

The Effectiveness of Drama as an Instructional Approach for the Development of Second Language Oral Fluency, Comprehensibility, and Accentedness

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Although the development of second language (L2) oral fluency has been widely investigated over the past several decades, there remains a paucity of research examining language instruction specifically aimed at improving this cognitive skill. In this study, the researchers investigate how instructional techniques adapted from drama can positively impact L2 fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness—three frequently discussed dimensions of L2 speech. Following a pretest–posttest design, the researchers obtained speech samples from 24 adolescent Brazilian EFL learners before and after their participation in a 4-month drama-based English language program. The development of oral skills by this group was compared with that of a parallel group of learners who received 4 months of instruction in a traditional communicative EFL classroom. Thirty untrained Canadian native English speaker raters evaluated randomized recorded L2 speech samples and provided impressionistic scalar judgments of fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness. Results indicate that drama-based instruction can lead to significantly larger gains in L2 English oral fluency relative to more traditional communicative EFL instruction; comprehensibility scores also appear to be impacted, but with a much smaller effect; accentedness scores do not seem to benefit from one type of instruction over the other. The authors discuss implications for teaching practice.

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When beginning to learn a new language, most second language (L2) learners hope to achieve advanced speaking ability. To help learners reach this goal, it is essential for teachers to provide explicit instruction with a focus on the development of L2 oral fluency (henceforth L2 fluency) and pronunciation (Wood, 2001). This is most obviously the case in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, but is also true in English as a second language (ESL) contexts, where extensive interactions in English are not readily available to many learners (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2008; Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013).

Despite their importance, L2 fluency and pronunciation are often neglected in language classrooms. This is in part due to the fact that many teachers do not understand how best to promote their development (Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011; Rossiter, Derwing, Manimtim, & Thomson, 2010; Wood, 2004). Furthermore, teachers' reliance on commercial materials is unhelpful because classroom texts typically give inadequate attention to these aspects of oral proficiency (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013).

One promising classroom strategy for promoting the development of L2 fluency and pronunciation is to use techniques borrowed from drama and theater, which can provide learners with extensive speaking practice. To date, only a limited body of research has focused on how such techniques can impact oral communication (Coleman, 2005; Gill, 2013; Kao, 1994; Stern, 1980; Stinson & Freebody, 2006). In addition, extant research has not been framed in terms of which particular dimensions of oral communication might be most affected by drama and theater techniques (e.g., fluency, pronunciation), but instead has only reported the impact of such instruction on global oral proficiency. Consequently, more fine-grained analyses of how drama and theater techniques promote the development of specific dimensions of oral communication are needed.

In this article, we report findings from a study in which we examined how a drama-based EFL program impacts three dimensions of oral communication: fluency, comprehensibility, and accent, which are widely accepted as important correlates of oral proficiency (for an overview, see Derwing & Munro, 2005, 2014). In addition to addressing the impact of explicit instruction on these three dimensions of speaking, we investigated whether drama-based instructional intervention affects L2 speech in task-specific ways—that is, does the efficacy of instruction depend on the type of speech learners are producing? Research investigating fluency typically uses picture story narration, dialogue, and monologue tasks to elicit speech samples (Derwing et al., 2008). In contrast, research investigating pronuncia-

tion most often employs reading tasks to elicit speech, although elicited imitation, picture narration, and short discussion tasks have also been used (Thomson & Derwing, 2015). In the current study, we employed five different tasks: a first person picture narration, a third person picture narration, a video narration, a role-play, and a monologue. Together, these tasks were used to elicit a variety of extemporaneous speech samples in order to obtain a broader representation of learners' abilities (Ejzenberg, 2000; Rossiter et al., 2010). Further details are provided in the Methodology section.

BACKGROUND

L2 Oral Fluency

Definitions of L2 fluency vary. As a lay term, *fluency* is typically used to mean general proficiency in the L2, conflating grammatical and vocabulary knowledge with other elements of speaking (Lennon, 1990). Within the research literature, however, the term is often used in a more technical sense. Schmidt (1992), for example, describes fluency as a speaker's automatic procedural skill, emphasizing the "performance aspect of actually doing something in real time rather than the knowledge of how something is to be done" (p. 359). Similarly, Skehan and Foster (1999) describe fluency as "the capacity to use language in real time, to emphasize meanings" (p. 96). Koponen and Riggensbach (2000) define fluency as how smoothly a speaker delivers the message in terms of flow, continuity, and automaticity. Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) use the term "automatic fluency" to mean "the smooth and rapid production of utterances, without undue hesitations and pauses, that results from constant use and repetitive practice" (p. 326). Others have described fluency in terms of speech rate (Freed, 1995; Kormos & Dénes, 2004; Lennon, 1990), filled pauses or hesitations (Freed, 1995; Lennon, 1990; Rossiter, 2009), and mean length of run (Lennon, 1990; Riggensbach, 1991). Segalowitz (2010) argues that underlying all such operationalizations of L2 fluency is a cognitive skill, the development of which requires restructuring of linguistic knowledge such that it becomes more readily accessible. This suggests that developing L2 fluency and pronunciation is a complex process, requiring not only speeding up speech production (procedural), but also awareness of features that contribute to enhanced fluency (cognitive; see Thomson, 2015, for a detailed overview of the relationship between fluency and pronunciation).

Comprehensibility and Accent

Comprehensibility and accent are two related but partially independent dimensions of L2 pronunciation. Using Munro and Derwing's (1995) distinctions, *comprehensibility* refers to listeners' subjective sense of how easy a stretch of speech is to understand (a processing perspective), whereas *accent* refers to how different an L2 speaker's pronunciation is from a target variety. These two dimensions are partially distinct because, as Munro and Derwing (1995) have shown, it is possible for a speaker to be heavily accented, while still being comprehensible. While not the focus of our research, it is also important to consider the term *intelligibility*, because it is also related to accent and comprehensibility. Whereas comprehensibility refers to how easy or difficult it is for listeners to understand speech, intelligibility refers to how much listeners actually understand of a speaker's intended utterance (Derwing & Munro, 2009). Given the partial independence between foreign accent and comprehensibility, we take the perspective that pronunciation instruction should focus on helping learners become more easily understood, rather than helping them to lose their foreign accent, which is both an unrealistic and unnecessary goal.

