Improving Fluency and Intelligibility Using Online Drama Approach: Links to Speaking Anxiety

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Abstract

The main concern of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of online drama approach in improving English majors' oral fluency, intelligibility and reducing speaking anxiety. Adopting a quasi-experimental design, the participants, totaling (40) were selected from EFL first year English Department students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology. To fulfill the purpose of the study, two instruments were required; an EFL oral performance test to measure both fluency and intelligibility and an EFL speaking anxiety scale to measure learners' uneasiness while speaking. The online drama treatment material employed was based on The Lost Secret Series designed and presented by the BBC through Microsoft Teams. Results revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group on the pre and post administrations of the EFL oral performance test and the EFL speaking anxiety scale   in favor of the post administration. They also indicated the effectiveness of using role-play, storytelling and improvisation underlying drama approach in improving English majors' oral fluency, intelligibility and reducing speaking anxiety.

   Keywords: fluency; intelligibility; online drama approach; speaking anxiety.

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Introduction:

Speaking is widely acknowledged as a crucial element of the four language skills and effective communication in language learning and education (Cole, Ellis, & Mason, 2007; Ellis, 2003; Hughes, 2011; Nunan, 2001, 2015; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ulas, 2008). As an interactive process in which both speaker and interlocutors share feelings, thoughts and ideas, speaking is viewed as the most crucial communication tool learners are in dire need to master in the target language.

One of the four macro skills that must be cultivated in order to communicate effectively in foreign language learning environment is speaking. The development of students' fluency and comprehensibility when speaking depends heavily on giving them regular and varied speaking opportunities (Boonkit, 2010; Dörnyei, 2005; Oya, Manalo, & Greenwood, 2004). The ability to speak a language fluently and intelligibly may mirror the level of performance and self-confidence attained by learners.

Students will have to deal with fear and lack of confidence, which may reduce motivation to learning English. Though Krashen (2008) advocates performance evaluation, in which students may have to take exams in a foreign language class, he also argues that lower anxiety leads to better language acquisition. He also maintains that if students have low self-esteem and low motivation, there is a high affective filter that prevents language acquisition.

Students utilize language to express true meaning advocated in the communicative approach to language learning. Because it is student-centered and meaning-oriented, drama is a communicative language teaching method where dramatic activities boost one's self-confidence and self-esteem. Drama and language learning have long been strongly associated because they both involve the comprehension and use of words. Negotiating and building up meaningful sentences while participating in dramatic activities help students perceive the strong tie between the language they use and the world around and consequently take charge of their learning (Dodson, 2000).

Being a novel strategy relying on media for practicing speaking, learners become highly motivated and attentive while being involved in dramatic activities. In addition, media also mirrors relationships and boosts verbal knowledge (Davis, 2004). According to Brown (2000), media engage students in active learning so that teachers may see proof of their development. Online drama is one of the educational tools employed to enhance students' English-speaking skills. Learners will become highly motivated to reveal their feelings as a result of the clear picture series that represents a specific theme in the drama and allows them to show utmost skills and confidence.

Despite the widely spread use of online drama strategy for enhancing speaking practice, little research was conducted to probe how online drama alleviates anxiety both globally and at specific dimensions (Atas, 2015; Coleman, 2005; Piazzoli, 2011; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013).

Although recent research has shown that learners' speaking skills and their oral performance in EFL classes including online drama approach are highly correlated, there is a paucity of research into the effects of this technique of instruction. This paper therefore explores the effectiveness of using online drama approach in improving fluency, intelligibility and reducing anxiety.

Review of Literature

Speaking is the ability to express oneself in different situations with varied ideas (Bygate, 2010; Ellis, 2009; Kanda, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Nzanana, 2016; Saito, 2015; Shantha & Mekala, 2017; Swanson & Nolde, 2011; You, 2014). Speaking has long been studied from different angles focusing mainly on fluency, comprehensibility and accentedness (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2013; Galante & Thomson, 2017). In spite of varied definitions of fluency, the focus is mainly on the speaker's ability to spontaneously express the purpose of his message without hesitation (e.g., Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2007; Galante & Thomson, 2017). Both comprehensibility and accentedness are highly correlated with pronunciation; comprehensibility refers to how easy or difficult a listener finds the speech of the language to understand, while accentedness is defined as a listener's perception of the difference in

pronunciation from the target language's utterances (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2007; O' Brien, 2014).

