly drama activities, and offers some suggestions for future use of this method in teaching English at the primary schools in Vietnam.

2. Methods

A literature review is a survey of previously published research on a topic. This plays a critical role in scholarship and doing research. A literature review is essential for (i) identifying what has been written on a subject or topic and identifying relevant topics or questions requiring more investigation; (ii) determining the extent to which a specific research area reveals any interpretable trends or patterns; (iii) aggregating empirical findings related to a narrow research question to support evidence-based practice; (iv) generating new frameworks and theories;

A literature review is a written summary of articles, books, and other documents that describes the past and current state of information on a research topic. This method will organize the literature into the different topics and texts required for a proposed research. However, a good review may also contain other information drawn from conference papers, books, and government documents or NGOs. The cited documents or articles can be both qualitative and quantitative research.

Therefore, to develop the speaking skills of primary students in general, it is essential to draw a theoretical overview of the educational system. This method helps to conduct a review of previous research literature to supplement existing literature to avoid duplication, to demonstrate to educators that the topic of study is necessary as well as to develop necessary and timely document retrieval skills. There are some steps involved in conducting a review

article: formulating the research questions and main objectives; searching the extant literature; screening for inclusion; assessing the quality of primary studies; extracting and analyzing data.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. English language teaching of primary schools in Vietnam

Since the 1990s, English has been taught in a pilot program at language centers and some primary schools in cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City [3]. In 1996, English became an elective subject starting from Grade 3 (8 years of age), with two 40-minute periods per week [4]. These schools received sufficient teaching resources and support from the parents, but speaking competence was not achieved. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) launched an English curriculum that gave the numbers of words that the students must learn: Grade 3, 120-140 words; Grade 4, 140-160 words; and Grade 5, 180-200 words [4]. The government set the aim of students communicating in English in various settings, and the solution was to learn vocabulary [1].

The vocabulary curriculum led to the use of various inappropriate textbooks for Vietnamese students. There is a debate on whether or not teachers should use English textbooks. Some teachers have complained that the textbooks have a boring style and are less than useful as a source for classroom teaching, while others have a more positive attitude [5]. Textbooks are useful guidelines for both the teachers and students, while others demonstrated the danger of being restricted to a particular textbook and the lack of practice teachers end up with, in terms of preparing materials and instruction. However, in the context of Vietnam, textbooks are used for almost every curriculum. English teachers can use textbooks to take advantage of quality materials with a detailed syllabus for grammar, appropriate vocabulary, practice, pronunciation focus, and exercises [1, 5].

Moreover, some textbooks include a teachers' book which assists the teachers with procedures and the implementation of new ideas. This advantage saves much time for teachers in comparison with preparing the materials and instruction by themselves. Furthermore, from the point of the students, textbooks provide a grammatical and fundamental framework that assumes the common needs of learners, as well as enabling them to study topics in advance or revise previous topics, and consequently keep track of their progress [6]. Thus, selecting suitable textbooks is an important key to implementing the goals of a curriculum, as well as the education's goals.

3.2. Using E-learning materials aiming at improving speaking skills

E-learning materials are a collection of electronic media for teaching and learning, including textbooks, reference materials, assessment tests, presentations, datasheets, files, audio, images, videos, electronic lectures, teaching software, virtual experiments (in Article 2, Circular 12/2016/TT-BGDĐT regulating the application of information technology in management, online training). E-learning materials are forms of organized training based on technology and mobile devices through an environment connected to the Internet. The most common form of E-learning materials are videos, during the learning process, learners can interact with the teacher by commenting directly on the teaching videos or drama activities thus increasing the interaction more. Through watching videos, primary students can learn by acting like actors or cartoon characters. Therefore, for learning English, the application of ICT and the use of E-learning materials in teaching makes the lessons interesting when technology is now an indispensable part of life, thereby helping primary students to focus and learn more interested and often practice English skills in practice.