Task Type

L2 fluency is known to vary depending on the context in which speech is produced. For example, Nation (1989) analyzed whether fluency would differ if a speaking task were delivered three times: first in 4 minutes, then in 3, and finally in 2. He found that learners had significantly lower false starts, hesitations (*uh, er, ah*), and repetitions (*I think that, I think...*)—all elements that can affect fluency—the third time the speech was delivered compared to the first. Foster and Skehan (1996) examined differences in speaker performance on a personal information exchange, a picture story description, and a collaborative decision-making task. They found that the personal information exchange task resulted in more fluent speech (fewer pauses and silence) relative to the picture description and decision-making tasks. Foster and Skehan also found that providing learners with planning time before the speaking tasks resulted in stronger performance across tasks. Similarly, Ejzenberg (2000) found that L2 learners produce more fluent speech when interacting with a native speaker interlocutor than when asked to produce a monologue. Derwing, Rossiter, Munro and Thomson (2004) concluded that learners are most fluent when telling a personal story or engaging in a conversation and weakest in a

picture description task. Taken together, these studies suggest that tasks that are more cognitively demanding, either because an interlocutor is not providing support or because there is insufficient opportunity to plan what will be said, result in less fluent speech production.

Drama-Based Approaches in L2 Classrooms

In keeping with previous L2 literature on the topic, we apply the term *drama* in its broadest sense to encompass techniques that are borrowed from both theater and drama. However, it is worth acknowledging that these are distinct but complementary disciplines. Theater is typically conceived of as product-oriented. Thus, theater techniques emphasize scripted language and a final staged product performed by learners as part of the language learning experience (Moody, 2002). Kao and O'Neill (1998) have noted that scripted presentations or role-plays, in which learners take pre-established roles and use language limited to a particular script, are found in many L2 textbooks. In contrast to theater techniques, drama techniques are traditionally conceived of as part of a process-oriented approach, emphasizing the experience of a dramatic task (Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Moody, 2002). Thus, drama techniques include group-oriented activities, negotiation of meaning, and more natural and extemporaneous speech. These activities are intended to enhance "fluency in communication" (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 6). In addition, drama can include planning for an impromptu presentation in class (Moody, 2002, p. 136) with the aim of "increas[ing] the fluency and confidence of the students' speech" (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 15). For example, typical drama activities include improvisational scenarios and role-plays, where learners experiment with language, rather than reciting from a script. Taken together, theater and drama techniques might be seen as complementary means for promoting fluent L2 speech in more cognitively demanding tasks, because implicit in a combined approach are opportunities for both planned and spontaneous production (Brauer, 2002).

The Impact of Drama on Oral Communication

Although many have argued that drama activities can serve as a useful supplement to more traditional approaches to teaching (Bournot-Trites, Belliveau, Spiliotopoulos, & Séror, 2007; Dodson, 2002; Heath, 1993; Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Maley & Duff, 1982; Miccoli, 2003;

Ntelioglou, 2011; Via, 1976), few have systematically investigated the effectiveness of such approaches.

Stern (1980) examined the use of drama techniques in advanced ESL classrooms, finding that this approach had a positive impact on psychological variables known to predict language learning success, including heightened self-esteem, increased motivation, and spontaneity. She concluded that these psychological changes should have a facilitative effect on oral communication, but did not actually demonstrate this to be the case.

Kao (1994) investigated EFL learners in a Taiwanese university and found that drama techniques provided learners with more opportunities to use the target language in class, again only indirectly supporting the claim that drama techniques are more useful than the standard instructional practices. Similarly, it has been argued that drama promotes oral communication among Korean (Coleman, 2005) and Singaporean (Stinson & Freebody, 2006) learners, but not that drama results in more fluent speech. Given these gaps in the previous research, there is clearly a need for more fine-grained analyses of L2 oral improvement as a result of drama-based instruction.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to extend previous research concerning the effect of drama-based instruction on L2 speaking to explicitly compare a drama-based approach with a traditional classroom. The study examines the extent to which learners improve along three dimensions of oral communication: fluency, comprehensibility, and accent-ness. In addition, it evaluates the extent to which any measurable improvement extends across different speaking contexts. Our specific research questions are as follows:

1. Do learners in a drama-based EFL program experience greater gains in oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness compared to learners in a non-drama EFL program?
2. Does their oral fluency differ across speaking tasks?

Participants

The study took place at two separate sites of the same private language institute, located in the metropolitan area of São Paulo, Brazil.

Each site shares a common curriculum and employs equivalent teaching practices. With 17 locations in the city, the language school is well established and recognized for its consistency in programming across its many sites. The two locations selected were both in affluent neighborhoods of São Paulo, thereby providing some control for the socioeconomic status of participants.

Learners. Four pre-intermediate-level intact classes, two at each site, were recruited to participate. All learners had either completed 6 levels—of a 14-level EFL program—or been previously assessed by the institute coordinator to be at level 7. The seventh level is the first pre-intermediate course and is equivalent to level B1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). Learners and their parents were given the opportunity to opt out of the study, meaning their data would not be used. However, all agreed to participate. Table 1 provides a summary of participants.

Teachers. Because it was not possible to have the same teacher teach all four classes, we felt it was best to have four different teachers (rather than only two) teach the classes. This decreases the probability that improvement or lack of improvement in either the treatment or comparison group could be attributable to a difference in a single teacher. As noted, the curriculum itself also provides a great degree of consistency across classes. The four teachers, all volunteers to participate in the study (henceforth teachers A, B, C, and D for classes 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively), were female nonnative speakers of English, born in São Paulo, ranging in age from 26 to 38. Their language teaching experience varied from 3 to 16 years. Teachers were assigned to teach a particular condition, rather than self-selecting. The two teachers who delivered the drama-based program (i.e., treatment group) did not have previous experience in drama or theater. They had taught this program four times prior to this study and reported high levels of comfort. The other two teachers had experience

TABLE 1
Learner Demographics

Treatment group: Drama-based EFL program	Comparison group: Traditional EFL program
Class 1: 5 m	Class 3: 2 f; 3 m
<i>M</i> age = 13.8 (range = 13–14)	<i>M</i> age = 13.6 (range = 13–15)
Class 2: 4 f, 4 m	Class 4: 5 f; 1 m
<i>M</i> age = 14.6 (range = 13–16)	<i>M</i> age = 13.3 (range = 12–15)

conducting an oral presentation project in other programs and were therefore chosen to administer this protocol to the comparison group.

