

**THE USE OF DRAMA AS A PERFORMANCE
ENHANCER IN TEACHING GERMAN AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE: A CASE STUDY BASED ON THE
STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE OF THE DRAMA FAUST
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Abstract

This research seeks to examine the impact of using drama as a performance enhancer in teaching German as a foreign language. This is a case study based on the first year German Honors Degree students' performance of the Drama Faust by first – years students doing an Honors Degree in German at the University of Kelaniya. The data was collected by distributing a questionnaire among 15 students who took part in the drama performance. The findings of the research indicated that the use of drama in foreign language classrooms enhances the learners' oral skills, intercultural competency, and translation skills as well as their skills in social and performing arts, while extending the ability to remember the content of the literary work through dramatization.

Keywords: *Drama, Faust, Foreign Language, German, Performance enhancer*

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Introduction

Drama and theatre have been used in the foreign language curriculum to enhance the performance level of language learners since the beginning of the 19th century. Drama in foreign language teaching uses techniques like improvisation, role -playing, pantomime and puppets, and many other creative tools. One of the most important benefits of using drama in the foreign language classroom is that it contributes to creating a positive safe, ideal, and warm learning environment, which is sensitive, to the individual personality of the learners. The use of puppets, masks, props, and other creative elements used in stage plays, helps shy and troubled students, to reduce their anxieties and inhibitions connected with the language learning process, and fosters nonthreatening interaction among students. This friendly learning environment, replaces the characteristics of a traditional language learning classroom, where the learners are pressurized to learn the linguistic and syntactic patterns and encourages them to cherish the learning process and to store the new learning material faster in the long-term memory.

Written drama provides the learners an opportunity to bridge the past and present, where a stage performance can bring history in to the present as a lived experience. During the performance, the students need to act as if they were people from the target language country and should possess an in-depth knowledge about the socio-cultural context of the literary epoch in which the drama is set in. Drama and theatre allow the learners to practice the language in a situational context. Although their characters are fictional, they will use the language to convey emotional elements such as moods and feelings and recreate the lives and emotions of people, who lived in another time in a distant culture.

Drama and theatre in the foreign language classroom creates possibilities to improve nonverbal communication. Techniques used in dramas to convey human emotions such as gestures and mimics and facial expressions are rarely approached in text books but are essential gestures in day-to-day communication.

Moreover, students engaged in dramatic performances during rehearsals exchange enriching cultural experiences which assist them to overcome the fright of dealing with people from different cultural contexts. Therefore, the cooperative act of performing a drama allows the learners to have close contact with the otherness and foster intercultural, negotiation, and creative skills. The objective of this research is to examine the impact of drama and theatre on enhancing foreign language learning skills.

Materials and Methods

This research is a case study based on the drama performance “Faust” by first year students of the Honors Degree in German at the Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya. The research sample was selected using a purposeful sampling method where a total number of 15 students who took part in the performance were selected as participants. A survey was conducted, through the distribution of an online Google form questionnaire. The questions were mainly focused on examining the learning experience of the students and the development of foreign language learning skills. As the majority of the questions in the survey were open-ended questions the thematic analysis method under content analysis was used for the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the research indicated, that the learners have developed a wide variety of skills not limited to foreign language learning but also related to performing arts and theatrical techniques. The majority of the students have used creative tools such as masks, background music, and ornaments and as the drama was presented in virtual space, using the zoom conferencing software, the learners have used features in zoom application such as animations and virtual backgrounds which have been very effective during the performance.

When using creative tools, more focus was given to the moods and emotions of the main characters and the setting of the scenes. The emotions and feelings of the characters were portrayed with the use of makeup, facial expressions, and suitable background music. According to the students’ opinions oral pronunciation, and listening skills were mostly developed through the performance. As the drama was performed in Sinhala, the German text was translated in to Sinhala during which the learners have faced certain challenges such as difficulties in finding suitable Sinhala terms for German phrases due to the differences in language structures and translating the script in to Sinhala without harming it’s pure and real sense was considered by the learners as one of the main challenges during the translation exercise. Yet the learners have highlighted that this exercise was helpful to develop their translation skills and understanding of how unique languages can convey human emotions and feelings in vastly different ways. When inquiring whether there are any characters or scenes which the cast found difficult to play, the learners mentioned that acting in the male roles and imitating male voices and attributes, and changing the appearance completely using male costumes and make up as female actress, was very challenging.

The learners have identified the use of drama in the foreign language classroom as an interesting effortless way of learning the target language culture without following the traditional, monotonous language learning methods. The learners had, in general, a very positive impression of the drama performance as it helped them to remember the story line, dialogues, scenes, themes and characteristics better and also to enhance their performing art skills.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It was evident through the research, that the use of drama and theatre in foreign language classroom enhance the learner's language competency skills such as listening, reading, oral skills, translation skills, and intercultural skills as well as their social and performing arts skills while extending the ability to remember the content of the literary work through dramatization. It is suggested through the research findings, to integrate more live group activities, both physical and online such as making short movies and short story narration exercises in to the German Honors degree curriculum.

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