

The Impact of Drama Instruction on EFL Omani Fifth Graders' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract: Drama instruction is one of the methods recommended in EFL literature. This study aimed to investigate the impact of drama instruction on EFL fifth graders' reading comprehension. It also explored the students' and the teacher's perceptions of the use of drama in reading lessons. A total of 74 randomly selected students participated in the study and formed the control group and the experimental group. The study followed the mixed quasi-experimental design. A pre- and posttest reading test was administered to examine the impact of drama on reading comprehension. A questionnaire was implemented to explore students' perceptions of drama. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to probe students' and teacher's perceptions of drama. The results were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. They showed no significant difference in reading comprehension between the control group and the experimental group. However, the experimental group performed better in the posttest than the control group although their mean scores in the pretest were lower. The participant teacher and students responded positively towards the use of drama in reading lessons. They reported that drama activities were exciting and made them love reading.

Keywords: Drama instruction, drama activities, Omani fifth graders, reading comprehension.

أثر تدريس القراءة باستخدام الأنشطة الدرامية في فهم القراءة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طالبات الصف الخامس الأساسي

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مستخلص: هدفت الدراسة إلى اختبار فاعلية استخدام الأنشطة الدرامية في رفع فهم القراءة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طالبات الصف الخامس الأساسي. وكذلك استطلاع حول اتجاهات المعلمة والطالبات حول استخدام الأنشطة الدرامية في حصص القراءة. شمل مجتمع الدراسة جميع طلاب الصف الخامس للتعليم الأساسي ومعلمي الصف الخامس في محافظة مسقط للعام الدراسي ٢٠١٧/٢٠١٦، أما عينة الدراسة فقد كانت ٧٤ طالبة (٣٧ طالبة للمجموعة الضابطة و٣٧ طالبة للمجموعة التجريبية) ومعلمة من معلمات الصف الخامس الأساسي. وللإجابة عن أسئلة الدراسة قامت الباحثة بإعداد اختبار قبلي وبعدي يقيس مهارة القراءة، واستبيان لقياس منظور الطالبات تجاه استخدام الأنشطة الدرامية في القراءة، وإجراء مقابلات للطالبات لمعرفة منظور الطالبات في الأنشطة الدرامية، ومقابلة للمعلمة لمعرفة منظور المعلمة في الأنشطة الدرامية. وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى عدم وجود فرق كبير في مستوى القراءة بين المجموعة الضابطة والمجموعة التجريبية ولكن أداء المجموعة التجريبية كان أفضل بالضعف. كذلك جاء منظور الطالبات والمعلمة في استخدام الأنشطة الدرامية إيجابياً. وفي ضوء النتائج طرحت الباحثة عدداً من التوصيات والاقتراحات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استخدام الأنشطة الدرامية، الأنشطة الدرامية، الصف الخامس، مهارة القراءة.

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The interconnected and digital world demands an extensive range of skills and knowledge, at the core of which lies reading. As a fundamental skill, reading is a tool that contributes to the development of other literacy skills. It is the key in acquiring knowledge within enormous domains, as well as a requirement for self and community development. While in the past literacy was defined as the ability to read and write, its definition changed in the 21st century and it is currently defined as an advanced capability in reading (Alber, 2013). This includes understanding written texts and the ability to interact with them. Comprehending written texts is currently of great importance. The learning skills for literacy have also been modified in the 21st century and are called the four Cs: critical thinking, communicating, creative thinking and collaborating, each of which includes a set of other skills that enable their achievement.

Many factors contribute to poor reading comprehension, including ineffective teachers, inadequate curricula, uninterested students and limited exposure to English outside the classroom (Al Hosni, 2016). Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016) stated that students in Oman face difficulties in reading, including poor reading comprehension, which causes them to underperform in reading tests. The current study did not focus on all of the abovementioned factors but rather concentrated on one, namely teaching techniques. This factor may contribute negatively or positively to reading comprehension, depending on which technique is used. The present study investigated the effect of drama instruction as a teaching method on students' reading comprehension.

Research background

Drama activities are taught to a limited degree within the new educational system in Oman. For example, Total Physical Response (TPR), an approach where-

by students mime or act out actions, is included in the curriculum for Grades 1-6 as a warming-up activity. Also, part of assessing independent reading is, whereby students are free to select whichever generic tasks they wish to count as reading, one of which is to act out the stories they read (Ministry of Education, 2016, p.112).

