

Suggestions for an Effective Drama-based EFL Course at a Korean University

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This paper aims to suggest pragmatic instructions for conducting an English course that focuses on speaking and listening skills through using drama as a language teaching activity. Recent research on drama in the ESL/EFL classroom has been about the benefits of drama and methods one can use, but research on techniques, activities, and methodology that is more beneficial in regards to student's improving their language capabilities has been lacking in Korea. For this study, drama approaches and techniques were examined based up on the constructivist methodology in teaching English as a second language and researcher's observation and participants' journals were analyzed. With this research as a premise, a model for a drama course that might effectively enhance student's speaking and listening skills is proposed. The suggested model proposes a blend of approaches and a variety of techniques that have been used globally among the EFL community, focusing on bonding activities for warm-up and team-building, guided activities for creating a scenario and debate and discussion.

Key Words: Model for EFL drama class, drama techniques, drama activities

I Introduction

Over the past decade, there's been an emphasis on drama being used within language teaching to encourage cooperative learning within the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology. In language education, research has shown cooperative learning promotes intrinsic motivation, heightening self-esteem, creating caring and altruistic relationships, lowering anxiety and prejudice and results in improvement of language ability (Oxford, 1997). All of these factors are essential for language learning and can be facilitated by creating teamwork activities, social interactions, and cooperative and collaborative learning in the classroom. Cooperative learning is a key component to CLT, and may take a

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while to adjusting to this methodology.

Within Korea, such approaches are neither commonly practiced by L2 instructors nor familiar with learners (Suh & Price, 1993). Even though many teachers believe in the effectiveness of using drama in language classrooms, they have not received special training and they do not know how to use appropriately and skillfully. This implies that many so-called communicative language classes are not as communicative as the teachers believe in terms of classroom discourse and activities (Kao, 1994). Hence the techniques of the proper use of drama activities are considered very important. If a drama-oriented language class is claimed to be a version of communicative language teaching, it needs to be well designed to work effectively.

Until now, some studies on drama-oriented English classes (Chaudron, 1988; Di Pietro, 1987; Holden, 1981; Kao and O'Neil, 1998; Maley & Duff, 1991; Smith, 1984; van Lier, 1988) advise activities, techniques and approaches that have been widely accepted among the ESL/EFL community. Two of the most acclaimed drama approaches to teach English has been Strategic Interaction (SI) and Process Drama (PD), known also as educational drama. With this ongoing trend of using drama in the L2 classroom, little research has focused on a drama-based language class in Korea. If drama is really beneficial for L2 learners, why not create a course designed to teach language through drama? Creating a drama-based language course would require one to familiarize oneself with drama approaches and techniques that ought to be used to teach language.

Thus, the aim of this study is to examine and suggest effective drama approaches and techniques that can be implemented as a basis to teach a drama-based language class that is effective in building English skills among L2 learners in Korea at a higher tertiary level. For this, literature on drama approach and techniques were reviewed and the researcher's observation and participants' journals were analyzed.

2 Approaches and Techniques for Teaching Drama

Di Peitro (1987) regarded drama as an effective teaching approach in response to the constructivist method of teaching language, because it enhanced the learner's communicative competence and because of its ability to enhance orals skills. According to constructivist methodology, learning is an inherently social-dialogical process. This process is best described as having the characteristics of reciprocal teaching, problem-based learning, and collaborative groups, in essence activities that places value on dyadic or group discussions (Duffy & Knuth, 1993; Sivaubramaniam, 2011). Meaning social interaction and learning from peers is essential to the constructivist. Using group activities is seen to promote dialogical interchange and reflexivity. This means that there must be an emphasis on informal collaborative reasoning about problems and reflection about the learning process. Students can do this by sharing viewpoints and challenges that help develop each alternative point of view of the topic (Cunningham, Duffy &

Knuth, 1993; Savery & Duffy, 1995; Sharan & Sharan, 1992) when drama is used as an approach to language learning.