According to Bashir, Azeem, and Dogar (2011), speaking fluency is often seen as the benchmark for language proficiency. Fluency is viewed by learners as the capacity for interpersonal communication, rather than the capacity for reading, writing, or understanding oral language. They view speaking as the most crucial ability they can learn, and they gauge their success based on how well they are able to communicate verbally.

Conceptually divided into two categories, namely, ability and performance, speaking ability, according to Koizumi (2005), is an advanced feature that is evaluated and monitored through learners' responses whether orally or in writing, whereas speaking performance necessitates production of spoken language in a natural situation. In a similar vein, speaking is viewed as a construct comprising fluency, complexity and accuracy (Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Skehan, 2009). As subcomponents of speaking, both fluency and complexity focus on effective communication among learners, whereas accuracy counteract them by hindering fluent performance in varied contexts using the target language (Do, 2017). Regarding speaking competence, core speaking skills, linguistic competence, discourse and communication strategies are closely relevant, where fluency is associated with negotiation, interaction and language use (Goh, 2017; Goh & Burns, 2012).

Oral fluency is a complicated phenomenon that interacts with other performance-related factors (Kormos, 2006; Rerung, 2017; Segalowitz, 2010) is defined as the ability to convey one's intended message with no fatigue, easily, and with little to no interruption. Measuring fluency, according to De Jong (2018) and Skehan (2009), involves three components, such as breakdown fluency, speed fluency, and repair fluency. By quantifying the quantity and duration of filled and unfilled pauses, breakdown fluency analyses the continuous flow of speech. Calculating speech rate, such as the number of syllables per second, is a component of speed fluency. Put simply, it is the extent to which speakers employ false beginnings,

corrections, or repetitions as a sign of repair fluency. Fluency can be measured by speed fluency, which emphasizes speaking rate and amount of talk. Most research have found that when fluency increases generally, so do speech and articulation rates.

According to the interaction theory, language learning occurs when interlocutors react and modify their utterances in conversation. If they encounter a major breakdown in communication for linguistic reasons, they often resort to comprehension checks and clarification requests to overcome lack of understanding. Language learners need to focus on such dimensions of intelligibility to repair improper performance and consequently attain successful communication. (Crowther et al., 2015; Thomson, 2018).

In a study by Nagle & Huensch (2023), the attempt was made to explore phonetic predictors of intelligibility, comprehensibility and foreign accent. Participants, totaling 42 Spanish learners with different levels of proficiency performed picture description. Analysis examined relationships between the phonetic features and intelligibility, comprehensibility and foreign accent. Results indicated that several features were correlated with foreign accent whereas diphthongization and rising intonation predicted intelligibility, and rising intonation predicted comprehensibility. The study called for identifying the features that should be given priority in teaching pronunciation.

In order to help students comprehend how fluency, grammar, and lexical knowledge impact listener comprehension, teachers should require their students to be involved in varied speaking activities to boost successful communication in different situations. The advantage of getting students engaged in fluency activities is to enable them to give their intended message in a shorter time, reduce their pause fillers, false starts and hesitations (Macalister, 2014).

Anxiety has always been categorized as trait, state and situation-specific. MacIntyre (2007) defines trait anxiety as the tendency of the individual to become anxious, being a behavioural pattern, whereas state anxiety refers to temporary apprehension at a given time; and situation-specific anxiety is a person's predisposition that is recurrent at a specific context. Though recent research indicates that anxiety has

often negatively affected FL speaking (Horwitz, 2001; Matsuda & Gobel, 2003; Oya et al., 2004), and these three dimensions of anxiety may not always operate independently, Dewaele (2013) reported that trait and situation-specific anxiety could be correlated.

In a similar vein, Dornyei (2005) claims that "undoubtedly anxiety affects FL learning particularly speaking" (p.198). First introduced by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was constructed to measure learning anxiety. In spite of the results reported by some studies that language anxiety could be due to deficiency in performance, anxiety could be attributed to excessive concern for mistakes. As stated by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) and cited by Galante (2012), most students view speaking as the most anxiety-causing among the four skills.