Statement of the problem

Reading is a tool to communicate with people. It requires comprehension and mastering specific skills to grasp the meaning. Readers who lack comprehension might face reluctance to continue reading; they may also feel frustrated. Snow (2002) claimed that the need for research in reading comprehension is critical and the possibilities for research topics in this area are nearly endless. Understanding how to improve reading comprehension outcomes, not just for students who are failing in the later grades but for all students who are facing increasing academic challenges, should be the primary motivating factor in any future literacy research agenda (Snow, 2002).

Despite the reading programs implemented in Cycle 1 (Grades 1- 4), reports about the poor reading skills of Omani learners are alarming despite the massive investment that the country has put in educational reform (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016). Al Seyabi and Al Rashdi (2016) stated that the analysis of tenth graders' exam papers in the academic year (2013/2014) showed a severe lack of success in vocabulary and reading. Anecdotal evidence of analyzing 238 exam papers shows that 52% of the students scored less than 50% in the reading skill (Al Seyabi & Al Rashdi, 2016). This emphasizes the importance of taking actions to reduce this lack of vocabulary and reading success.

Based on experience and analysis of the EFM curriculum in Grade 5, the researchers found that most reading activities involve answering questions,

true/false activities, and matching. Such activities may indicate a high possibility of guessing answers without thinking or even reading. It is rare to find drama activities in textbooks for reading purposes. It is also rare to find activities that can increase the level of thinking, encourage decision-making or require analysis, which are all needed for proper comprehension. Some teachers also tend to apply the questioning technique or use reading worksheets when teaching reading. Also, based on experience, the researcher found that reading lessons are often not entirely motivating or lively. Booth (1997, cited in Cameron, 2007) stated that "what is needed for good comprehension is strong motivation before reading and strong intellectual stimulation afterward. Answering comprehension questions affords neither motivation nor intellectual stimulation, but drama may succeed" (p.117).

Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of drama instruction on fifth graders' reading comprehension in EFL classes in Oman. It also aims to probe teacher's perceptions and EFL Omani fifth graders' perceptions of drama activities used in the reading lessons.

Research questions

This study precisely aims to investigate these questions:

- 1. What is the impact of drama instruction on EFL Omani fifth graders' reading comprehension?**
- 2. What are the students' and the teacher's perceptions towards the use of drama in reading comprehension in an EFL Omani fifth grade context?**

Significance of the study

This study is significant for four reasons. First, Ntelioglou (2006) stated that there is an insufficient amount of primary research providing insights into what is happening in second-language class-

rooms where drama activities are implemented, and most of the existing research is theoretical. In the Omani context, no study has been conducted, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, that investigates the impact of drama instruction on reading comprehension in primary schools. Second, based on 21st-century standards and skills, increasing comprehension in students' reading is of great priority in modern education. This study focuses on fostering comprehension to meet the current standards. Third, the Oman Ministry of Education advocates the implementation of a student-centered approach and encourages teachers to apply teaching techniques that meet this philosophy (Ministry of Education, 2017). Drama activities are one of these teaching techniques that take place in second-language classrooms. Fourth, for curriculum designers and stakeholders, it is very worthwhile integrating drama instruction with reading in order to foster reading comprehension.

Research limitations

This study had two limitations that might affect the generalizability of the study results. It was limited to the female schools. Second, the study was conducted in Muscat region only.

Literature Review

Reading comprehension

The nature of reading and reading comprehension

For a long time, reading was considered to be the reproduction of the ideas on a page. Later, reading theorists found that readers sustain an in-depth cognitive process to reach comprehension and currently it is viewed as an interactive process. Hence, it plays a vital role, which has implications for how it is taught in EFL classrooms. Reading is not only decoding words. It is a process of making meaning from a text. It requires employing effective strategies, efficient activities and teaching methods that help promote reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is connected to cognition and schema theory, which concerns how knowledge is represented and organized, and how that representation and organization facilitate the reader's prior knowledge to foster reading comprehension (Aloqaili, 2011). The role of comprehension in reading is essential. Comprehension is critically essential to the development of children's reading skills and therefore to the ability to obtain education and knowledge (National Reading Panel (NRP), 2000). It is important not only to academic learning in all subject areas but to lifelong learning as well (NRP, 2000).

