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## Discussion of the Qualitative Results (Interviews and Questionnaires)

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### ABSTRACT

From the results of the two approaches, it is apparent that learners show a tendency to immensely appreciate the new learning experience. The novelty effect associated with these two types of approaches was highly valued by the students and it was mentioned throughout the interviews and questionnaires as a source of enjoyment and motivation. The students perceived these approaches as being useful for language improvement but not without some problems or difficulties. All learners were highly enthusiastic about the new methods. They admitted that the drama-based English class was new to them and different from their previous classes. Nonetheless, they immensely enjoyed the new experience. They had been used to a teacher-centred approach, drills and grammar exercises with very few opportunities for collaborative and active ways of learning, since they had started learning English, which meant they also had limited opportunities to practice their speaking skills. Therefore, working with authentic material in an active, playful and interactive way in the English classroom was strongly felt by learners to be a unique and fresh experience.

Key Words: **Novelty effect**

### Introduction

As discussed in the Literature Review, the proponents of teaching through authentic texts (Lazar 1993, Short 1996, Paran 2006, Carroli 2008) believe that students will be more motivated to learn using such texts. In fact, authentic dramatic scripts used during both phases of learning were very much appreciated for various reasons. Firstly, learners enjoyed the content of the dramatic scripts as they felt they were learning new things and building knowledge about a different culture, along with language which could be applied to real-life situations. This boosted their interest and encouraged active participation. Students also appreciated the fact that such texts shed light on differences in roles and status. In fact, as Fleming (2006) suggests, it is necessary to encourage the students to be aware of the way in which our in-built views of our roles and those of others are defined and clarified through language in order to avoid teaching language in a vacuum. In real-life language use, when we talk to people, we need to be aware of their role in relation to ourselves: learners need to know not only the grammatical rules and how to form sentences but also to know when, where and with whom they should use these sentences in a speech community and how to vary sentences according to the social context (Hymes 1971).

In general, the novelty effect did not seem to diminish as the weeks went by. Learners' level of excitement remained constant throughout the whole text-based approach phase, perhaps because they were faced with different stories and situations, appropriate and varied dramatic games and a variety of interesting and new activities. The debates carried out on the play-text extracts provided an opportunity for independent thinking, which they had been not accustomed to until that point and students were pushed to use language as a means of expressing their ideas and offering their views. Yet, the most appreciated element of novelty were the dramatic games in which learners actively took part because they felt that they were learning language in a purposeful way, and somehow unconsciously, which made it seem effortless. Indeed, as suggested by drama games proponents (Maley & Duff 2003, Almond 2005, Fleming 2006, Schewe 2013) these games encourage students to feel less self-conscious about speaking and bring an emotional connection to words that would otherwise be hard to garner in more traditional classroom activities. As a negative critique to the text-based phase, only one student criticised the text-based phase on the grounds that working with play scripts alone became rather repetitive because they were only presented with one literary genre, namely dramatic texts. For the sake of variety, learners would probably have liked to work with others literary genres such as poems or prose as well.

With regard to the performance-based approach, learners were simultaneously excited and anxious about it long before the classes started. They did not have any theatre-making experience and they were eager to discover what new ideas and activities they would be presented with in future lessons. Learners mentioned that engaging in warm-up exercises and activities in which they took part wholeheartedly, along with the experience of understanding how it felt to put themselves in somebody else's shoes when performing their role(s), offered a unique opportunity for enjoyment and the improvement of their linguistic skills. In addition, they mentioned that the warm-up exercises made them feel more relaxed and helped them to focus on the lesson. Students tended to become more deeply involved as the two approaches offered a new dimension to language learning through laughter and fun, and all the students explicitly stated that the element of novelty increased their motivation and desire to learn because it made the experience more meaningful.