In a more recent study, Resnik, Dewaele & Knechtelsdorfer (2022) explored differences in FL classroom anxiety before the outbreak of the Coronavirus and during lockdown. Statistical analysis indicated that online teaching helped learners become less worried about their performance compared to their counterparts, felt more confident when they were well- prepared.

The value of using drama-based strategies in teaching has been widely recognized and strongly advocated by FL researchers with a view to attracting students' attention to achieve the learning task at hand, being a procedure with potential to reduce anxiety (Guapacha Chamorro & Benavidez Paz, 2017; Nunan, 2015; Ozek & Civelek, 2006; Ratna, 2014). Drama has been adopted for several decades as a strategy to arouse FL learners' interest so as to enhance the speaking skills (Dodson, 2002; Miccoli, 2003; Stinson & Freebody, 2006; Stinson & Winston, 2011). Recent research indicates that the use of drama boosts students' willingness to participate in classroom activities which might help them to develop oral skills, and more specifically comprehensibility and fluency (Bournot-Trites et al., 2007; Galante & Thomson, 2017).

The growing interest of adopting drama in language teaching and learning among researchers has consistently yielded positive results in enhancing oral fluency and language use (Athiemoolam, 2006,

2013; Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Cockett, 2000, 2002; Kao, Carkin, & Hsu, 2011; Mok, 2012; Winston, 2011). Sirisrimangkorn & Suwanthep (2013) define drama as a learning activity that engages students' attention in a given situation communicatively.

To encourage students to learn speaking in the classroom, engaging teaching techniques must be used. Recent research indicates that using digital learning resources will grab students' attention. Adopting electronic presentation in the form of online drama episodes could be useful for strengthening students' speaking skills (Clarke & Adam, 2012). Online drama can be thought of as a fusion of multimedia technology and conventional drama (Norman, 2011). Research maintains that students are more likely to be engrossed in following episodes demonstrating their attachment to technology.

The use of pre-tasks to prepare students for a main language task and interactions in pairs or small groups have both been suggested as ways to reduce anxiety in the FL classroom, although there is little data on their efficacy. Furthermore, employing drama as a method of teaching has proved effective in reducing anxiety (Atas, 2015; Piazzoli, 2011; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013). Nevertheless, results available are contradictory and consequently there is a dire need for further research.

More interesting methods are recommended to replace conventional ones so as to enable both teachers and students attain the objectives of teaching speaking implored. The teachers' major concern is to get language learners involved in meaningful activities that boost their motivation, confidence and independence. Dramatic activities seem to be a fitting option for students to understand and enjoy doing.

The present study advocates using online drama as a method to enhance EFL majors' speaking fluency and intelligibility and reduce speaking anxiety. Using online drama seems to provide students with the opportunity to express themselves through the internet without the embarrassment they may go through in face-to face methods commonly adopted, which is likely to enhance their fluency and intelligibility.

Statement of the problem

Most of English majors at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology lack oral fluency, intelligibility required for their career. They also suffer from high speaking anxiety that may hinder them to express their thoughts and ideas effectively. This lack might be attributed to the regular approaches and strategies adopted by teachers in speaking classes. Students suffer from speaking anxiety in front of their teachers as well as their colleagues. Using online drama approach is hoped to reduce speaking anxiety among English majors and consequently develop oral fluency and intelligibility.

Questions

The following questions are raised:
(1) What is the effect of online drama approach on developing English majors' oral fluency?
(2) What is the effect of online drama approach on developing English majors' intelligibility?
(3) What is the effect of online drama approach on reducing English majors' speaking anxiety?

Purpose

The purpose of the present study is threefold:
(1) Identifying the effect of online drama approach on developing oral fluency of EFL majors.
(2) Investigating the effect of online drama approach on developing students' intelligibility.
(3) Examining the effect of using online drama in reducing English majors' speaking anxiety and consequently enhance their performance.

Hypotheses

The present study tested the following three hypotheses:
(1) There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students on the pre and post administrations of the EFL oral fluency test in favor of the post administration.

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(2)   There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students on the pre and post administrations of the EFL intelligible speech test in favor of the post administration.