Factors affecting reading comprehension

The success of reading is determined by certain variables. Scholars have studied reading comprehension and reached conclusions on which factors influence it positively or negatively. However, low levels of language proficiency are sometimes related to word-recognition problems, lack of vocabulary or the inability to apply reading-comprehension skills, which may cause a reduced comprehension (Al Salmi, 2005). Context and text genre are among the variables that contribute to reading comprehension (Sanford, 2015). Context acts as a "filter" that allows readers to decide on the appropriate word meanings while restraining meanings that do not fit (Sanford, 2015). Word-recognition ability plays a role in speeding up reading and hence leads to reading comprehension.

Drama instruction as a method of teaching

Drama in education theory has changed throughout the 20th and into the 21st century (Gaylor, 2011). Several theories about drama in education were presented over the course of the 20th century, but it has taken years for drama to be accepted in education. The end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century marks the moment of this acceptance (O'Hara, 2001). Recent examinations in

brain research and how people learn state that using drama can be a satisfactory way of teaching elementary students in particular (Moore, 2004) and higher levels in general.

The use of drama in the classroom in the early stages of literacy is of essential importance. Gardner first outlined his theory in 1983 suggesting that people have different kinds of "intelligences" (Cherry, 2016) and indicating that learners learn in different ways, through visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, linguistic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Through Gardner's theories, it is evident that drama is an efficient means of reaching students with intelligences that are not reached through traditional teaching methods (Ntelioglou, 2006; Moore, 2004). Drama is a useful tool in teaching EFL classes because of its capacity to gainfully utilize these multiple intelligences and especially the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (Schewe, 2002). Regarding interpersonal intelligence, many learning theorists advocate the role of social interaction in the process of learning, which also contributes to the development of the cognitive domain while learning. Vygotsky noted that learning and development occur in a social context, thereby indicating that teachers play an important role in helping children to learn (Cameron, 2001, p.6). Since drama activities are usually performed in groups or pairs, they foster the skills of group interaction to discuss, negotiate and reach consensus, and hence contribute significantly to the development of the teaching and learning process (Athimoolam, 2004). Students act for an audience which gives feedback and discuss the performance. Students of young ages learn best when using their bodies. Moore (2004) indicated that students continuously move around and perform using their bodies during drama activities. Texts are visualized in drama activities when students turn written texts into actions and

scenes, which help visual learners to retain the scenes in their minds.

Drama raises learners' motivation, interests and confidence in learning English, which ultimately positively affects learning the target language (Rew & Moon, 2013; King, 1981). Also, Wessels (1987) claimed that drama activities can bring the written materials to life by infusing the lifeless print with feelings, imagination and thought for the learner, who becomes an active participant in the learning process. In addition, Moore (2004) declared that drama builds trust and strong relationships among students, justifying that drama creates a safe and comfortable environment.

Impact of drama on reading comprehension

Drama plays a role in increasing reading comprehension. Wagner (1998) claimed that students could develop a deeper understanding and better construct meaning through drama activities, and that it helps them rehearse roles and activities for the future. Kelner and Flynn (2006) stated that students demonstrate with their voice and body (drama) what they understand from the text (reading comprehension). Some researchers asserted that drama-based reading instruction can improve reading skills more than traditional reading instruction (Rose et al., 2000). As Al-Busaidi and Sultana (2015, 17) state, "Genres like novels, stories and drama present learners with a microcosm of the real world in which characters, setting, and action presented appear to be a replication of the real world."

Teachers' perceptions

Selecting the teaching techniques is influenced by many factors. Teachers' perceptions of methodology determine what teaching strategies to use. Adipranata (2009) declared that teachers should pay attention to learning situations in order to decide upon the appropriate teaching styles and classroom techniques. A number of studies show

that EFL teachers perceive drama instruction as a useful teaching approach and find it efficient for the enhancement of literacy skills, including reading.

Students' perceptions

Since students' perceptions of drama instruction vary depending on their motivation, self-efficacy, interest, and personality, researchers investigated students' perceptions of drama in EFL classes. Many results showed positive perceptions.

Review of related studies

In the Iranian context, Tajareh and Oroji (2017) examined the extent to which drama activities could develop the reading comprehension ability of young learners. The participants were 44 students who were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group used drama activities in reading lessons while the control group was taught reading comprehension conventionally. The researchers ran a pre- and post-test using an independent t-test. The results revealed that the application of drama techniques could have an enormous impact on reading comprehension ability.