Along with the strong and continuous development of ICT and communication, applying ICT in teaching by exploiting information on the Internet, using teaching software, E-learning materials, ... on the basis of smart devices have made a significant contribution to improving teaching efficiency. Therefore, research topics on this activity have been receiving much attention from researchers, lecturers, and educational managers in the world. Currently, there are many studies on E-learning materials that have also been researched and developed in European countries. These studies have confirmed the advantages of building E-learning materials, in teaching and training, especially used in the form of joint training. In particular, the authors all come to the conclusion that building supplementary E-learning materials is really attractive and attracts primary students to participate in learning speaking.

In Vietnam, there are many researches on ICT application in university teaching in general and English teaching in particular. Research on “Teaching and learning English in a new situation: challenges and solutions”, the authors found that English language training has not yet met the current social needs because many textbooks are outdated, not up to date, the lack of testing and assessment methods, etc. Two of the important solutions are to develop human resources, teaching materials, improving English teaching methods that the author offers to improve English proficiency and English ability of learners [7].

There is research on “Building an E-learning system to support training under the credit system at Can Tho University”. The outcomes include: choosing a solution to build an E-learning system; research on the selection of standards and background training management system for E-learning; building several supporting tools, especially those integrated into the platform for E-learning; proposing the structure of

the electronic lecture and the knowledge matrix to meet the requirements; system implementation in practice [8].

In addition, few studies have studied to create an environment for specialized English learning outside of school hours through the use of social networks and some supporting ICT tools to enhance self-study outside of the class time of learners in general, primary students in particular. Of which the role of ICT and the Internet in enabling teachers and educational administrators to apply technology to lesson design, making teaching and learning more interesting than textbooks. The required condition is that English classes must have an internet connection to integrate traditional and electronic lectures. There should be a financial mechanism and support for lecturers in compiling electronic supporting build e-learning documents, etc.

3.3. Using drama activities as an effective tool for teaching speaking skills

Scholars and educators have recommended using drama in teaching a foreign language. Indeed, this approach has attracted the attention of many practitioners, because of the insufficiencies of the traditional language teaching approaches.

Learners from the traditional language teaching approach are always afraid of speaking in and out of the classroom. These learners hardly get a chance to interact with their fellow students or the teacher in the foreign language, and with native speakers outside the classroom. Therefore, students from the traditional teaching approach find it very difficult to attain fluency and confidence when speaking in a foreign language [9]. From this perspective, drama is considered as “communication between people”. It integrates the verbal and non-verbal components of an experience, very much like language. Even if the students have a limited amount of vocabulary, they can use gestures and body language to compensate and express the content. These verbal and

non-verbal components make learning a new language much easier and more interesting for learners [10].

Maley and Duff defined dramatic activities in a language classroom as activities which “allow the student to use his or her personality in creating the material on which part of the language class is to be based. These activities draw on the natural ability of every person to imitate, mimic and express himself or herself through gesture. They draw too, on the student’s imagination and memory, and natural capacity to bring to life parts of his or her experience that might never otherwise emerge. They are dramatic because they arouse our interest, which they do by drawing on the unpredictable power generated when one person is brought together with others. Each student brings a different life, a different background into the class. We would like students to be able to use this when working with others” [11].

In addition, drama allows the teacher and students to deal with real-life problems in a protective environment, hence facilitating learning by acquiring real knowledge and experience. As Heathcote noted in her study, their experience and knowledge affected their actions [12]. So, drama activities are like rehearsals to prepare the students for their future social roles and everyday lives. They can help the students obtain the relevant qualities to improve their performances in any profession and role. The opportunity to experience real-life situations gives the students the confidence necessary for tackling real-life situations beyond the classroom.

Through drama, students acquire new vocabulary and expression in the appropriate context. For example, in an “at the hospital” simulation, a student pretending to be a doctor may write down “one spoonful of tequila” as a remedy for coughing. While other students do not know the meaning of tequila, after the teacher explained the meaning of the phrase, the students learned the new phrase from a different culture [13]. Drama provides the

context and needs to listen and speak the foreign language comprehensively. For example, when the students have to enact meeting an English-speaking person for the first time, they have to listen carefully and introduce themselves properly. Equipped with the experience, it may motivate the learner to practice talking to a native English speaker in the real world. When there is the experience of speaking the foreign language and a need later arises, then the motivation of the students in using that language should also increase.