According to O'Neil (1993), PD and SI, in regards to the Constructivist Methodology for language teaching, explores a problem or situation through the use of artistic medium unscripted by offering many opportunities for negotiation and input of the participants through collaborative meaning-making process by all the participants through the medium of role. Simply put, collaborative learning is through improvisation and problem solving. In the process of creating drama, the participants are constantly required to listen, speak, read, and write attentively in order to respond to each other and contribute ideas to the story or task at hand (Carlin, 2007). Thus, exhibiting reasoning skills within a social context is one of the primary components of the Constructivist Methodology.

2.1 Strategic interaction (SI)

Using constructivist methodology as a basis for an EFL classroom encourages students to converse in a way that has students collaborating effectively in English; one such approach in which drama is used is the SI. This approach was first developed and honed by Di Pietro (1982). It calls upon learners to use the target language purposefully and skillfully in communication with others (Di Pietro, 1982, 1983, 1987). Students are free to respond to the problem presented in the scenario in their own way and devise their own personal strategies for dealing with the situation at hand. This drama technique is not built upon prepared scripts or storylines but is developed by the participants according to their impromptu responses to the events and situations created by them. Carlin (2007)'s Strategic Interaction can be summarized as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of Strategic Interaction

| Procedure | Teacher's Role | Student's Role |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Rehearsal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Give students a scenario - Put students into the scenario with other people from the other group -Act as an advisor/guide | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore the situation and the characters and decide the different outcomes -Come up with vocabulary words or phrases that might be used |
| Performance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Designate students to perform -Watch and take notes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call on a classmate for help - Watch and take notes |
| Debriefing Discussion/ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lead the entire class in a discussion -Introduce language forms and vocabulary items | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share what they've observed - Write down new language forms and vocabulary items introduced |

As shown in Table 1, the SI approach is divided into three phases: rehearsal, performance and de-briefing (Kao & O'Neil 1998). In the first phase, rehearsal, students are divided into two groups and then given a situation. Afterwards, they create a scenario or situation that requires a solution to a conflict. Then students discuss or create their own dialogue. They create a dialogue for the actor who is representing their group, by discussing possible vocabulary and language functions. In rehearsal phase, students discuss possible outcomes and practice them (Kao & O'Neil, 1998). Thus, students must create several dialogues to prepare themselves for different ways the situation may end. In the second phase, performance, students from each group come to the front of the class and act out the situation. If students stumble with vocabulary or dialogue during the performance, then they may ask for help from their groups. During the performance phase, students are able to stop and ask for help from their group or classmates (Carkin, 2007). In the final phase of the lesson, the teacher leads a de-briefing session in which difficult or inappropriate linguistic and interactional elements that were used during the performance are discussed (Kao & O'Neil, 1998).

2.2 Process drama (PD)

Another approach to teaching drama within a language learning setting that meets the basic premise of constructivist methodology is PD, because of its continual enforcement of students working in groups and peer work to solve and discuss problems and possible situations. PD known as educational drama was developed and used with Communicative Language Teaching, particularly during the 1970s (Ashton-Hay, 2005). The reason this method is still preferred in education is that the drama is built up from ideas, negotiations and responses of all the participants in order to cultivate social, intellectual and linguistic development; as well as to solve problems and to employ higher order thinking processes (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). In contrast to Kim and Lee's approach (2000) to teach drama through a script reading and putting on a performance, PD is a compilation of drama activities that do not lead up to performances to an audience who are outside the drama (Carkin, 2007).

The basic layout for creating a lesson using PD as an approach is to find an effective starting point for the drama, and if necessary, initiate the drama in role. Then choose themes and topics appropriate for the social and linguistic abilities of the students and next introduce a variety of roles in order to familiarize students with a wide range of language functions. When executing PD in the classroom it is important to generate a dramatic "elsewhere," a fictional world, which will be inhabited for the experiences, insights, interpretations and the understandings it may yield.

PD does not precede from a pre-written script or scenario, but rather from a theme, situation or pre-text that interests and challenges the participants. It is built up from a series of episodes, which may be improvised or composed and rehearsed. It takes place over a time span that allows this

kind of elaboration. It involves the whole group in the same enterprise. There is no external audience to the event, but participants are audience to their own acts (Kao & O'Neil, 1998). The instructor needs to understand and foster the operation of tension in the dramatic situation, so that encounters continue to be predictable and authentic. The whole class is organized into pairs and small group for these activities. It is helpful to release students from the constraints of language and provide them with fresh opportunities by incorporating non-verbal activities in the process. Examples of such activities are discussed more thoroughly in the section, in 2.3.