Raters. Thirty untrained raters were recruited (27 female and 3 male; ages 18–46, $M = 22.2$) from a Canadian university (29 undergraduate and 1 graduate) to rate the speech samples. All were Canadian native English speakers with the exception of one rater, who reported speaking French as a first language (L1) but who spoke English from the age of 3. At the time of the data collection, none of the participants had studied Portuguese or lived in Portuguese-speaking countries, and none indicated ongoing exposure to Portuguese-accented speech. All reported having normal hearing.

Teaching Procedures

Both the drama-based and comparison classes were delivered over a period of 4 months. Classes met for two 2-hour periods each week for a total of 74 hours of instruction. Both programs followed a communicative, task-based approach and primarily followed Granger's (2004) *Creative English 4* text. Supplementary materials included a laboratory booklet with a focus on pronunciation and listening, a worksheet booklet with extra activities that complement the content of the primary course book, and a teacher's guide with suggestions on how to best use the material. An in-house curriculum development team created these supplementary materials. Each 1-hour lab component followed approximately 4 or 5 hours of classroom instruction. During a typical lab period, learners recorded and listened to their L2 speech, focusing on phonological elements known to be challenging for Brazilian Portuguese speakers, and including both segmental (consonant and vowel sounds) and suprasegmental features (pitch, stress, and rhythm). For example, learners were required to listen and repeat adjectives ending in *-ous* (e.g., *generous*, *gorgeous*, *adventurous*) while focusing on the /əs/ sequence. For suprasegmental practice, learners were required to read a passage along with the recording—also known as tracking—several times, and each time focus on thought groups and pausing, stress in sentences and syllables, rhythm, and rising and falling intonation. This technique is commonly used in L2 pronunciation classes (Rossiter et al., 2010).

The experimental drama-based program. The drama-based classes followed a curriculum based on earlier work conducted by the first author, who began to incorporate process- and product-oriented drama activities into her EFL classes after receiving a certificate in

theater studies. Although these activities had never previously been assessed for their efficacy, they had been piloted before their formal implementation in the school curriculum in 2004, when a 5-hour teacher training session was provided by the first author. This session introduced hands-on practice of drama in EFL and was important to ensure teachers' comfort levels with the use of drama activities.

The drama-based components of the class consisted of elements from both process- and product-oriented approaches. For example, process-drama activities from Kao and O'Neill (1998), Spolin (1989), and Booth and Lundy (1985) were adapted for use in the L2 environment. These included awareness, simulation and problem-solving games, as well as improvised scenarios and role-plays (see sample in Appendix A). The product-oriented drama activities included scripted scenarios and role-plays and the study, rehearsal, and presentation of a short play or scene of approximately 15 minutes (see sample in Appendix B). The goal was not to provide learners with professional training in acting or the dramatic arts, so the program did not strictly adhere to a particular theoretical paradigm. Rather, the use of drama-based techniques was intended to allow a focus on particular dimensions of oral communication while simultaneously encouraging more positive learner affect.

Drama-based and regular EFL activities were blended into each 2-hour lesson by including linguistic and situational elements from the assigned textbook. For example, when a lesson focused on particular lexical units (e.g., adjectives to describe people), the drama activities were designed to offer practice of the same linguistic items through role-playing or simulation games. Approximately half of each class period was taken up by drama-based practices, and the remainder of the class followed a traditional format.

In addition to blending drama-based activities into regular classes, the drama-based classes also culminated in a short class performance. At the beginning of the 4-month course, teachers informed students about the upcoming use of dramatic activities, and that this could evolve into an informal presentation of a play or scene. Then, at the midpoint of the program, a selection of plays and scenes were presented to learners, who were asked to collectively decide which to rehearse and perform. The plays were selected for appropriate content and adapted to the learners' L2 proficiency. Care was also taken to ensure that the number of characters and lines were equitably distributed across all students in each class. During rehearsals for the short plays, time was spent helping students understand and convey the meaning of their lines. Rote memorization was not the focus, and learners were invited to improvise their lines and suggest changes

when appropriate. Learners were also encouraged to work on character development.

One of the two drama-based classes chose to use two 15-minute scenes (“The New James Bond” and “The Bank”) for their drama project. The other class chose to perform a 15-minute segment of the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, which had been adapted by the teacher and the learners. At the end of the 4-month program, learners were given the option of performing their plays for an audience, consisting of parents and friends. Both classes chose to do so.

The comparison traditional communicative program. The traditional communicative classes used the same core materials as the drama-based classes, but did not participate in any drama-based activities. Instead, they encouraged both pair and group work, but with no explicit focus on learner affect, nor rehearsal for a performance. In place of the drama project, learners in the comparison classes prepared presentation projects, which included a set of steps: open-ended discussions in class, readings of their own interest, completion of a research project, and preparation and delivery of oral presentations in front of the class (see sample in Appendix C). The themes for the oral presentations were suggested by the learners and reflected their own interests. Music, sports, trips, movies, and books, among others, were popular themes. The oral presentation project allowed learners to use prior and new knowledge of lexical items; practice pronunciation, intonation, and accuracy; and engage in open-ended discussions in class. Approximately half of the class time in the comparison condition was dedicated to activities and discussions intended to prepare students for their final oral presentation.