Nonetheless, the nature of a performance-based approach meant that the issues of acting and memorization of lines were repeatedly raised both in the interviews and in the open questions on the questionnaire as constituting a novel and interesting approach to language learning, but not without difficulties. Taking on roles in the production of a play and rehearsing scenes in front of their peers who offered constructive criticism were largely very enjoyable experiences for the learners, especially in the early stages of preparing for a performance. These were described as very useful activities for improving their language skills. Students were simultaneously intrigued and anxious long before the performance-based phase started. In the preparation for the stage production, students had to deal mostly with the rehearsals of their scenes, but even when they became accustomed to such a routine the novelty effect didn't appear to fade for the majority of them. Most of the learners put considerable effort into the memorization of their lines and rehearsed every week. Far from getting bored, the majority of the learners found that rehearsing and preparing props remained very enjoyable, especially because these activities boosted their confidence as they felt their level of language improved. Only one learner mentioned that she began to perceive this process tedious due to its repetitive nature, but at the same time it was not found to be too excessive. Even more so, as they began to get used to playing a character, being in somebody else's shoes and performing in front of their classmates, they also started deliberately exaggerating their roles in order to make the situations more interesting, or more dramatic or humorous. In his study regarding the effects of drama on English oral skills, Gill (2014) also found that students learning through drama exhibited more animated paralinguistic and their voices become more expressive.

However, the novel way of learning was also cited as the cause of slight difficulties and problems, especially for those students with a lower level of language proficiency. Firstly, the language used in the authentic texts meant they were initially perceived as quite challenging by lower/intermediate level learners who mentioned that they did not fully understand the narration at first glance because it contained too many unfamiliar words. Yet, gradually, as the weeks went by, they started to understand more and more and then they were delighted to be able to increasingly enjoy such texts. Secondly, learning grammar in an inductive way using such texts was also perceived as quite difficult by the same lower- intermediate level students who had largely been used to explicit explanation of the grammatical rules and their application to drills prior to that point. Interestingly, they stated they would still prefer a deductive approach to teaching grammar and they were pleased to have homework which included fill-in the gap exercises, which I continued to set as homework from time to time during this phase. These findings largely suggest that, depending on the learning situation and students' learning strategies, deductive approaches should not necessarily be excluded as when combined with other types of exercises they can still be a valuable activity for language learning.

Another element of novelty which posed some initial challenges for the low-level proficiency students was the fact that the classes were conducted mostly or exclusively in English which seemed to hinder their full understanding of what was happening in the story. The language employed in the authentic texts, coupled with the classes being conducted mainly in English, was a new experience that was initially perceived as difficult by learners with a lower level of language proficiency, compared to the more traditional type of teaching that the students had been used to until that point. However, the learners grew to appreciate the linguistic immersion because they could benefit from it, and they explicitly stated that, as the time passed by, they became accustomed to the language of the authentic texts and their understanding increased, to the extent that classes conducted in English were no longer a problem in the performance-based approach.

Regarding the use of acting and memorization in the performance-based approach, not all of the learners were positive about these aspects since this was their first attempt at a full-scale performance process. A couple of students perceived memorization as being difficult, whilst most of them thought it was the least enjoyable part of the whole process of learning. In addition, they were pressed for time due to their upcoming final exams and so they did not learn all their lines by heart. In fact, some students read their part from a script whilst rehearsing instead of reciting it by heart, to the frustration of some of their classmates. On the other hand, although acting made the shyer students feel uncomfortable to start with, as time went by, most of them managed to overcome their shyness because they had a lot of fun and because they perceived that through acting they could gain linguistic benefits. Numerous previous studies have confirmed that by taking on roles in a performance, initial inhibitions are broken down and students' self-esteem increased (Bourke 1993, Liu 2002, Dodson 2002, Järfås 2008, Aden 2010, Sirisrimangkorn & Suwanthep 2013 to name but a few). Additionally, memorizing lines and subsequently acting were such novel activities for the learners that some of them reported feeling insufficiently prepared for being good actors. Although the process oriented-approach put emphasis on the process of learning the language rather than on being a good actor, they further stressed that if they had previously been more accustomed to theatre-making they could have performed better, a finding that underlines the strong appeal of such activities and the extent to which they engaged the learners. Furthermore, some students also regretted not getting the opportunity to perform in front of an audience because of the lack of time to fully prepare. As previously mentioned, one of the reasons for not staging the performance was that students did not have enough time to memorize their lines adequately and this was cited as a negative issue. In fact, some learners pointed out that if they had had more time to practise their part they could have performed the play to an audience. Nonetheless, through such activities, they greatly improved their complexity, accuracy and fluency as the students themselves perceived and as shown by the quantitative results of this study.

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