(3)   There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students on the pre and post administrations of the speaking anxiety scale in favor of the post administration.

Significance

The significance of the study might lie in the following points:

(1)   The present study gives prominence to raising EFL learners' awareness to handle the difficulties they encounter while speaking through online drama approach.

(2)   The oral performance test and the speaking anxiety scale, being the instruments constructed for the study, may be beneficial for EFL researchers.

(3)   The present study uses online drama as a current teaching approach to develop EFL learners' oral fluency, intelligibility and reduce their speaking anxiety in a stress-free, and motivating environment.

(4)   The present study draws the attention of EFL researchers, course designers, curriculum developers, teachers and language specialists to the importance of using online drama approach in developing oral fluency, intelligibility and reducing their speaking anxiety.

(5)   Probing the relationship between language learning anxiety and speaking performance would help instructors better understand the experience of uncomfortable language learners and consequently enable their students overcome the speaking difficulties encountered.

(6)   Providing an online drama approach may enable EFL majors to practice speaking in a non-threatening and supportive environment where a boost to learners' self-confidence and self-image is likely to occur.

Delimitations

(1) Developing students' oral fluency, intelligibility and reducing their speaking anxiety.

(2) A sample of first year EFL majors at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology.

(3) Online drama approach-based program that is suitable for EFL first-year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology.

(4) The selected online drama approach used in the program were the following; storytelling, role-play, and improvisation strategy.

(5) Online drama approach, in the present research, was presented in Microsoft teams synchronously.

Definition of Terms

- **Drama approach**

The Greek term drama, which originally meant "to do, to act," is the origin of the word. Learning a language requires action because it helps learners develop their body language, motivates them, and keeps them interested in what they are learning (Gorjian, Moosavinia, & Jabripour, 2010; and Miccoli, 2003). Drama also boosts a welcoming, stress-free environment for the best possible learning. Using drama encompasses a variety of activities that can be utilized in the classroom, including role playing, improvisation, mime, simulation, and reading plays. Morrow (1981) and Brumfit (1984) both advocate for communicative language learning, which is the result of all of these actions (cited in Vasantrao, 2012, p.6). According to Shraiber and Yaroslavova (2016), the drama approach is a collection of practices that arrange students' role-related behaviour in foreign language learning. It can be operationally defined as deliberately creating plans used by EFL majors to handle the difficulties that hinder them while speaking orally and the ability to be easily understood. These strategies include storytelling, role-play, and improvisation.

- **Oral fluency**

Tumova (2002: 15) defined oral fluency as speaking freely to express own thoughts in varied situations of everyday life. In a similar vein, Gatbonton & Segalowitz (2005: 326) defined oral fluency as effortless production of words uttered without hesitation and pauses. Along with this, Segalowitz (2010) referred to oral fluency as automatic and smooth production of speech readily flowing without pauses or interruption. In addition, it is the learner's ability to express their thoughts using a series of phrases and sentences creatively, coherently and in varying contexts (Fillmore et al., 2014; and Yang, 2014). Nagle (2018: 199) also defined oral fluency as the use of clear smoothly flowing expression of own ideas in an appropriate style to the context required. It is operationally defined as students' ability to communicate intended message readily flowing automatically without hesitation or interruption. It can be measured according to speech rate and amount of talk.

- **Intelligibility**

The degree to which listeners genuinely comprehend a speaker's intended utterance (Munro & Derwing, 2011: 479). According to Gooskens (2013), it is also described as a group of features that enable listeners to accurately identify linguistic units (such as phonemes, syllables, morphemes, and words) in the order in which the speaker created them. Additionally, it refers to listeners' actual comprehension of oral content, which is evaluated by using orthographic transcriptions of speech or comprehension tests based on that content (Crowther et al., 2015: 81). It can be operationally defined as the students' ability to comprehend both segmental and supra- segmental features of uttered speech of one another as easily measured by speech errors.

- **Speaking anxiety**

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is defined as "worrying, unfavourable emotional reactions, and feelings of tension associated to a specific situation of foreign language learning" (Punsiri 2011: 6). The feeling of fear that arises while utilizing the language orally (Wilson, 2006). Speaking anxiety is operationally, a situation-specific

anxiety is one that causes speaking anxiety due to negative evaluation expected.