Data Collection

In order to obtain demographic information, we asked learners to complete a short questionnaire at the beginning of the study. Five pretest and posttest speaking tasks were used to assess changes in L2 oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness over time. The tasks were identical at both Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2). The recorded speaking tasks were as follows:

1. Describe a picture story of a boy who was late to class, using either first or third person;
2. Watch a short video about a friendship between a bird and a boy and retell the story;

3. Perform a role-play with the first author in which you welcome a foreign student into your country;
4. Perform a monologue about the best trip you have taken in your life;
5. Repeat the first picture story task using the opposite grammatical person (first or third) used during your first telling. (The order of first and third person narrations were counterbalanced across learners.)

Multiple tasks were used to ensure some tasks did not favor one group over another. Learners performed the tasks individually and the speech samples were recorded using a high-quality digital audio recorder. They were allowed approximately 30–45 seconds after the explanation of each task to prepare and become familiar with the task and topic. They were also allowed to ask questions prior to beginning the recording.

Rating Procedures

Following procedures used in previous studies (Derwing & Munro, 2013; Derwing, Munro, Foote, Waugh, & Fleming, 2014; Derwing et al., 2008), 20-second speech samples were rated from the beginning of the picture descriptions, video retell, and monologue tasks, after initial false starts and hesitations had been removed. Sampling from the beginning of each task ensures that content is held relatively constant across speakers and times. The end of each speech sample was also controlled to ensure each learner ended at a clause, phrase, or sentence boundary. Because the role-play was longer than the other tasks and included speech produced by the first author, a 1:20-minute excerpt was taken from the beginning of each of these recordings to provide raters with sufficient input to assess. We gave the raters brief direction in how fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness should be measured. Fluency judgments should be based on factors such as speech rate, filled pauses (*hums* and *uhs*), self-corrections or self-repetition, and silent pauses, as well as the overall flow of speech. Raters were told that grammar and lexical knowledge should not be taken into consideration. This clarification was needed to distinguish fluency from proficiency, a strategy previously employed by Munro, Derwing, and Morton (2006). For judgments of comprehensibility, the raters were asked to indicate how easy or difficult the speech samples were to understand. Accentedness judgments were based on how the EFL learners' accent was similar or different from the raters' variety. Finally, raters were shown

the picture and the video used in the narrative tasks, and the script of the role-play task. This measure was the same as that followed in previous studies investigating these three dimensions (Derwing & Munro, 1997; Derwing et al., 2008, 2014; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Munro et al., 2006) and was employed to minimize the effect of content familiarity on raters' judgment of later items relative to earlier items.

Listeners completed the rating tasks in four small groups. Each group attended two 2-hour rating sessions, rating 240 samples (24 EFL speakers performing five tasks at two different times), presented in a different randomized sequence to each group of raters. All the recorded samples were randomized across group, time, and task. Before beginning the official rating session, listeners were provided with three practice items, which illustrated a range of learner ability, and they were asked to rate each practice item and then discuss their ratings with the entire group of raters. This practice session was not intended to provide formal training, but was meant to ensure minimal agreement among raters on how to assess each sample and to indicate that the raters understood the task.

Raters listened to each speech recording and were given 5 seconds after each sample to make their judgment. Three 9-point scales were used for each sample, fluency (1 = *very fluent* to 9 = *very dysfluent*), comprehensibility (1 = *very easy to understand* to 9 = *very hard to understand*), and accent (1 = *no foreign accent* to 9 = *very strong foreign accent*). Each rating session took approximately 2 hours, with a mandatory break at the midpoint to reduce rater fatigue. Water and snacks were also provided for raters. Upon completion of the rating tasks, each rater received 40 Canadian dollars.

Data Analysis

The study followed Derwing et al.'s (2004) methodology for examining oral fluency by considering variation of fluency across tasks and the use of untrained native English speaker raters to assess speech samples for fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness. Similar methodology had been used in previous studies (Derwing et al., 2004, 2008; Munro et al., 2006). We pooled all ratings, and mean ratings for each speaker on the five tasks were computed for fluency, comprehensibility, and accent. After gathering the mean ratings for each speech sample, repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were carried out.

RESULTS

We separated the EFL learners’ speech sample ratings into three categories: fluency, comprehensibility, and accent. To assess inter-rater agreement, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were computed for all 240 speech samples for each scale, with scores of .95, .94, and .87, respectively. These scores indicate an acceptable level of inter-rater agreement. Listeners’ ratings for fluency, comprehensibility, and accent for each speech sample were then pooled across tasks to find the mean score for each item. We carried out three partially repeated measures ANOVA for fluency, comprehensibility, and accent, separately, with Task (five levels) and Time (two levels) as within-subject factors and Group as a between-subject factor. We also carried out post-hoc independent and dependent samples *t*-tests where appropriate.

Fluency

The ANOVA for fluency ratings revealed a significant effect for Time, $F(1, 22) = 39.071$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .640$, and a significant Time \times Group interaction, $F(1, 22) = 13.940$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .388$. No significant effects for Task or Group were found. Figure 1 illustrates mean scores for fluency ratings across groups and time.

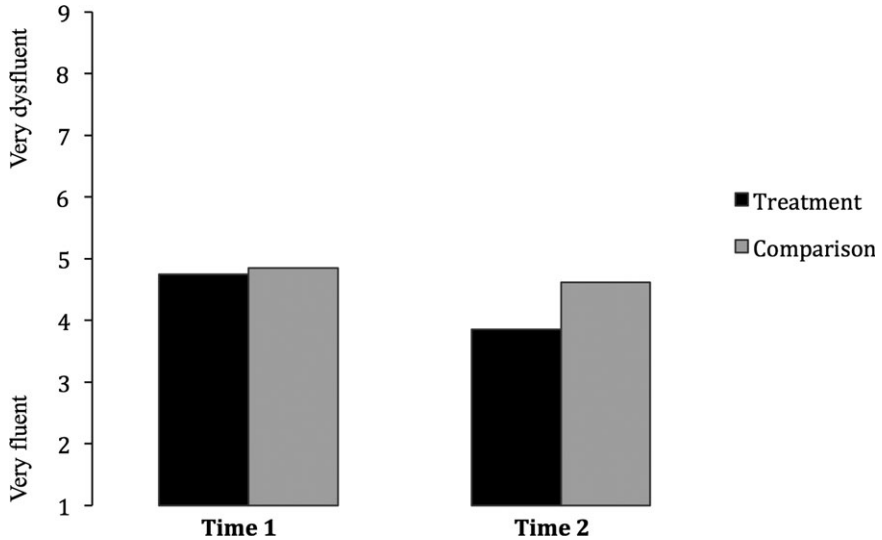


FIGURE 1. Fluency scores for treatment and comparison groups at T1 and T2.