Arzu (2008) examined the effect of drama activities on reading strategies, students' attitudes toward reading, and their perceptions toward drama. Two Turkish groups of fifth graders ($n = 54$) participated in the research. The researcher administered the Scale for Attitude Toward Reading in the pre- and post-test. The results showed that using drama in reading comprehension is a more effective strategy than the traditional way of teaching. Also, students declared that drama enabled them to understand the importance of reading and to increase their reading and learning abilities.

Keehn, Harmon, and Shoho (2008) conducted an experimental study to examine the effect of reader theater on reading comprehension, vocabulary and reading fluency. In six weeks, 36 stu-

dents from South Texas in the USA participated in the study. To measure reading growth and comprehension, the Ekwall Shanker Reading Inventory (Shanker & Ekwall, 2000) was administered to both groups. Quantitative measures showed that when compared with students in the control group, students in the experimental group made statistically significant progress in their reading level, as well as significant gains in fluidity and expressive measures of oral reading.

Methodology

Research design

The study is a mixed quantitative and qualitative research. It used a quasi-experimental design with one experimental group and one control group to investigate the influence of drama instruction on reading comprehension of EFL Omani fifth graders.

Sample

The participants were 74 female students, aged 10–11 years, in mixed-ability classes, with 37 participants assigned to the experimental group and 37 students to the control group. They had been learning English as a foreign language for four years. Some had studied cycle one in private schools. The teacher who participated in the study holds a bachelor degree in education from Sultan Qaboos University. She has been teaching grades five–nine for eight years, with two years' experience of teaching fifth grade.

Selecting the sample

Before conducting the study, a total of 151 students were tested to measure the level of their reading ability and to select the closest results in order to have homogeneous classes for the study. A pre-test was administered in the study, and the students were all tested on the same day for 40 minutes.

Research instruments

Pre- and post-test:

The researcher developed a reading test to be administered pre- and post-test to measure the students' reading comprehension level in order to examine the impact of drama instruction on reading comprehension. Participants' responses to the pre- and post-test reading test were statistically analyzed using SPSS. Levels of reading comprehension were interpreted using statistical mean scores of the Oman Ministry of Education rating scale.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was a researcher-made instrument based on previous studies and reading. It was conducted to collect data concerning students' perceptions of drama activities. It includes seven Likert-scale statements ranging from strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2 to strongly disagree = 1. This means the higher the scores, the more positive the students' perceptions of the drama activities.

Interviews for students:

A researcher-made semi-structured interview, consisting of eight questions and based on previous studies and reading, was used in the study to collect data with respect to students' perceptions of using drama in EFL reading classes.

Interview for the teacher

A semi-structured interview developed by the researcher, which was based on previous studies and readings, was applied in the study to explore the teacher's perceptions of using drama in EFL classes. It included nine questions.

Results

Q1: What is the impact of drama instruction on reading comprehension?

A t-test was conducted to evaluate the students' reading comprehension in pre- and post-tests for the experimental group. There was a statistically signifi-

cant increase in reading comprehension scores from pre-test ($M = 2.78, SD = 2.83$) to post-test ($M = 5.62, SD = 3.87$) $t(36) = 5.727, p < .00$. The mean increased for reading comprehension with a large effect size ($r = .476$) according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines.

Table 1 shows the statistical analysis of the t-test conducted to evaluate the impact of drama instruction on students' scores for the reading comprehension test before the experiment. No statistically significant difference was found between the experimental group ($M = 2.78, SD = 2.83$) and the control group ($M = 3.12, SD = 3.33$) $t(450), p < .450$ for reading comprehension mean scores before the experiment.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of the Experimental and Control Groups' Scores on Reading Comprehension Before the Experiment (n = 74)

	M	SD	t	P
Experimental	2.78	2.83		
Control	3.12	3.33	.450	.654

A t-test was also conducted to examine the impact of drama instruction on students' scores for the reading comprehension test. There was no statistically significant difference between the reading comprehension mean scores after the experiment for the experimental group ($M = 5.62, SD = 3.87$) and the control group ($M = 4.54, SD = 4.41$) $t(72) = 4.465, p < .266$. Table 7 presents the statistical analysis of the t-test after the experiment.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of the Experimental and Control Groups' Scores for Reading Comprehension After the Experiment (n = 74)