Method

Adopting the quasi-experimental method to examine the effect of online drama approach on improving fluency, intelligibility, and reducing speaking anxiety among EFL majors, the (One- Group Pretest- Posttest Design) was chosen as the study had one treatment group.

Design and Participants

The participants of the present study, totaling 40 students, representing the treatment group were selected as intact class of the first year EFL majors at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology during the first semester 2022/ 2023.

Instruments

To fulfill the purpose of the present study, the following two instruments were required:

The Oral Performance Test

The oral performance test, consisting of two parts, was constructed. Comprising of three main tasks, namely topic discussion, picture description, and imaginative situation, the first part measured the students' oral fluency. In a topic discussion task, students were required to discuss one of five topics provided. In the second picture description task, students were required to look at the picture; describe the problem, its causes, and how it will be solved in the future. In the third task, students were asked to read about the imaginative situation presented to them and start thinking about how to resolve this situation. Students were asked to talk for about five minutes in each task. The scores for the oral fluency part were based on students' speech rate and amount of talk. These two variables were used as indicators of the students' oral fluency. The second part was constructed to measure the students' speech intelligibility. This part of intelligibility test was divided into two sections. The first section was intended to measure the segmental and supra-segmental features at the perceptive level whereas the second one aimed to measure the

segmental and supra-segmental features at the productive level. Scoring the perceptive level section, one point was given for each correct response and zero was given to the wrong or left response. In the productive level section, the students' speaking was assessed by detecting the errors made in students' actual pronunciation using a dichotomous scale.

The EFL Speaking Anxiety Scale

The Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and modified for the Japanese context by Kitano (2001) to evaluate the degree of stress participants have gone through while speaking in class face to face with peers and instructor. The five-point Likert type scale consists of 33items, with the answers ranging from: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. For each point, a score was given ranging from 5 for strongly agree to 1 for strongly disagree. For negatively worded items, namely, items number 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28 & 32, the order of scoring was reversed, so that a higher score would be an indicator of higher anxiety (Aida, 1994). FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and Aida (1994) is considered highly reliable according to factor analysis of the items with the exception of three items measuring test anxiety that did not load on any of the factors, revealing that the scale is generally valid.

Treatment

The online drama approach Program

A program based on online drama was required to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhancing EFL students' intelligibility and oral fluency
- Familiarizing EFL students with online drama approach through three strategies, namely, role-play, improvisation and storytelling using Microsoft teams.
- Reducing students' speaking anxiety.

Description of the BBC Lost Secret Drama Episodes

The treatment material employed was based on an exciting drama presented by the BBC and sequenced through a complete structural and functional syllabus graded in its level of difficulty. Consisting of

11 episodes, the lost secret series is an engaging drama discussing the story of a man who lost his memory, but he tries to find his identity, aided by an inspector and a psychiatrist. The mystery of the plot arouses viewers' interest and help students to progress toward fluency. Making use of the fitting plot in which the man restores his memory gradually, starting by failing to answer questions like "who are you?" and "what is your name?" in a very slow rate of speech and advances step by step until he restores his memory completely and consequently speaks at a normal speed. The drama reveals the secrets of a mysterious civilization called the Membatics in South America.

Procedures

Prior to administering the treatment program, the oral performance pretest was given to the experimental group students, having been instructed on how to respond to the test items and the statements of the EFL speaking anxiety scale. First-year English major students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation, Misr University for Science and Technology represented the treatment group. Using Microsoft Teams, they received 11 sessions of online drama strategy training including the pre-and posttest sessions; each one took 2 hours during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023. Before starting, an orientation session was assigned to familiarizing the participants with the objectives, importance, and characteristics of the program. Following the warm-up session, the main steps of the program were fully explained to the participants. Prominence was given to the objectives of the program, activities and the instructional procedures. On finishing the treatment, the oral performance posttest and the anxiety scale were administered to the participants. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for handling and analyzing the results of the study.

Results and Discussion:

The first hypothesis

To test the first hypothesis stating that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group

students on the pre and post administrations of the EFL oral fluency test in favor of the post administration", t-test was used to investigate the difference between the mean scores of the treatment group on the oral fluency test pre and post administration.