Significant group \times time interaction. We conducted post-hoc Bonferroni-adjusted independent samples *t*-tests to further probe the significant Time \times Group interaction. There was no significant difference between groups at T1, $t(118) = -470$, $p = .639$, suggesting that both groups had similar fluency levels at the start of their program of language instruction. There was a significant difference in fluency scores between groups at T2, $t(118) = -4.263$, $p < .001$, indicating that fluency levels among learners in the treatment group were significantly higher after the treatment relative to learners in the comparison group.

Bonferroni-adjusted paired *t*-tests, with the criterion for significance set to $p < .025$, were used to evaluate within-group performance, that is, how participants in both groups performed over time. The tests revealed a significant improvement in fluency scores for participants in the treatment group from T1 to T2, $t(64) = 7.853$, $p < .001$. In contrast, the mean fluency scores for participants in the comparison group did not differ significantly from T1 to T2, $t(54) = 1.575$, $p = .121$.

The ANOVA for fluency ratings did not show a significant effect for Task, which indicates there was no significant difference across the five tasks. The differences, although not significant, can be seen in Table 2, which shows learners' mean scores for each task at both T1 and T2.

Descriptive statistics suggest that each of the two separate classes in the treatment group had similar gains in oral fluency over time, whereas both classes in the comparison group similarly lacked fluency gains. For the treatment group the mean difference for Teacher A's class (Group 1) between T1 and T2 was 0.81, whereas for Teacher B's class (Group 2) the mean difference was 0.94. For the comparison group, the mean difference for learners in Teacher C's class (Group 3) between T1 and T2 was 0.34 and for Teacher D (Group 4) was 0.06.

In sum, results for tests of fluency indicate that this dimension of oral proficiency improved for the treatment group, but not for the

TABLE 2
Mean Fluency Scores for Tasks for Treatment and Comparison Groups at T1 and T2

	Treatment				Comparison			
	Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First person picture narration	4.38	0.72	3.46	0.47	4.93	1.33	4.42	1.27
Third person picture narration	4.85	0.71	3.80	0.69	5.00	1.36	4.26	1.20
Video narration	4.83	0.83	4.03	0.84	4.93	1.40	4.60	1.14
Role-play	5.03	1.25	4.25	0.84	4.90	1.48	4.98	1.40
Monologue	4.67	0.96	3.71	0.51	4.48	1.30	4.82	1.17

comparison group. Furthermore, there was no relationship between task type and fluency for either group. The absence of an interaction between Task and Time also suggests that the treatment group experienced similar gains in oral fluency across all task types.

Comprehensibility

An ANOVA for comprehensibility ratings revealed significant effects for Time, $F(1, 22) = 33.408$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .603$, and Task, $F(4, 88) = 3.411$, $p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .134$, as well as a significant Time \times Group interaction, $F(1, 22) = 7.089$, $p = .014$, partial $\eta^2 = .244$. No significant effect for Group was found. Figure 2 illustrates mean scores for comprehensibility ratings across groups and time.

Significant group \times time interaction. Post-hoc Bonferroni-adjusted independent samples t -tests were conducted to further probe the significant Time \times Group interaction. There was no significant difference in comprehensibility scores between groups at T1, $t(118) = 1.124$, $p = .263$, or at T2, $t(118) = -1.927$, $p = .056$.

We carried out Bonferroni-adjusted paired t -tests to investigate within-group performance. The tests revealed a significant difference in comprehensibility scores for participants in both groups over time: The treatment group improved from T1 to T2, $t(64) = 7.360$, $p < .001$, while the comparison group also improved, $t(54) = 2.381$,

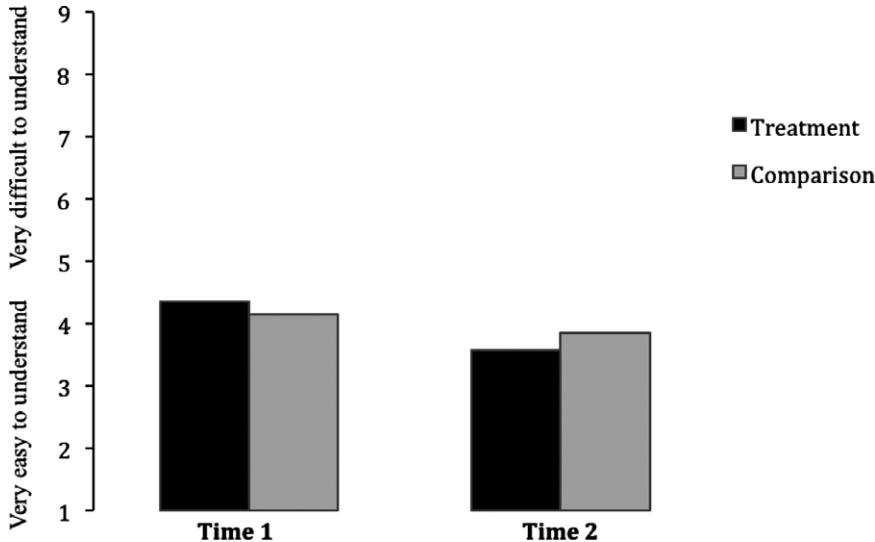


FIGURE 2. Comprehensibility scores for treatment and control groups at T1 and T2.

$p = .021$. Although these post-hoc t -tests failed to establish the source of the significant Time \times Group interaction found with the ANOVA, the difference in means suggests that the treatment group improved more over time, but with a small effect size.