	M	SD	t	P
Experimental	5.62	3.87	1.121	.266
Control	4.54	4.41		

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of the Differences (Pre-test and Post-test) for the Experimental and Control Groups' Reading Comprehension Scores (n = 74)

	M	SD	T	P
Experimental	2.83	3.01		
Control	1.43	1.95	2.381	.02

A t-test was conducted to explore the difference of scores in reading comprehension for the experimental and control

groups. The difference between the two groups is big. The experimental group's scores ($M = 2.83, SD = 3.01$) are higher than the control group ($M = 1.43, SD = 1.95$).

The results revealed an increase in both groups' reading comprehension. According to the Oman Ministry of Education's reading rating scales, both groups were poor in reading comprehension, but their reading comprehension increased to the limited reading comprehension level. The experimental group performed doubly well and gained more reading comprehension than the control group in the post-test, almost reaching the third level of comprehension, which is reasonably good comprehension, and this was despite their mean scores being lower than the control group in the pre-test.

Q2: What are the students' and the teacher's perceptions of the use of drama instruction in reading lessons?

Students' perceptions (questionnaire)

The questionnaire was designed to investigate students' perceptions of using drama instruction in reading lessons. It was conducted for the experimental group after the experiment.

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations of the Questionnaire Statements and the Total Mean for the Students' Perceptions of Drama Instruction in Reading Lessons. (n=37)

Statements	M	SD
Item 1. I liked the drama activities.	4.49	.803
Item 2. I felt comfortable in participating in drama activities.	4.27	.990
Item 3. I took drama activities seriously.	4.51	.931
Item 4. I think the use of drama has made me love reading lessons.	4.78	.534
Item 5. I was able to understand the texts through drama activities.	4.10	1.15
Item 6. I felt motivated in the drama lessons.	4.13	1.03
Item 7. I like to have drama in my reading lessons in the future.	4.08	1.29
Total	30.38	4.29

Table 4 presents the mean and standard deviation of the Likert-scale questionnaire. The total mean of the questionnaire is (30.38). The results indicated a very positive degree of perception to-

wards the use of drama in reading lessons. Students did find that the drama activities in reading lessons positive and they wanted them to be included in their reading lessons in the future. Students' and teacher's perceptions of drama activities (interviews).

Two themes emerged from the data, namely "reading" and "drama instruction," which included three and two sub-themes respectively.

Reading

Perceptions towards reading

Five students reported having positive perceptions of reading, three of whom already perceived reading positively before having drama lessons.

Drama made Asma recognize the importance of reading for communication. Fatma mentioned that she liked reading and that she read more often to act well. Muna viewed reading from a speed-improvement perspective. Hala said that drama did not influence her perception of reading because she already liked reading and believed that reading is necessary for developing cognitive skills. Similarly, Amal mentioned that drama caused no changes in her perception because she faced problems in cooperation and improper performance, which she did not like.

Reading ability

Five students said that drama activities affected their reading positively, stating that drama activities made them faster and better in reading. Two students said that drama activities made them like reading and encouraged them to read other books. By contrast, Asma said that she found drama had a limited effect on her reading because she still could not read difficult words quickly. Similarly, Hala found no effect of drama on her reading because she was a good reader.

Reading comprehension

All students found drama activities helpful for a better understanding in reading lessons. Asma and Muna mentioned that they understood texts through actions. Three students mentioned that they were able to understand texts through practicing in their preparation for enacting. Samya mentioned that she understood texts from hearing words and scripts while her colleagues were acting. Muna and Asma mentioned that they translated words of which they did not know the meaning or asked their parents to help them in order to perform well. The participant teacher found that drama activities helped students to comprehend the texts due to the feedback given, preparation and motivation.

Drama instruction

Benefits of drama

The participants expressed getting different benefits from the use of drama in reading lessons. The first is the enjoyment of acting, which was mentioned by all students. Furthermore, collaborative learning was preferred by Asma. Hala reported a safe and comfortable environment in drama-based reading lessons. The participant teacher found that teachers need training to include drama activities in their teaching.

Second, Asma and Maryam took drama seriously because they already liked drama and enjoyed acting. Asma replied, "I found them beneficial because they helped me read texts which included a lot of information." Third, three students mentioned that they gained knowledge and learned words through the use of drama activities in reading lessons.