Table 1. Results of t-test Comparing the Pre and Post-Test for the Treatment Group in the Overall Oral Fluency Test

Oral Fluency		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2 tailed)	Effect Size (η^2)
Amount of Talk	Pre	40	274.85	77.30	3.60	0.01	0.61
	Post	40	369.68	102.78			
Speech Rate	Pre	40	195.42	64.08	4.60	0.01	0.71
	Post	40	288.52	97.01			

Table (1) shows that the *t*-value was statistically significant at the level (0.01) and the mean scores of the treatment group students in the amount of talk in the post-test were (369.68), whereas the students' mean score in the pre-test was (274.85). The *t*-value calculated ratio was (3.60) for the amount of talk, which was higher than the tabulated one (2.44) at the level (0.01).

The above table also illustrates that the mean scores of the treatment group students in the speech rate in the post-test was (288.52), whereas the students' mean score of speech rate in the pre-test was (195.42). The table also reveals that that the *t*-value calculated ratio was (4.60) for the speech rate, which was higher than the tabulated one (2.44) at the level (0.01).

The "Effect Size" technique was used to probe the effectiveness of online drama approach in oral fluency among EFL learners. The value of "Eta square" for the score was (0.61) in the amount of talk and (0.71) in the rate of speech, maintaining that the online drama approach was effective in enhancing oral fluency among EFL majors.

As shown above, the treatment group students scored higher mean in the posttest of the oral fluency test than the pretest, indicating that their oral fluency has improved following their exposure to the training program. Thus, the first hypothesis was accepted.

The treatment group students' oral fluency development could be attributed to the carefully selected speaking activities based on online drama approach that might have accorded students the

opportunity to practice speaking freely particularly in the presentation phase. This is consistent with what Reeder (2009) pointed out the online drama program provided a motivating, interesting and stress-free atmosphere where students can express feelings and opinions.

The results of the present study are in line with those reached by Galante & Thompson (2017); Kao et al. (2011); Sagban (2015) maintaining that the drama instructional strategies furnished learners with motivating factors such as brainstorming , group work and discussion that might have involved students wholly and actively in the activities that were purposefully communicative. The participants' anxiety was reduced resulting in gradual development in their oral fluency.

The results reached by the present study are consistent with those reached by Cojocariu & Butnaru (2014); Guneysu & Temiz (2012); Holt & Kysilka (2005); Shmidt (2015); Winston (2012). Their findings revealed that the tasks of role-play situations, storytelling, and improvisation activities might have contributed to enhancing speaking skill. These tasks boosted their confidence to speak unconsciously and fluently as indicated in their posttest performance. Involved in pre-task planning, students might have gained confidence to produce more fluent and intricate language communicatively, resulting in better performance in their favor.

The results obtained are in harmony with what Hayati & Shariatifar (2009); and Shand (2008) revealed, maintaining that the great contribution of motivation lies in empowering students to be in control of their learning to be energized by their interests that arouse intrinsic motivation and consequently lead to better performance while speaking.

It could be reasonable to attribute the results attained to the fact that drama instructional strategies might have provided students with both time and the chance to interact with each other more effectively. Presumably, students' oral fluency and intelligibility were enhanced thanks to the features of role-play that heightened interaction as well as the element of suspense characterizing the plot of the Lost Secret episodes.

This result is consistent with those of Eliason (2009); Janssen (2002); Sato & Lyster (2012); Shih (2000) affirming that these strategies of role-play, storytelling, and improvisation provided better chances of interaction to attain an intelligible input. More importantly, dividing students into small groups offered them opportunities to get involved in more natural interaction than in teacher-centered classes, let alone the distinguished performance of the highly acclaimed actors of the episodes.

The second hypothesis

To verify the second hypothesis stating "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group students on the pre and post administrations of the EFL intelligible speech test in favor of the post administration", the researcher used a paired sample t-test to examine the difference between the mean scores of the treatment group on the EFL intelligible speech test pre and post administration.