Significant main effect for task type. Ten post-hoc Bonferroni-adjusted paired samples t -tests were carried out to compare differences in comprehensibility across speaking tasks at each time. The first person picture narration was significantly more comprehensible than the role-play at Time 1 $t(23) = -3.806$, $p = .001$, and again at Time 2, $t(23) = -3.187$, $p = .004$. No other significant differences were found. See Table 3 for mean comprehensibility scores for each group at each time for each task.

In sum, results for tests of comprehensibility indicate that this dimension of oral proficiency significantly improved for the treatment group, but not for the comparison group. However, as indicated by the effect size and post-hoc tests, the overall impact of the treatment on comprehensibility scores was not very substantial. Although there was a difference in comprehensibility scores across some tasks, training did not appear to differentially impact performance on particular tasks over time.

Accent

An ANOVA for accent ratings revealed significant effects for Time, $F(1, 22) = 18.170$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .452$, and Task, $F(4, 88) = 6.549$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .229$. As with fluency and comprehensibility ratings, no significant difference for accent scores was found for Group, $F(1, 22) = 2.059$, $p = .165$, partial $\eta^2 = .086$. Unlike fluency and comprehensibility, no significant effect was found in the

TABLE 3
Mean Comprehensibility Scores for Tasks for Treatment and Comparison Groups at T1 and T2

	Treatment				Comparison			
	Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First person picture narration	4.17	0.66	3.20	0.39	4.01	0.96	3.80	0.98
Third person picture narration	4.30	0.77	3.40	0.51	4.19	1.23	3.67	0.97
Video narration	4.38	0.76	3.84	0.69	4.40	1.27	3.90	0.88
Role-play	4.82	1.17	3.86	0.86	4.10	1.08	4.17	1.16
Monologue	4.13	0.73	3.53	0.57	4.07	1.38	3.77	1.06

interaction between Time and Group, $F(1, 22) = .382$, $p = .543$, partial $\eta^2 = .017$, suggesting no benefit associated with either type of training. Figure 3 illustrates mean scores for accent ratings across groups and time.

Significant main effect for task type. Ten post-hoc Bonferroni-adjusted paired samples t -tests were carried out to compare differences in accent levels across tasks. The first person picture narration ($M = 5.8$) was significantly less accented than the role-play at Time 1, $t(23) = -3.245$, $p = .004$, and at Time 2, $t(23) = -4.380$, $p < .001$. The first person picture narration was also significantly less accented than the video narration at Time 2, $t(23) = -3.156$, $p = .004$. No significant difference for accent was found between other tasks at either Time. See Table 4 for mean accent scores for each group at each time for each task.

In sum, results for tests of accent indicate that this dimension of oral proficiency significantly improved for both groups equally. Although there was a difference in accent scores across some tasks, training did not appear to differentially impact performance on particular tasks over time.

DISCUSSION

The goal of the research reported in this article was to provide a better understanding of the effects of drama as an instructional

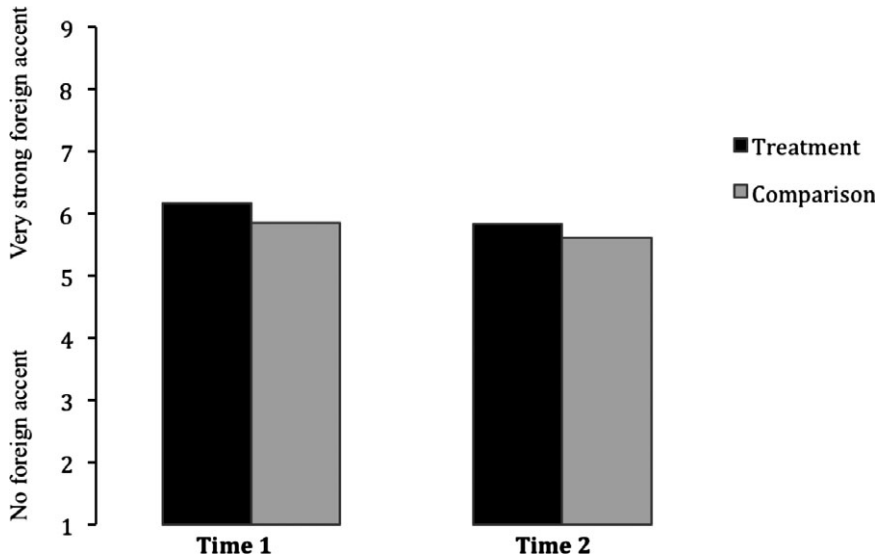


FIGURE 3. Accent scores for treatment and comparison groups at T1 and T2.

TABLE 4
Mean Accent Scores for Tasks for Treatment and Comparison Groups at T1 and T2

	Treatment				Comparison			
	Time 1		Time 2		Time 1		Time 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First person picture narration	5.91	0.33	5.56	0.40	5.81	0.59	5.52	0.74
Third person picture narration	6.03	0.38	5.78	0.31	5.88	0.59	5.59	0.85
Video narration	6.12	0.28	5.96	0.46	5.90	0.61	5.60	0.68
Role-play	6.56	0.61	6.00	0.51	5.93	0.68	5.90	0.75
Monologue	6.22	0.49	5.85	0.33	5.80	0.71	5.46	0.91

approach for the development of L2 oral communication, particularly on oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accent. A secondary objective was to determine to what extent performance before and after training differed across task types.

The results of our study suggest that the use of drama techniques in language classrooms can have a significant impact on L2 oral fluency relative to other learner-centered communicative language practices. Previous studies reported positive impacts of drama-based approaches on oral proficiency (e.g., Coleman, 2005; Kao, 1994; Stinson & Freebody, 2006), but the comparison groups in these studies comprised learners in less communicative classrooms and were conducted in Asian contexts. Thus, although learners were found to experience oral proficiency gains as a result of a drama-based instructional program, the comparison groups' lack of improvement may have been due to the fact that the instructional practices did not emphasize communication. Furthermore, the Asian contexts considered may have played a role, given that Confucian heritage culture educational practices often comprise teacher-centered classes, where learners engage in few communicative activities (Coleman, 2005). In our study, although learners in both treatment and comparison groups were enrolled in communicative learner-centered classes, the oral fluency level of the treatment group improved more. Thus, our study appears to confirm that the use of drama-based techniques can positively affect oral fluency among L2 learners who may already have access to language instruction that is more communicative in nature.