The development of the drama must be negotiated with students, and encourage similar positive interactions among them. One must use a variety of forms of questioning to promote involvement, support students' contributions and challenge superficial or inadequate responses. Lastly, students need to reflect on the experience, both in discussion and through the use of other modes of expression.

To sum up, PD, educational drama can create a "non-threatening" environment for the learners to acquire and use the target language (Radin, 1985; Stern, 1981). In addition, educational drama is not built upon prepared scripts or storylines but is developed by the participants according to their impromptu responses to the events and situations created by themselves (Heathcote, 1984). This characteristic highly resembles real life experience. Conversations produced in such a classroom are similar to naturally occurring interaction. Hence, educational drama is legitimately viewed as a version of Communicative Language Teaching.

The procedure for PD is quite similar to SI, even though the theme and activities will vary from lesson to lesson. Within PD, students are always required to think about the vocabulary or discuss how they will do the task before performing the activity. In SI, students are required in the rehearsal session to focus on creating key vocabulary and phrases necessary to for the drama. Thus, drama creates a social context in which students can experiment with the target language, in which students will share with other students' vocabulary and linguistic skills, to explore an array of topics. What make PD unique are the activities that are mainly used for strategy. Strategy is another word for activities that engage the students in exploring different aspects of the topic of the lesson. There are a variety of activities that are widely used, some being still-image, simulation and guided tour, narrative action such as hot-seating, interview and television conversation, poetic action like thought-tracking, caption making and documentary (Needlands & Goode 2000), which are expounded in the next section.

2.3 Techniques and activities for teaching drama

Current theory in second language acquisition supports the assumption that drama activities can enhance communicative competence and thus facilitate language learning in general (Savignon, 1983). Using drama techniques, such as dialogues, storytelling, role-play, scenarios, simulation, and improvisation

in a second language classroom is not a new idea in second language classroom practice (Di Pietro, 1987; Holden, 1981; Maley & Duff, 1991; Smith, 1984). These are activities found in each approach or activities that can be used in the classroom (Table 2).

Table 2. Activities for PD and SI

| <i>PD</i> | PD and SI | Miscellaneous |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Hot Seat | | |
| Conscience Alley | Discussion and Brain-storming Improvisation | Situational Role-Play Simulation Debate |
| Tableaux (Still Image) | | |
| Thought-Tracking | | |
| Teacher-in-Role | | |
| Role on the Wall | | |

The column on the far left provides a list of activities or strategies that are primary associated with the PD approach. The central column provides additional drama activities that could be used in either approach but are not necessarily recognized as a strategy for either of the approaches. With these PD and SI approaches, each activity can be applied to classrooms as follows. These activities can be primarily carried out during the ‘rehearsal’ phases of each approach.

Improvisation

Improvisation is the expression of one's own thoughts and words in unrehearsed speech. This strategy is used in all drama activities and is the key ingredient to creating an English-based drama course. As Maurer (1997) says, “Improvisation is considered the fifth skill. In many ways, it is the most important because it is the real test of whether students can use what they have learned without being told exactly what to do or say.”

Hot Seat

“Hot Seat” is when a student remains in character and sits in a chair either in front of the class or a group as a character and is asked questions to have the questionee think about particular character more deeply. The student in the chair must answer the questions while acting and speaking as the character. (Ashton-Hay, 2005).

Conscience Alley

Conscience Alley is when two lines are formed to create an 'alley' and speak as a particular character's conscience when one student walks slowly through the “alley.” In this activity, it is encouraged that students create their comments before lining up to configure an “alley” (Ashton-Hay, 2005).

Tableaux

Tableaux is best described as a “frozen moment.” It involves students creating a frozen image with their bodies, particular facial expression, gestures and body position, to portray a dramatic moment (Hertzberg, 2003).

Thought-Tracking

Thought-tracking is when students make a still image and individuals are invited to speak their thoughts or feelings and teacher-in-role is when the teacher assumes a role in relation to the pupils (Farmer, 2010).

Role on the wall

Role on the wall is an outline of a body which is drawn on a large sheet of paper that is later stuck onto the wall. Afterwards, students create word or phrases describing the character and write directly onto the drawing (Farmer, 2010).

