

**IFTE 2018**  
**4th International Forum on Teacher Education**

**TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING TO READ AMERICAN AND  
BRITISH CLASSICS IN EFL CLASS**

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***Abstract***

What made the authors of this paper start this research? The survey that was undertaken at the very start of the research revealed University students' (freshmen's) ignorance on American and British classical literature. They were asked to name 10 American and 10 British writers and their literary works. 62 respondents that made 100% could not fill in the two lists completely. 41% of respondents recollected 6 American and 4 British writers, but failed to give the full names of their books/ collections of stories. 59% of respondents could name either from 2 to 3 authors or from 3 to 4 titles of books/ collections of stories in each list. In searching for the efficient ways to teach students to read American and British classics, we had sorted out lots of teaching techniques until the following idea struck our minds. Why not try drama techniques? Making PowerPoint presentations about American and British writers' creative and personal life was the first stage of our research. The second stage of the research consisted of compiling a collection of texts by American and British writers, both classics and modern. At the third stage there was conducted an experiment proper. 62 University students were offered a few drama techniques in EFL class. The most appealing to students teaching drama techniques turned out to be personifying inanimate characters and writing scripts. The study materials can be used in EFL class. The described drama techniques can serve as recommendations for University English teachers.

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**Keywords:** American and British classical literature, drama techniques, EFL class, teaching to read.



## 1. Introduction

Searching for the efficient ways to teach students to read American and British classics, we focused on drama techniques. Drama techniques, in our viewpoint, include:

- Acting out dialogues
- Reading aloud story episodes pretending to be this or that character of the story
- Personifying inanimate characters of the story, e.g. If I were a tree/ a star, etc., I would (do)
- Writing scripts, etc.

At the first stage of the research we made PowerPoint presentations about American and British writers' creative and personal life. We found out that students started to get interested in writers' literary works via getting acquainted with their personal life and the real facts from the writers' life, which became a starting point for writing a book/ story or even became the plot of the whole literary work. At the second stage of the research we compiled a collection of texts by American and British writers, both classics and modern. There were selected 40 short stories and extracts from novels by 10 American writers (O'Henry, Mark Twain, Harper Lee, E. Hemingway, Jack London, Margaret Mitchell, Theodor Dreiser, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Graham Greene, Richard Bach) and 10 British writers (Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, Jerome K. Jerome, Somerset Maugham, William Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, William Thackeray, Agatha Christie, Herbert Wells, Joanne Rowling). At the third stage we conducted a pedagogical experiment which involved 62 University students. The participants of the experiment were offered all the mentioned above and other drama techniques in EFL class. We found out that the most appealing to students teaching drama techniques were personifying inanimate story characters and writing scripts of their own.

We consider our experiment successfully conducted, although we, too, faced up to the challenge of selecting and choosing the proper texts. We believe that the findings of the study can serve as a general guideline for faculty and student body of the university.

## 2. Problem Statement

With respect to the methodological principles, drama techniques are based on the communicative approach. As Larson-Freeman (2000) remarks, the goal of such approach is not based on the linguistic accuracy, but on making the students communicate in the target language fluently. Students are involved in pair and group activities, where they have the opportunity to dedicate more time to speaking interaction with their peers and negotiate meaning in order to be understood.

Why are drama activities so useful and important in education? The first important function associated with drama is fostering speaking skills. As Ulas (2008) comments, "although drama has existed as a potential language teaching tool for hundreds of years it has only been in the last thirty years or so that its applicability as a language learning technique to improve oral skills has come to the forefront".

Initially drama was employed by other institutions as a training and teaching technique before it came true for the classroom (Ashton-Hay, 2005). Among the numerous benefits of using dramatic techniques in a classroom, a lot of scholars (Dougill, 1987; Duff & Maley, 1982; Phillips, 2003) believe they are entertaining, fun and useful to motivate students learning. Duff and Maley (1982) think that "these activities draw on the natural ability of every person to imitate, mimic and express himself or herself through gesture". Moreover, drama activities allow the student to show his or her own feelings, personality

and creativity, (Duff & Maley, 1982) to be used in the language class. Dramatizing also allows students to express their emotions, thoughts and feelings, which can vary depending on the communicative situation (Fleming, 2006)

### **3. Research Questions**

The survey that we undertook at the very start of the research helped us to frame the following research question: What teaching techniques can be implemented to overcome freshmen's ignorance on American and British classical literature?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In this study, we set a few goals:

- to seek for such a starter that could get students interested in American and British writers' literary works;
- to select and pick out prose excerpts from the numerous literary works by American and British writers;
- to sort out teaching drama techniques, appropriate for the implementation in EFL class;
- to conduct a multi-staged experiment aimed at motivating students to read more American and British classical literature.