Another distinctive result of our study is how it indicates that the repetitive fluency-building activities present in drama activities can promote transfer to more fluent extemporaneous speech. Although repeating the same classroom task several times has previously been shown to lead to more fluent speech within the context of task itself (e.g., Nation, 1989), the drama techniques employed in our study appear to help learners develop strategies that are generalizable to a variety of novel speaking tasks.

Some of the strategies used in our drama-based intervention clearly focused on improving fluency. For example, the “performance aspect of actually doing something in real time” (Schmidt, 1992, p. 359), emphasis on meaning-making (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Skehan & Foster, 1999), and practice of speech without inappropriate pauses and hesitations (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005) are all said to promote fluency. In contrast, although learners in the control group also received learner-centered instruction, this may not have afforded practice with the same strategies to which the drama group was exposed. This result is important because it supports the belief that explicit instruction can lead to significantly larger gains in oral fluency relative to purely communicative approaches (Derwing et al., 2008; Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Rossiter et al., 2010).

The drama-based approach also appears to offer some advantage in terms of promoting an improvement in the comprehensibility of learners’ speech, although the extent of the benefit afforded is small. Although learners in both groups participated in laboratory classes with an explicit focus on pronunciation (segmentals and suprasegmentals), the greater improvement in comprehensibility experienced by the treatment group may have resulted from their introduction to other paralinguistic features of speech in the context of the drama-based lessons. For example, these learners had opportunities to practice vocal projection, volume, and expression of emotions, in addition to practicing segmentals and suprasegmentals. It is not possible to explain this small difference in comprehensibility improvement on the basis of a single variable, but it appears that practicing pronunciation in the context of the drama-based approach facilitated greater uptake by learners.

Learners in both groups received significantly lower accent ratings over time, although they were still perceived as having highly accented speech. Given the fact that neither group received instruction with a focus on Canadian English pronunciation, it might not be expected that the learners’ speech would be perceived as more native-like to Canadian listeners over such a short period of time. Nevertheless, learners in both groups were exposed to a similar quantity of native (course listening) and nonnative (teachers’) speaker input, which combined with their relatively young age (12–16) may have contributed to this significant improvement in accent ratings. It could also be that the laboratory program, with practice on English segmental and suprasegmental features, led to improvement in accent scores for both groups.

It is worth noting that the learners’ speech in our study was perceived as comprehensible despite also being characterized as strongly accented. These results extend previous research, which suggests that comprehensibility and accent are partially independent dimensions of speech (Munro & Derwing, 1995) and that foreign accent does not

necessarily reduce comprehensibility for listeners. Thus, we agree with Levis's (2005) suggestion that L2 pronunciation instruction should be guided by the *intelligibility principle*, with its focus on listener understanding, rather than the *nativeness principle*, with its focus on native-like attainment. The former is more likely to lead to improvement in comprehensibility (Derwing & Munro, 2009), whereas the latter is both unnecessary and unrealistic.

The investigation of task type in this study is novel in the sense that it examines performance before and after two different pedagogical interventions. Learners in both groups performed five different tasks at T1 and T2: a first person picture narration, a third person picture narration, a video retelling, a role-play, and a monologue about a familiar topic. Task-related differences found in this study seem to somewhat contradict previous literature. For example, Derwing et al. (2004) found that ratings of Mandarin speakers of English on the third person picture description task were significantly lower than ratings on either a monologue or a conversation. Foster and Skehan (1996) found that a picture narrative task contained more silence and pauses than a personal information exchange task or a collaborative decision-making task. In contrast, in our study, oral performance on monologues and conversational tasks (e.g., role-plays) were not superior to picture description tasks. In fact, when participants described a picture story using the first person, they were significantly more comprehensible and less accented than when performing some other tasks. The best comprehensibility scores were those from the first person picture description, and, at least in terms of the descriptive statistics in Table 3, comprehensibility appears to have improved most for the drama-based group. Telling a picture description in the first person places the speaker in the role of actor, which is not unlike the practice the learners in the drama-based group obtained during their language program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TESOL TEACHERS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As noted at the outset, most L2 learners desire to achieve fluency in their new language. Thus, the implementation of pedagogical practices that enable learners to reach this goal is needed. Given the fact that opportunities for L2 practice outside of the classroom may be limited in both EFL and ESL contexts (Derwing et al., 2008; Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013), explicit fluency instruction is essential. This study examined the use of drama-based instructional practices as one

possibility for successfully addressing this need. The results reported here show promise and suggest that L2 learners can benefit from the introduction of pedagogical practices originating from drama and theater. Explicit instruction that helps L2 learners gain greater control over the global functions of language, including vocal projection, stress, rhythm, and the ability to be easily understood, can be more beneficial than those with an exclusive focus on global accent (Derwing & Munro, 2009). Drama-based practices such as improvisation and problem-solving activities facilitate control over these functions, whereas many traditional pedagogical practices, even those with a focus on communication, may not.

Admittedly, as with any study that aims to stake out new territory, the research reported here has limitations. Although significant results were found, the sample sizes of learners in both treatment and comparison groups were relatively small. For a more accurate measurement of the effects of drama-based instruction on oral fluency, future studies would ideally obtain a larger number of participants. We note, however, that many classroom-based studies suffer from this limitation. As for the selection of teachers and pedagogical practices, the drama-based EFL program was part of the intact school curriculum, and not allowing the teachers in the comparison group to use the drama activities was a potentially disruptive element. Although the two teachers in the comparison group reported having previously taught the oral presentation project used in place of the drama-based activities, the way in which they taught the presentations was not stipulated by the researchers with the same detail as were the drama activities. The suggestion of substituting the drama-based practice for an oral presentation project came from these teachers themselves, but it is not known whether they were as prepared as the two teachers in the treatment group. The two teachers who delivered the drama program had received a 5-hour training session on how to use the drama guidelines and seemed comfortable with the program. Although short, this training session was important in that it highlighted that the drama activities in the program were similar to regular EFL activities in many textbooks. Future research investigating the use of drama should include a training session to support our argument that teachers do not need to be actors or have a theater background to effectively use drama in language classes. Finally, our study relied on quantitative analyses only and future research could include qualitative analyses from learners, raters, and teachers to expand and confirm the results of our study.