The question is why children? Are they too small to learn a foreign language? There are many debates around this question. The younger one learns to speak a language, the more permanently it is remembered. Children are highly motivated to learn a language because the language gives them the key to opening an enormous world of many meaningful activities around them. They also receive an enormous amount of support and reinforcement in their first faltering attempts at an adult language and are continually encouraged and rewarded for their successes. Language brings children the opportunity to access a rich and patterned language environment. Thus, they are exposed to language and experience it as being linked to clear material and social contexts, in which language use is highly functional, and where many other modalities such as gaze, body language, and gesture reinforce the linguistic meanings being made. Gradually children are exposed to the sheer amount of language over periods in which they can listen to others talking and try out the new language themselves. Therefore, seemingly trivial play activities, such as nursery rhymes, language games can be the reinforce key of their language development [14].

Fluency means that the person speaks the language continuously and with little to no interruptions. Learners can improve their fluency through drama because certain activities are repeatedly rehearsed, and practice improves fluency. In a theatrical play, for example, the

students listen, read and repeat their lines. By repetition, they can say the lines with increasing fluency. Moreover, playing enables learners to overcome their rational and emotional barriers, so they can speak freely and confidently express what they want to. The learners feel at ease and safe when there are a facilitator and a group of like-minded people. Therefore, speaking gradually improves fluency. Drama helps the students by making them more self-confident when using the language. Each student, shy or talkative, is given a role in the play or activity.

They can initially speak through the disguises of the costumes. They will garner more positive attitudes towards learning English and will become better speakers over time. Once they are exposed to the situation, the students will be more motivated to speak in similar real-life situations.

The four stages of a drama-based lesson plan includes a full description and teachers' roles designed by Billíková and Kissová [15] (Table 1).

Table 1. four stages of a drama-based lesson plan [15]

Stage	Description	Teacher's Roles	Examples
Warm-ups	Introduced after opening the lesson (2-7 minutes). Movement is great to energize the class and wake up the learners' bodies and senses.	Teacher is a leader and a manager during this stage.	Nonverbal activities: clapping, sending silent signals, walking in space, etc. Simple verbal activities: word chains, greeting activities, tongue twisters, etc.
Pre-Drama	A preparation stage where the topic of a lesson is introduced (IQ- 15 minutes).	Teacher is a facilitator, not a doer, but he/she is still quite dominant during this stage. He/she should ensure that the learners are doing the task properly.	Miming, still image, setting, characters, dramatic hook, choral, individual drills, chants, story elicitation, and short improvisations.
Drama	The most productive stage. The learners prepare, rehearse and perform to the class (15- 30 minutes).	Teacher is an observer and encourager. Learners are responsible for their work, by means of their performances.	Different alternatives of improvisations, simulations, roleplays, dialogues, rehearsed plays, still images, etc.
Calming down	The final and most critical stage of dramabased lesson plan. Learners will be "left" at a high emotional and voice level without this stage.	Teachers and learners should share their experience from the lesson, such as difficulties, critical evaluation and feedback.	Relaxation activities (music), hot- seating, writing (letters, news, reports, journals, diary entries, dialogues, finishing a story), writing-in-role, drawing, creating poster, jigsaw reading, etc.

3.4. Designing E-learning materials based drama activities

Technology can support education in many ways, from making it easier for teachers to create E-learning materials to enabling new manners for primary students to learn English. Through watching films and videos in English, primary students can easy to remember and copy the action, language and, characteristics of actors and cartoon characters. Therefore, a teacher creates units or lesson plans to carry out the goals and objectives of the speaking teaching for primary students. To involve drama activities

into E-learning materials can be done as follows:

- Selecting the cartoon film that primary students like most (e.g., Peppa pig”;
- Teacher draws the curriculum instruction (e.g., how to introduce yourself?);
- Students watch movies, that transfer knowledge, and speaking skills;
- Primary students act like the cartoon character and practice with their partners;
- Teacher uses the smartphone to record those dialogs and to analyze to students; compared to the action in films;

- Select the best team to act and record as teaching materials. After that those will be presented via the Internet.