Thus, we hypothesize that teaching drama techniques engage University students in reading American and British classics.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. Students' Background**

Number, age and gender characteristics: 62 students, 17-18 years old, mixed who made up an experimental group. Students' status: B.A.

#### **5.2. Research Site**

Leo Tolstoy Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Russia.

#### **5.3. Study materials**

Forty fragments from stories and novels by 10 famous American and British writers. The key features of American and British classical literature that were identified at the preparatory stage of our experiment assisted us to specify the teaching methods on the use of these materials in EFL class.

#### **5.4. Study instrument**

Nowadays students' motivation seems to be one of the vital issues in the teaching-learning process. Students' active participation in the classroom activities is a troublesome question for many teachers, especially for those who rely on more learner-centred methodology. This paper aims to investigate the

students' knowledge and reading skills that can be enhanced through the employment of drama techniques. Indeed, drama activities are believed to foster students' interest in the subject and, consequently to improve their language skills.

In accordance with the set objectives of the study, the experiment was conducted with the aim to monitor, develop, analyze and assess the effectiveness of using the following drama techniques:

Acting out dialogues

Personifying inanimate characters of the story, e.g. If I were a tree/ a star, etc., I would (do)

Writing scripts,

Performing, etc.

The experimental training was conducted among freshmen of Leo Tolstoy Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication (1 experimental group) during two semesters: Fall, 2017 and Spring, 2018.

The experiment consisted of three stages:

1. Ascertaining experiment.
2. Forming experiment.
3. Control experiment.

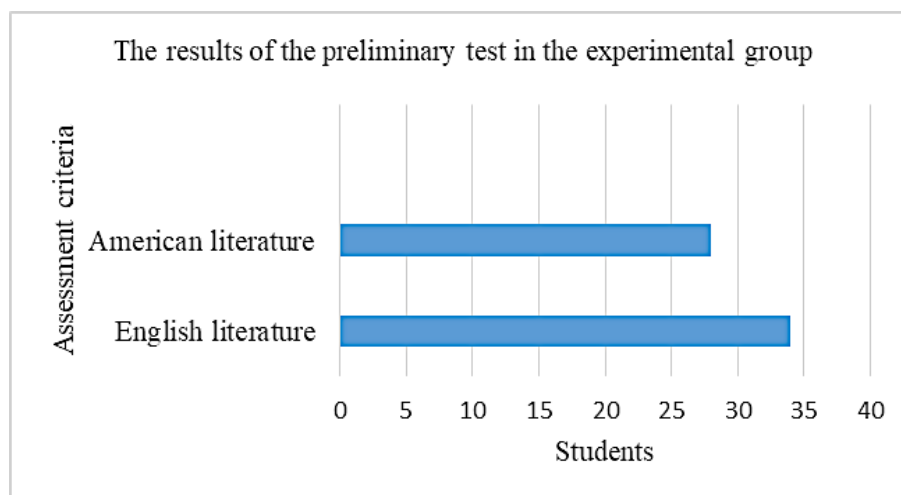
At the ascertaining stage a survey was offered to the students with a view to identify a number of writers from the English and American classics with their works. Contradictory results followed that stage of the experiment due to the students' nescience of the English and American literature (that are most often confused). There were selected 40 short stories and extracts from novels by 10 American writers (O'Henry, Mark Twain, Harper Lee, E. Hemingway, Jack London, Margaret Mitchell, Theodor Dreiser, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Graham Greene, Richard Bach) and 10 British writers (Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, Jerome K. Jerome, Somerset Maugham, William Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, William Thackeray, Agatha Christie, Herbert Wells, Joanne Rowling).

All these data were taken into account during the experiment in the organization of the educational process at the formative stage where various drama techniques were implemented, while reading English and American classics in EFL class.

The control experiment was carried out to assess the effectiveness of drama techniques in teaching English and American classics in EFL class.

## **6. Findings**

The preliminary test (excerpts) was aimed at revealing students' knowledge in the English and American classics. The results of the test in the experimental group are shown in Fig. 1.



**Figure 01.** Results of the preliminary test in the experimental group

The overall results show the correct answers given by the students in the experimental group. As can be seen from the diagram, it proves that less than half of the students were unaware of their level of knowledge in English and American classics, mostly in the proper matching of the writers and their works.