As for the methods, the types of speaking tasks we used for assessment may also have been a limitation to the study's ecological validity. Although a variety of extemporaneous speaking tasks were used, all

were conducted in a testing environment. Future research can explore to what extent fluency, comprehensibility, and accent gains would be maintained in a more naturalistic context (e.g., an authentic conversation with other speakers). In addition, the 2-hour rating sessions in our study included only one break. This may have contributed to rater fatigue, although high interrater reliability suggests it was not a major issue.

Overall, from a pedagogical perspective, a practical achievement of the study is that it provides TESOL instructors and researchers with a basic understanding of the effects of drama-based practices on important dimensions of oral communication. It is hoped that the potential of drama-based practices to enhance fluency instruction in L2 teaching contexts is recognized and further explored.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF A PROCESS-ORIENTED DRAMA ACTIVITY

Problem-solving scenario. Goals: practice on improvisational skills, body language, prior knowledge of linguistic items, oral fluency; prosodic features (suprasegmental sounds); pronunciation of consonants and vowels (segmental sounds); vocal projection; expression of emotions; critical thinking; conflict resolution.

Instructions: Students work in groups of three. The teacher hands in a card with a situation:

CHARACTERS: MOTHER, FATHER, SON/DAUGHTER

It is Sunday afternoon and you allowed your son/daughter to go to the movies with friends. He/she was supposed to be back home by 8 p.m. It is now 10 p.m. You are worried because your son/daughter does not answer your calls and you have no idea what happened. You start thinking of calling the police to ask for help when your son/daughter walks in the room as if nothing had happened.

He/she says, "Hey, what's up?" and starts going to his/her room when you invite him/her for a talk.

The teacher may write guiding questions on the board: *Which character are you going to play? / Why are the parents worried? / Why didn't the son/daughter arrive home by 8 p.m.? / What is going to happen next? / How are the characters going to resolve the conflict?*

Students are allowed a few minutes to discuss the situation before presenting their scene to the class. Students are encouraged to use props, body language, improvised language, and prosodic features (stress, intonation, rhythm, pitch, loudness) to convey their emotions. After the scene presentation, the teacher can provide feedback on overall pronunciation. These are some guiding questions:

Did the presentation include fluent speech, with appropriate pauses and little hesitation?

Did students' accent interfere in comprehending the message?

Was it easy to understand the presentation? If not, why (e.g., inappropriate intonation, word stress, expression of emotions)?

After all the groups receive feedback, students are invited to prepare and present the scene once again with focus on improving the pronunciation features raised by the teacher. A second round of teacher feedback, with emphasis on improved features, can help students have a sense of accomplishment.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF A PRODUCT-ORIENTED DRAMA ACTIVITY

Scripted role-play: Giving advice. Goals: practice on language to give advice; grammatical accuracy; oral fluency; rhythm and intonation (suprasegmental sounds); pronunciation of consonants and vowels (segmental sounds); vocal projection; expression of emotions; and use of body language.

Instructions: The teacher asks students some warm-up questions: *When a friend is telling you a problem he/she has, do you think you are a good listener? / Are you good at giving your friends advice?*

The teacher elicits some expressions to give advice and may write them on the board: *Have you tried _____ (verb+ing)? / Why don't you _____? / If I were in your shoes, I would _____. / In a case like this, you might want to _____. / Maybe you should _____.*

The teacher pairs students up and hands out a card:

I'm being bullied at school.

I heard my best friend talking behind my back.

I got a D on my math test.

My sister is mad at me and I don't know why.

Students are encouraged to write a short dialogue using the sentence on the card and an expression to give advice. Students are allowed a few minutes to write down their dialogues. The teacher monitors students and ensures their dialogue is grammatically accurate and appropriate. Students are then asked to read their dialogues in pairs and focus on elements of pronunciation, including fluency, segmental and suprasegmental features, and vocal projection. For example:

Are there inappropriate pauses and/or hesitations that can be avoided? (e.g., I think, uh, my parents, uh, will, uh, ...)

Is the pronunciation of consonant sounds easy to understand (e.g., is the th in this pronounced as /d/ or /ð/)?

Is the pronunciation of vowel sounds easy to understand (e.g., is the a in mad pronounced as /e/ or /æ/)?

Does word stress in sentences/questions match the message conveyed (e.g., "I'm being bullied at school")?

Students can read the dialogues multiple times, each time focusing on one particular aspect of pronunciation. Later, students are encouraged to present their dialogue to the class and receive teacher feedback on pronunciation. After all the groups receive feedback, students are invited to present the scene once again with focus on improving the pronunciation features raised by the teacher. A second round of teacher feedback, with emphasis on improved features, can help students have a sense of accomplishment.

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE OF AN ORAL ACTIVITY IN THE NON-DRAMA EFL PROGRAM

Discussion: Oral presentation (Theme: Sports). Goals: practice on oral communicative skills, prior knowledge of linguistic items, and improvised language.

Instructions: Students work in groups of three. The teacher asks them what their favorite sport is. Later, the teacher writes some guiding questions on the board: *What is your favorite sport? / What do you like about it? / Do you ever play this sport? Why/Why not? / Do you like watching this sport on TV? Why/Why not? / Who is your favorite player? Why?*

Students are encouraged to discuss the topic in groups. Later, each one in the group will share his/her ideas with the whole class by delivering an improvised monologue.

As a follow-up, the teacher assigns a research project that students will develop: They will research further information about the sport chosen. Then students are required to write a 5-minute oral speech about the topic. The teacher will read the presentation and check grammatical and lexical accuracy. Students are asked to prepare their oral presentation by studying their script. Students are not required to memorize each line. Rather, they are encouraged to know the topic and improvise their speech delivery. Students are also encouraged to design posters with pictures and images to illustrate the topic.