Following are the results of the t-test paired sample comparing the mean scores attained by the students in the intelligibility test before and after the administration of the program as shown in table 2:

Table 2. Results of t-test Comparing the Pre and Post-Test for the Treatment Group in the Intelligibility Test

Intelligibility		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2 tailed)	Effect Size (η^2)
Perception	Pre	40	17.52	4.70	25.61	0.01	0.96
	Post	40	38.31	3.41			
Production	Pre	40	7.11	1.57	10.34	0.01	0.86
	Post	40	10.35	2.43			

The results, shown in table 2, revealed that the *t*-value was statistically significant at the level (0.01) and that the mean scores of the treatment group students in the perceptive intelligibility in the posttest was (3 8.31), whereas the students' mean score in the pre-test was (17.52). It also showed that *t*-value calculated ratio was (25.61) for the perceptive intelligibility, which was higher than the tabulated one (2.44) at the level (0.01).

It was also clear from the previous table that the mean scores of the treatment group students in the productive intelligibility in the post-test was (10.35), whereas the students' mean score of productive

intelligibility in the pre-test was (7.11). It also showed that *t*-value calculated ratio was (10.34) for the productive intelligibility, which was higher than the tabulated one (2.44) at the level (0.01) which indicated that there was a statistically significant difference.

Furthermore, to examine how much variance in EFL intelligibility of the experimental group as a result of using online drama approach, the study used the "Effect Size" technique. Results revealed that the value of "Eta square" for the score was (0.96) in the perceptive intelligibility and (0.86) in the productive intelligibility. These results could be due to the online drama approach suggested by the present study that might have contributed to developing   intelligibility of the treatment group.

These results revealed that the higher mean score was in favor of the experimental group students' post administration of the intelligibility test. Having been exposed to the suggested online drama approach, the treatment group developed intelligibility, resulting in significant differences in their favor. Consequently, the second hypothesis was accepted.

Performance of the treatment group on the posttest was significantly superior to that of the pretest in intelligibility. This could be interpreted by the fact that rehearsals and discussions in simulations of drama phases provided participants with ample opportunities for intelligible speech. This is supported by Thornbury' view (2009) maintaining that training on drama strategies were beneficial practice for boosting learners' oral skills, particularly through rehearsals based on drama technicalities.

This interpretation is consistent with the findings reached by Bygate (2018); Fleming (2006); Gatbonton and Segalowitz, (2005); Gill (2013) claiming that the use of drama in teaching English is tantamount in effect to a living experience of communication on the understanding that dramatization facilitates memorization of expressions practiced in training.

New vocabulary encountered in context of others' reactions while rehearsing made guessing and learning easier, giving a rationale for students to consider rehearsal a pre-speaking phase where they were

required to practice pronunciation, intonation, pitch, stress and volume.

The results attained by the present study are supported by those reached by Richards & Schmidt (2002); and Rossiter et al. (2010) in that students might have benefitted from more competent peers and enriched their vocabulary while practicing rehearsal, which could have enhanced their processing   to higher levels, resulting in significant differences in their favor.

The superiority of the treatment group in the posttest of intelligibility could be ascribed to the active learning environment where students were encouraged to produce intelligible oral content both in sounds and ideas. This explanation is in line with the results reached by Berkeley et al. (2010); Hartman (2001); Wilson & Smetana (2011) maintaining that using drama instructional strategies offered active learning opportunities that boost language learning, interaction and thought-provoking among students. The collaborative atmosphere the drama instructional strategies offered made students more attentive to their counterparts' performance in addition to the relaxing tone that enabled them to speak freely and fluently. The activities also provided an ample opportunity for the participants to use grammatical rules and rich vocabulary in addition to interaction with others that helped develop their fluency and accuracy.

The third hypothesis

To confirm the third hypothesis stating "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group students on the pre and post administrations of the speaking anxiety scale in favor of the post administration", a paired sample test was used to examine the difference between the scores attained by the treatment group on the speaking anxiety scale in the pre and post administrations. The following are the results of the t-test comparing the students' mean scores on the speaking anxiety scale before and after the administration of the program.