Situational Role-play

Situational Role-play begins with a situation in which the teacher presents specific vocabulary and language functions relating to the topic. Students are then given a detailed description of the situation and role cards with tasks included. A good example of this activity is students purchasing specific items at a local market (Sung, 2008).

Simulation

Simulation is easily defined as being oneself or someone else in a simulated real-life situation. The materials used to make the simulation should be as true to life as possible or realia (Wanyee, 1990). The benefits of adopting this technique include the realism of materials and tasks, personal involvement, and motivation. Language learners are encouraged to use the target language functionally and cohesively because they have roles, duties, and responsibilities within a structured situation involving problem-solving and decision-making.

Debate

Constructivist methodology is mainly characterized by the needs for students to solve problems collaboratively with sharing and explaining pre-existing knowledge, meaning that this kind of learning is best facilitated through expressing opinions to solve problems within groups. One such activity that strongly focuses on this aspect of Constructivist methodology is debate. The benefits include learning analytic thinking skills and forcing self-conscious reflection on the validity of one’s ideas (Nesbett, 2003). Also, students become more accustomed to expressing opinions in English (Fukuda, 2003). Krieger uses the outline below as a basis for ESL students learning debate (2005).

Table 3. Outline of Krieger's Debate

| Procedure | Teacher's Role | Student's Role |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Warm-up | -Prepare and guide students through a warm up activity | -Speak the L2 language to express their opinion |
| Teams | -Instruct students to create teams | -Form teams |
| Considering Resolutions | -Guide students through the process of choosing appropriate topics and the pro and con viewpoints | -Make a list of topics and the general pro view and the general con view. |
| Selecting Resolutions and Sides | -Guide students through the process of explaining their side by providing appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and phrases | -Discuss who is on the pro team and who is on the con team and choose best reasons to explain their side |
| Formal Debate Structure | -Help students with taking turns to share and express their opinions | -Each team introduces their topic and their arguments. Then they explain their second points |
| Creating Rebuttals | -Aid students in expressing their opinions or grammar during the break | -Teams are given a break to think of rebuttals for the opposite teams opinions and to summarize their own opinions |

The core of all these classroom activities are designed to model “real communication”—as opposed to drill-like, pseudo-communication which teachers and learners have been accustomed to (Savignon, 1983). It is argued that only through active interaction with people in the target language within meaningful contexts, second language learners can build up their communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Ko, 2012; Won, 2012), and therefore be able to use the language spontaneously and communicatively (Rivers, 1987; Savignon, 1983). Each of above activities engage students to interact with peers, thus requiring students to develop communicative competence.

3 Research Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were twenty college students enrolled in an ‘Interactive English’ course as an elective course at a university in Korea in 2013. Although the course was available to all students, most of the participants were freshmen because freshmen are given the opportunity to register for liberal arts courses first. The average TOEIC score of the students was 490 out of 990.

3.2 Instrument

The instruments for the study were the instructor's (one of the paper's authors) observation and the students' journals. Two questions were given: (1) What or what activities helped you? Why do you think so?; (2) What or what activities didn't help you? Why do you think so? The participants wrote their thoughts in their journals at the end of each class through the whole semester.

3.3 Procedure

The course was conducted by adopting the procedure and techniques for PD and SI for 15 weeks in the spring semester, 2013. An example of how a class was organized is given in Table 4 below. The topic was "The Princess and the Pea", a well-known fable within the western culture, the lesson was adapted from Sung's lesson (2008).

Table. 4 Description of Procedure for "The Princess and the Pea"