Fourth, drama positively impacted students' motivation and interests. Students had fun, and felt happy and motivated during drama lessons. The participant teacher explained that the lessons were very exciting and enjoyable with

drama activities. She also mentioned that students were active and that they started to like reading because they were more involved.

Drama challenges and limitations

All students encountered challenges in the drama lessons, be it as individuals or as groups. On the individual level, feeling nervous or hesitant formed a challenge for three students. Additionally, the difficulty to act out certain texts or words formed another challenge. Three students mentioned that they did not know how to act out particular words and texts. Not knowing the meanings of certain words created a challenge for them in acting parts out in the lessons. The participant teacher found drama activities to be suitable for integration within the curriculum, albeit with the requirements of adding more stories in textbooks.

In addition, memorization formed a challenge for two students. Time was the main challenge that may have resulted in other problems. The participant teacher identified time management as the main challenge. Concerning team work, the respondents expressed two main challenges: lack of co-operation and working with struggling readers.

Discussion

Q1: What is the impact of drama instruction on reading comprehension?

The results showed no significant difference in reading comprehension between the experimental group and the control group. In contrast, many studies revealed a significant difference in their investigation of drama's impact on reading comprehension (Tajareh & Oroji, 2017; Arzu, 2008; Cameron, 2007; Milord, 2007; Hsu, 2006; Rose et al., 2000; Dupont, 1999; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Millin, 1996; Maberry, 1975), though other studies showed no significant increase in reading comprehension (Keehn et al., 2008; Carrick, 2000; Fizzano, 1999).

The experimental group showed a better performance than the control group in the posttest. Although the mean scores of the pretest for the experimental group were lower than those of the control group, they showed greater improvement in reading comprehension in the posttest, for which there are a number of possible explanations. One possible reason for their improved performance in the posttest is the use of drama instruction accompanied by variables similar to those of the control group. Referring to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, drama may have accommodated students' different learning styles. This may support Moore's (2004) claims that drama could help meet students' intelligence. Drama is a useful tool in teaching EFL classes because of its capacity to utilize multiple intelligences and especially the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (Schewe, 2002). Drama may help students whose intelligence is primarily bodily, interpersonal, visual and auditory. Drama may help learners who are bodily and visual to use their bodies and move in order to translate the texts into actions. It is also possible that the social context plays a role, as posited by Cameron (2001) in reference to Vygotsky's theory of learning, which stated that children learn better in social environments. Students in drama lessons discuss, negotiate and work together to portray a play.

Q2: What are the students' and the teacher's perceptions of using drama in reading lessons?

The seven volunteer students who were interviewed reported positively about using drama instruction in the reading lessons. The majority found that they had positive perceptions towards drama reading lessons. The results of this study supported the previous studies (Bengtsson, 2009; Arzu, 2008; Kirmizi, 2007; Teresa, 2007) in which students liked drama activities. The respondent teacher reported positively toward the use of drama in reading lessons, similarly to some of the previous studies (Cameron,

2007; Fizzano, 1999; Kaaland-Wells, 1993).

The participants liked the drama activities in reading lessons. Many benefits could explain why the students and the teacher liked the drama activities, and revealed the students' motivation. First, the idea of acting and performing stories was favored by the participants. The participant teacher mentioned that it made lessons more interesting and enjoyable, as supported by the related literature (Rew & Moon, 2013; King, 1981).

Second, students used their imagination while acting which reflects that children enjoy living in their imagination. Drama provides children with contexts that enable them to explore their imagination (Kelner & Flynn, 2006; Wessels, 1987). Imagination can lead students to explore their abilities and skills, as well as to be creative (Gundogan et al., 2013).

Third, the teacher claimed that students were active and began to like reading because they became more involved. This showed the critical role that active learners can take in drama lessons, in which the focus lies mainly on students (Gaylor, 2011; Kelner & Flynn, 2006; Wilhelm, 199; Wessels, 1987).

Fourth, drama may contribute to students' positive feelings towards reading lessons. Students' responses in the interviews supported the questionnaire results suggesting that the drama activities were suitable, motivating and interesting. These results also supported the results of previous studies (Bengtsson, 2009; Teresa, 2007; Fizzano 1999) in which students were positive towards the drama approach process.