Table 3. Results of t-test Comparing the Pre and Post-Test for the Treatment Group in the Speaking Anxiety Scale

Speaking Anxiety Scale	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2 tailed)	Effect Size (η^2)
Pre	40	77.92	6.73	18.40	0.01	0.94
Post	40	51.35	3.17			

The results, shown in table 3, revealed that the *t*-value was statistically significant at the level (0.01) and that the mean scores of the treatment group students in the post administration of the speaking anxiety scale was (51.35), whereas their mean scores in the pre administration of the speaking anxiety scale was (77.92).

Since the ratio of the calculated t-value (18.40), being higher than the tabulated one (٢.٤٤) at the level (0.01), the difference in the post administration of speaking anxiety scale was statistically significant, revealing improvement and reduction of anxiety in favor of the post administration and consequently the third hypothesis of the study was accepted.

Furthermore, the effect size of the effectiveness of using online drama approach in EFL speaking anxiety, being (0.94), was remarkable, indicating that the approach contributed significantly to reducing speaking anxiety of the treatment group.

An interpretation for the results reached could be attributed to the advantage of online drama approach that helped break down inhibitions and alleviate anxiety. Having frequent opportunities to participate in speaking and interacting with peers, students gained confidence to perform orally resulting in significant difference in favor of the posttest. This result is consistent with those reached by Galante & Thomson (2017); Trivedi (2013); Tumova (2002) maintaining that online drama approach helped students attain higher self-confidence thanks to the higher participation rate accorded by the online safe learning environment compared to the classroom setting.

Another interpretation could be attributed to the nature of interaction in the classroom among learners, namely, pair work and

group work, being a feature characterizing online drama approach in learning language. This is matching with Fleming view (2006) maintaining that drama approach is beneficial in supporting social activity and consequently works best through cooperation. It seems reasonable to ascribe the difference between students' theoretical linguistic knowledge and practice to the interaction in the speaking classroom where the opportunity is available to enhance both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In discussion-based strategies, participants develop leadership skills and social interaction through the role identified and supporting notes.

These results are in line with those reached by Berk & Trieber (2009); Galante (2012); Holt & Kysilka (2005); Kayaoglu & Saglamel (2013); Shmidt (2015) in that   the drama approach increased the opportunity for students for oral interaction and consequently make use of the time assigned for speaking. Involved in group work, students were able to overcome their inhibitions while attempting to speak with the whole group, increase class engagement and make best use of the comfort level of FL classroom to learn effectively and reduce anxiety.

Conclusions

The present study gave evidence that online drama approach was effective in enhancing oral fluency represented by its two components: speech rate and amount of talk. In terms of methodological terms, the use of online drama approach boosted self-confidence, rate of participation in oral performance and willingness to communicate among students. As for the regular method followed, it proved ineffective to enhance intelligible communication of EFL majors. Adopting online drama approach was especially advantageous in that it reduced speaking anxiety of EFL majors and enhanced their intelligibility and oral fluency. This may justify the call for adopting online dram approach in teaching EFL majors particularly those who avoid expressing themselves orally in front of their peers and teachers. It seems also pertinent to call curriculum designers to consider allocating adequate time to develop speaking fluently and intelligibly. To achieve this, the attempt should be made to make speaking class less threatening and more ego-enhancing where anxiety is minimized

and self-confidence is highly boosted. In addition, adequate attention should be accorded to prudent choice of materials, injecting surprise, varying activities and providing feedback.

Recommendations

In the light of the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations seem pertinent:

(1) The online drama approach should be adopted to enhance oral fluency and intelligibility of EFL majors.

(2) Curriculum designers should consider allocating adequate time to develop speaking fluently and intelligibly in such a way that enables EFL majors to communicate successfully.

(3) The attempt should be made to make speaking class less threatening and more ego-enhancing where anxiety is minimized and self-confidence is highly boosted.

(4) EFL majors should be involved in dramatic activities using the target language to maximize practice, alleviate anxiety and enhance self-confidence.

(5) The attempt should be made to create a supporting emotional climate where fun and humor are maintained so that students feel that the class is a safe zone to try things out.

(6) Adequate attention should be accorded to prudent choice of materials and pace of speaking to guarantee keeping students interest and fluency.

(7) Injecting surprise, varying activities and providing feedback are sorely needed in speaking class to stimulate challenge and motivation of students to interact both with peers and instructor.

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