| Procedure | Teacher's Role | Student's Role |
|--|---|--|
| Warm-up | -Explain the objective and the general overview of the procedure for today's class - Instruct on narrating a fairy tale in a two minutes | - Prepare, and then narrate and act out a fairy tale of their choice in two minutes. |
| Presentation/ Framework: Reading and Language Practice | -Ask students to look at the title and brainstorm the plot of the story -Ask students to read -Explain the words chosen and difficult phrases | -Brainstorm and discuss what the story is about -Read the story in small groups -Circle words or phrases not familiar -Discuss words and meanings -Discuss the words circled |
| Activity A: Still Image & Thought Tracking | -Instruct the students how to do the activity -Circulate and supervise | -Discuss and create a still image in pairs -Present the still image (like a picture) |
| Activity C: Court Room | -Take on the role as one of the Jury -Explain to students beforehand that the people of the kingdom don't believe the princess is real -Review procedure for court room proceedings | -Take on roles of characters in the kingdom (for example: baker, farmers, sheep herder, attorneys, jury, etc.) -Allow the judge to proceed and start the ruling -Start proceedings to decide if princess is fake |
| Reflection | -Instruct students to decide if the princess is real or not -Instruct the students to write in their journals -Circulate and supervise | -Decide if the princess is a fake -Write their feelings and what they learned in their journals |

4 Results and Discussions

The teacher and the students play specific roles in a drama-oriented language classroom. What they do together in the classroom and how they perceive themselves as participants and /or learners in the drama activities are the focus of the inquiry of the present. According to the research questions, the perceptions of the researcher as well as the instructor and the participants were as follows.

4.1 What or what activities were helpful? Why do you think so?

The responses to the activities in the journals of the participants were as follows:

- I learned how to cooperate with people through games.
- Warm-up activity. So I gained self-confidence.
- I participated in debate and play. I thought more about English words.
- I like group activity but not too many people in one group. It helped me to get to know each other and this makes easier to participate in class.
- Debate. We have to make sentence quickly to fight, so it is helpful.
- Debate helped me to speak full sentences and think about reasons to refute.
- Coin activity helped me use the brain.
- Fruit Basket and Café Talk. They were good because we strive to understand each other through various games and questions and answer activities.
- Conversation, because I need a chance to speak English.
- Discussion activities helped my English skills.
- Idioms. I got new knowledge.
- Preparing story is good for listening.
- Homework. We have to debate with team members for homework.

Overall responses to the drama class were as follows.

- I know that I can communicate with others using English.
- I used to be afraid of speaking in English, but the activities made me active and less shy.
- I learned that I can talk in English, even if it's not good.
- During the class, I must speak English and my English skill is increasing.
- I gain confidence when I understand my partner, even though I can't understand all of the conversation.

- This class is very beneficial because I speak and listen in English for all three hours.

The feedback given by the instructor is as follows;

- Doing drama games and bonding activities I noticed create a sense of safety for the students. Today's activity was Fruit Basket. Students were assigned a different fruit and had to try to switch seats with another student. However there was one chair short, so the student who was left standing had to call out a fruit and then that student had to try to sit in an empty chair. Another activity used today was the Spider Web. Students grabbed another classmates' hand with their left and a different students hand with their right. Then the class was instructed to untangle themselves anyway possible without letting go of their hands, all while speaking English. They seem to laugh and talk to people they normally wouldn't, thus enabling them to use English more freely in the classroom without the sense of being judged.
- Having students improvise a skit at the end of class was really hard for them to do in the beginning. They didn't know how to end the skit or would get stuck in the discussion and didn't know what else to say. By the end of the course, students were able to argue and solve problems in English and compensated their lack of English with body language and asking other students for help. Their ability to think quickly in English and engage in conversation quickly has greatly improved.

The responses reflect the rationale of using drama activities in language learning in the aspect that it creates a psychologically safe environment. The case being that when a student is playing a role, the burden of committing mistakes in the language has been taken away because one is not oneself, thus feeling more free to express oneself without judgment. Through the students' feedback from the journals, it was found that the bonding activities for warm-up and team building reduce inhibition, increase spontaneity in fluency, and enhance motivation. In addition, guided activities for debate and discussion were beneficial for listening and speaking practice according to the instructor's observations.

4.2 What or what activities didn't help you? Why do you think this?

Compared to the number of responses to the first research question, only a few responses were provided to the second research question, which are as follows:

- Blocking activity. Most people didn't understand it and it was boring.
- Painting is not helpful.

- Making poster. Because I can't draw well.
- I want to make long sentences. I spoke only short English.
- I don't make sentences well.