Fifth, feeling comfortable while participating in the drama activities was another positive feeling in the reading lessons, for which the questionnaire results rendered a high mean score ($M = 2.27$, $SD = .990$), as also supported by the interviews. These results supported the claim that drama builds strong relation-

ships among students and creates a safe and comfortable environment (Moore, 2004).

Sixth, all interviewees reported that they took drama activities seriously. In fact, one flaw of drama instruction is that some students do not take it seriously. Therefore, they tend to neglect participating in drama activities.

Seventh, students found that drama activities encouraged them to speak and practice the expressions they read. Drama is one of the compelling opportunities to develop speaking (Wessels, 1987; Dale, 1969), as supported in the studied conducted by Al-Mahrooqi and Tabakow (2013), and Rew and Moon (2013), in which students were able to utilize expressions in new situations.

Students' reading perceptions changed positively in drama-based reading lessons, a high mean score of 4.78 in the questionnaire ($SD = .534$) and as supported by five interviewees. Since they liked the reading lessons with drama, they related that interest to reading. They might automatically like reading as well as enhance their reading culture by recognizing the importance of reading.

Students' reading comprehension slightly increased and could be interpreted to result from many aspects. The results of the reading test were not significantly different, but the experimental group performed better in the posttest. Drama develops students' understanding of texts and aids in constructing meaning (Arzu, 2008; Kelner & Flynn, 2006; Wagner, 1998; Sloyer, 1982). Many studies similarly showed a significant growth in students' reading comprehension through drama activities (Tajareh & Oroji, 2017; Arzu, 2008; Cameron, 2007; Milord, 2007; Hsu, 2006; Rose et al., 2000; Dupont, 1999; Millin & Rinehart, 1999; Millin, 1996; Maberry, 1975).

Conclusions

This study examined the impact of drama instruction on the reading comprehension of Omani EFL fifth-graders. It also explored the students' and the teacher's perceptions of using drama in reading lessons. The results showed no significant difference between the control and experimental groups in the reading test. The questionnaire results revealed positive perceptions towards using drama in reading lessons. A total of seven students were interviewed and reacted positively towards the use of drama. The participant teacher also reported positively to using drama instruction in reading lessons. Despite the benefits that students got from drama, they faced four main challenges, as reported by the students and the teacher in the interviews. The first was the difficulty to memorize the scripts. Second, feeling nervous while acting formed a challenge for three students. Third, with respect to working in groups, some students worked with uncooperative partners. Fourth, students encountered difficulty in acting out some words or texts.

Despite the limited use of drama in EFL Omani classrooms, this study showed that the teacher and many students seemed interested in implementing drama in reading lessons. Regardless of the challenges that many students encountered in reading ability and reading comprehension, they appeared to like drama and began to love reading as a result. They also seemed to respond to the use of drama activities with high motivation and enthusiasm. Despite the non-significant difference between the experimental and the control group in reading comprehension, students got some benefits from drama instruction.

Recommendations

First, this study was conducted in a female school in the Muscat region. Consequently, the generalizability of the study results were limited mainly to the teacher's perceptions of the use of drama in reading lessons. It is recommend-

ed to further investigate the impact of drama in male schools as well as in other geographic regions. Second, there were no statistically significant differences between the control group and the experimental group in reading comprehension. Therefore, further investigation can be conducted to explore the impact of drama on other aspects related to reading, for instance on applying reading strategies, on reading fluency or on establishing a reading culture. Third, further investigation is recommended to examine the impact of drama on other language skills including writing, listening and speaking.

Three recommendations can be suggested for practitioners:

1. Establishing reading programs is one of the possible alternatives to boost reading. Omani fifth-graders need reading programs that enable them to continue developing their reading ability and reading comprehension.
2. Teachers need training in applying drama instruction. Drama instruction requires many steps of preparation in order to achieve the intended learning aims. The lack of knowledge, skills and understanding about drama instruction are some of the justifications for the reluctance and adverse reaction from teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers to explore the several activities of drama, the difficult skills required for successful implementation and the difficulties of training students to act effectively under the umbrella of the learning outcomes.
3. Reconsideration of the curriculum is recommended. Stakeholders and curriculum developers can include drama activities in teaching the target language. In addition, text genres are factors in reading comprehension. More stories can be added in the Grade 5 curricu-

lum for more enjoyment in reading lessons.

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