A further investigation of the problem was carried on at the formative stage of the experiment with a theoretical and practical overview of English and American classics. Moreover, creative exercises were worked out and implemented to boost consolidation of remarkable excerpts from the English and American literature in EFL classes during an academic year.

#### SAMPLE

##### Acting out dialogues

1. Teachers give roles to students based on their willingness, enthusiasm and ability. They adapt the script to suit their students' needs.
2. Before assigning roles teachers read out the story to the students as many times as possible and try as much as they can to give them a picture of the whole plot.
3. Students are supposed to first understand deeply their respective roles. Secondly they start to rehearse.
4. The acting is done in such a way that the speech is clear and appreciable to the audience.
5. The emphasis should be on speaking, acting and movement, not on reading lines.

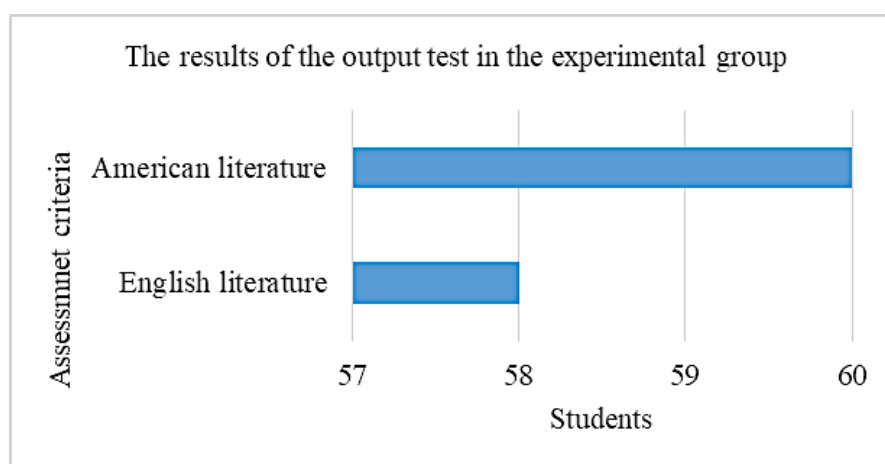
##### Scripts

1. First, it is read, in group or individually at home. Then it is analysed and discussed.
2. Later on, students interpret the excerpts in their own way.
3. In the end, the script is transformed in a dramatic performance.

##### Performance

1. Hand-written invitations to the show, posters and a translation of the script may all be done by students before the performance.
2. Each student writes out a translation to hand out to a member of the audience.
3. Students can take a video of the performance. It makes them feel significant. It may be used for feedback and as a benchmark to see progress later in the year.

The updated output test of the control stage was aimed at revealing students' knowledge on the above mentioned issues. The results of the updated output test are shown in Fig. 2.



**Figure 02.** Results of the output test in the experimental group

Comparing the results of both (ascertaining and control) stages, we obtained discrepant results. Overall, they confirmed the positive trend in the improvement of students' knowledge in English and American classics. Significantly, the quality of students' knowledge in the English language increased that, to some respect, can prove the formation of educational abilities and skills.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has been intended to demonstrate how beneficial drama techniques can be for students in EFL class. With their concern for reproducing real life situations, drama activities have the power of bridging the eternal divergence between the classroom environment and the language actually employed in everyday human interactions (Dougill, 1987).

Drama techniques offered the perfect tools to involve both the learner's intellectual and emotional sphere, and were aimed to create a meaningful, pleasant and low-stress atmosphere that could encourage students to comprehend the reading material deeper and consolidate the important information. In this environment the students had the opportunity to work in groups, being engaged in a cooperative learning context.

It could be concluded that drama techniques make the learning process an enjoyable and useful experience, by overcoming the academicism of the conventional lesson structure and bringing the outside real life right into the classroom.

As we pointed out in the literature review section of the current paper, the employment of drama techniques responded to the necessity of bringing more interactive instruments to the classroom and giving the subject an immediate field of application. As a matter of fact, the results derived from the surveys reveal how the participants not only enjoyed the techniques implemented during the investigation, but also considered them useful to achieve speaking fluency, to learn new vocabulary and to foster their communicative skills.

The results of the study can serve as guidelines for University faculty and students.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express deep appreciation to the director of Leo Tolstoy Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of Kazan Federal University Radif R. Zamaletdinov for the support in conducting our study.

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