The feedback given by the instructor is as follows:

- When presenting element of drama skills into the preview stage, it became too complicated. Students became too concerned with the elements of drama instead of using the language. For example, when teaching the students about blocking (where one should stand on stage to symbolize rank or position), students became obsessed with where to stand instead of using English. Just introducing blocking or a drama skill at the beginning of class might have been a better approach, so students can feel more freedom to focus more on communicating.
- From the journals collected from the students, I've noticed that students would prefer me to explain all the activities that we will be doing and what are expected to do during the class. Whereas, I'd explain one activity at time so students wouldn't get overwhelmed. For example, after reading a Shel Silverstein poem, I'd explain the first activity and then expect students to do the activity which might be thought tracking. Then with the characters in thought tracking, students will have to create an improvisation for the class. I noticed if I explained this in the beginning, students were more thoughtful in creating characters and transition times between activities were reduced; because students did not want to change their characters or situation.

The above responses indicate the disadvantages of the activities understood by students, which implies that guided activities are needed for effective debate and discussion activities.

Figure 1 below shows an outline of a class put together by incorporating the various approaches and activities through the review of literature and perceptions of the instructor and students.

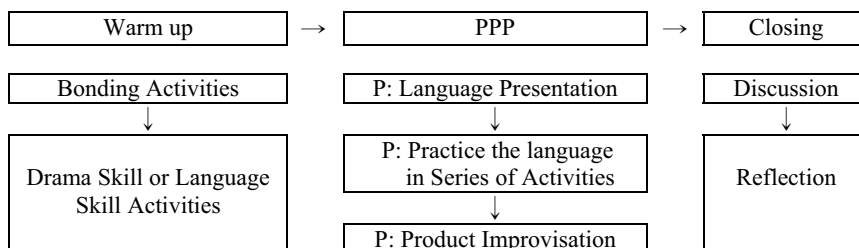


Figure 1. A model for drama course

The chart above is a diagram of a basic procedure for a drama based English course based upon the reviewed literature, feedback from students, and feedback from the instructor. The model uses both PD and SI elements, which are further discussed below.

At the beginning of each class is warm up, which consists of two stages; bonding activities and then drama/language skill activities. The bonding activity should focus on cooperative learning and social interaction. The drama/language skill activity should focus on practicing or learning a drama related skill or a language skill. Some examples of such drama skills that can be focused on are projecting one's voice, pronunciation, articulation etc.

The second part of the class is 'PPP'. It is composed of three stages: presentation, practice and production. The first part is the presentation of the language, where the instructor introduces the topic/situation and elicits or teaches language functions and vocabulary that is required for the lesson. The second stage is practice, which is composed of a series of activities. The instructor provides about two to three different drama activities that require students to discuss and explore different points of view in regards to the topic or situation and to use the language presented in different ways. These activities are always done in pairs and groups.

The final stage is production, in which students create an improvisation. Students are given instruction to create a three to four minute improvisation using the day's lesson topic or theme as inspiration. Students practice and then present their improvisation to the class. No scripts are used in the process, only improvisational skills. It is important to note, after students prepare and practice each activity done in the 'PPP' stage that they are expected to present their work in front of the class. This is synonymous with the SI approach.

The last part of the model is the closing, which is made up of two stages. The first step is discussion, meaning the instructor asks students what characters they saw and what these characters' motivations were. Also, at this time the instructor goes over any difficulties students had with pronunciation and vocabulary during the 'P.P.P' stage. The next stage is Reflection in which students are instructed to write their opinions and feelings in their journals and what they learned by writing in their notebooks. The notebooks are collected so the teacher is provided some feedback as to what students have gained or not gained by the lesson. Even though this research was for a drama-based EFL course, one might find it useful to teach debating skills at the beginning of the course or as a language/drama skill.

5 Conclusion

The goal for this research was to explore drama techniques, activities and approaches that could be used in a university drama course that would enhance students speaking and listening skills. The study showed that a blend of approaches and a variety of techniques that have been used globally

among the EFL community were suggested, bonding activities for warm-up and team building, discussion and debate activities for understanding language function, creating a scenario, improvisation and activities for presentation.

The present research as a pilot study is limited in its generalization as a result of the small number of participants. This pinpoints the need to replicate the present study with greater number of students. Also, future research should examine quantitative as well as qualitative results. While more research remains to be done, it is hoped that the results reported here offer a contribution for the next experimental research.

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