Some suggestions regarding primary students' motivation to speak English through designing E-learning materials based drama activities.

Firstly, every English class must have an internet connection to integrate traditional and electronic lectures, smart devices. There should be a financial mechanism and support for lecturers and primary students in compiling electronic supporting build E-learning materials.

Secondly, the teaching style for teaching students to speak should not be based on the traditional method. The drama-based program should be implemented in all schools, but teachers should take into account the learners' ages, demands, interests, and language levels before doing so. Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers must develop all speaking sub-competencies in one syllabus rather than concentrating on just one. In the first step, a teacher should select a small number of primary students who can communicate English quite well.

Thirdly, performances on stage are highly recommended for teachers, because the applause and approval from the audience is an important motivation factor for primary students. Those performances should be filmed and posted via the Internet.

4. Conclusions

The application of ICT and the use of E-learning materials in teaching makes the lessons interesting when technology is now an indispensable part of life. These help primary students to focus and learn more interested and often practice English speaking skills in practice. The authors of this study clarified the role of E-learning materials and primary English teaching in allowing teachers to use technology to design the materials and build lesson plans, in the

form of drama activities. Through watching videos, primary students can learn by acting like actors or cartoon characters.

Based on the literature review, most of the related studies found the impact of drama activities on students' developing speaking skills, motivation, and favorable attitudes toward English speaking studying. Drama-based instruction can be used in any part of the world (both rural and urban areas) since access to smart devices is becoming easier. The findings imply that drama activities can be beneficial to the development of Vietnamese primary students in case of growing demand for online studying English and speaking skills due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is suggested to combine the form of drama in the process of designing E-learning materials in primary schools step by step based on the traditional method.

Designing E-learning materials based drama activities can be done as follows: Selecting the cartoon film that primary students like most; Clarifying the role of a teacher in drawing the curriculum instruction; Interacting with primary students watching movies, that transfer knowledge and speaking skills; Acting as the cartoon character and practice with their partners or teamwork; Using the smart device recording those dialogs and to analyze to students; compared to the action in films. In the end, primary students are likely to have more positive attitudes towards learning speaking English, and will become better speakers over time and will be more likely motivated to speak in similar real-life situations.

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TỔNG QUAN VỀ SỬ DỤNG HOẠT ĐỘNG KỊCH TRONG THIẾT KẾ CÁC HỌC LIỆU ĐIỆN TỬ NHẪM PHÁT TRIỂN KỸ NĂNG NÓI CHO HỌC SINH TIỂU HỌC

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Tóm tắt

Trong quá trình giảng dạy tiếng Anh nói chung và kỹ năng nói nói riêng hiện nay ở các trường tiểu học, việc thiết kế và sử dụng học liệu điện tử còn khá hạn chế, đa phần các học phần được giảng dạy theo phương pháp truyền thống. Sử dụng ít học liệu điện tử làm cho học sinh, đặc biệt ở bậc tiểu học chưa thực sự thích thú và dành nhiều thời gian học tiếng Anh, do đó kết quả học tập chưa cao, ít học sinh có khả năng giao tiếp tốt. Bài viết này, trên cơ sở tổng quan tài liệu nghiên cứu có liên quan tác giả đã làm rõ vai trò của các học liệu điện tử đối với việc giảng dạy tiếng Anh ở bậc tiểu học, điều này cho phép giảng viên và các nhà quản lý giáo dục áp dụng công nghệ vào thiết kế bài giảng, xây dựng giáo án bài giảng dưới dạng các hoạt động kịch (drama activities) để cho việc giảng dạy kỹ năng nói trở nên thú vị, lôi cuốn học sinh. Trên cơ sở các kết quả nghiên cứu, tác giả đề xuất một số gợi ý nhằm tăng cường các hoạt động kịch trong xây dựng học liệu điện tử để hỗ trợ kỹ năng nói tiếng anh cho học sinh tiểu học.

Từ khóa: Kỹ năng nói, học sinh tiểu học, học liệu điện tử, hoạt động kịch.