Implementing Drama-based Group Projects for Developing Students' Spoken Intercultural Competence:
Teachers' Practices and Perceptions at Constantine 1 University

اعتماد بيداغوجيا المشاريع الجماعية القائمة على الدراما لتطوير الكفاءة الثقافية المنطوقة لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية:

ممارسات وتصورات الأساتذة بجامعة قسنطينة1

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Article abstract:

The current paper aims at getting insights into EFL teachers' practices and perceptions regarding the implementation of drama-based group projects for developing students' spoken intercultural competence. A descriptive quantitative method has been adopted using a teacher questionnaire as a data collection tool. The findings reveal that most of the teachers do not employ drama-oriented group projects in their speaking class in spite of the fact that the majority hold positive perceptions of the viability of incorporating drama-based group projects into EFL classes. Finally, some recommendations are suggested to address the shortcomings.

Keywords: drama-based group projects; spoken intercultural competence; teachers' perceptions; teachers' practices, higher education.

ملخص المقال:

يهدف هذا المقال إلى الكشف عن ممارسات وتصورات أساتذة قطاع التعليم العالي فيما يخص اعتماد بيداغوجيا المشاريع الجماعية القائمة على الدراما. ولقد تم اعتماد المنهج الوصفي الكمي باستخدام استبيان للأساتذة اعتمادا على مقياس 'ليكرت'. خلصت النتائج إلى أن معظم الأساتذة لا يستخدمون المشاريع الجماعية القائمة على الدراما عند تدريسهم لمقياس المهارات الشفهية علما أن الأغلبية لديهم تصورات ايجابية حول نجاعة هذه المشاريع كوسيلة لتعزيز الكفاءة التواصلية المنطوقة عبر مختلف الثقافات في الفصول الدراسية للغة الانجليزية. في الأخير تم تقديم مجموعة من التوصيات من أجل تدارك النقائص الملحوظة.

كلمات مفتاحية: المشاريع الجماعية القائمة على الدراما، الكفاءة التواصلية المنطوقة، تصورات الأساتذة، ممارسات الأساتذة، التعليم العالي.

Introduction

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Twenty-first century classes are designated for their advocacy of autonomous, self- regulated learning as a novel trend of teaching and learning emerged in alignment with student-centered pedagogy (Begum, 2019). Today's EFL classes are no longer made up to prepare linguistically competent speakers of the language; they are directed to cultivate intercultural competence that would enable students to move their skills and competences to respond with much elasticity and feasibility across-cultures(Bennett, 2015).In this regard, EFL classes integrate drama-based group projects as an innovative orientation towards enhancing spoken intercultural competence which effectively elevates intercultural understanding of verbal as well as non-verbal facets of the target culture. Thus, drama-based group projects that revolve around thematic selection of realistic, cultural-based situations help students activate a repertoire of several elements, namely knowledge, skills and attitudes to enhance their readiness to be interculturally competent speakers.

Beatty (2015) ascertains that drama offers access to authentic use of language across real-life situations in which speakers interact naturally in mutual, in time and unplanned natural communications. Consequently, drama has the capacity to co-create authentic contexts for learners to learn and practice spoken language as an interactive medium, rather than a set of segments and utterances. Literary works such as drama, as Cruz (2010) explains, provides an abundance of authentic materials that represent spoken language and cultural enhancement. In other words, drama as a literary work can be executed for instruction to intensify communicative competence and cultural disclosure of the target language.

The current research attempts to answer questions which are pertinent to the teachers' practices and perceptions with regard to the implementation of drama-based group projects in the speaking class. Three fundamental questions are raised:

– Do the Oral Expression teachers under study employ drama-oriented group projects in their speaking class?
– How do they implement drama-based group projects in their teaching of the oral skills?
– How do the teachers perceive the integration of drama-oriented group projects into their speaking class so as to enhance learners' spoken intercultural competence?

A theoretical background of the present study is provided, with focused spotlight on the key concepts and the role which drama-oriented group projects play in reinforcing learners' spoken intercultural competence.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence:

An era of intercultural exchange has typified the modern trends of foreign language education through which diligent interaction encompasses one's ability to interact both linguistically and culturally with people from other cultures (Deardorff, 2020). Various scholarly works were published in relation with intercultural competence. Nonetheless, the concept itself remains vague and ill-defined among scholars and across the various models developed in regard. One of the most influential figures in the realm of intercultural communication is Byram who developed the concept of *intercultural communicative competence* (Byram, 1997). He argues that various dimensions, or what he maintains through his model as the five "*saviors*" (namely "knowledge", "skills of interpreting and relating", in addition to "skills of discovery and interaction", "attitudes" and "critical cultural awareness")overlap to expand intercultural competence. Byram(1997) extendedHymes(1972) model of communicative competence and Van Ek's(1986) sociocultural competence to broaden the significance of societal contributors in appropriate and effective communication.

Fantini (2006) depicts the concept of intercultural competence as that whole set of binding capabilities required to act appropriately and effectively while interacting with speakers who own different linguistic and cultural systems distant from one's speech community. Accordingly, speakers of the target culture are required to acknowledge both divergent and convergent perspectives and views of both the local and target culture to prompt intercultural understanding of the dichotomy of "the Self" and "the Other" in context (Zhu, 2014). Speakers are stipulated to acquire a spectrum of affective and cognitive skills to interact smoothly and indulgently in various intercultural interactions (Facione,2015). Furthermore, effectiveness entails one's perception of the culture to be learnt as an outsider and a distinct performer, while appropriateness is related to one's performance as part of the learnt culture. Based on what has been stated earlier, intercultural competence refers to a multifaceted process with various elements that cumulatively supply the development of intercultural competence as an amalgamation of knowledge and attitudinal understanding as well as skills activated during action (Council of Europe, 2014).

Intercultural competence has been conceptualized in various theoretical models and frameworks. For the current study, the researcher has opted for Byram's model which includes the five "*saviors*" or what Byram (1997) identifies as follows:

- Knowledge ("*saviors*"): This entails acquaintance with social and cultural groups. it includes knowledge of their artifacts, behaviours and societal norms of interaction among the target interlocutors;
- Skills of interpreting and relating ("*savoir comprendre*"), including the ability to culturally identifications, providingexplanatory understanding in conjunction with data or actions from one's own culture;
- Skills of discovery and interaction ("*savoir apprendre/faire*") which enable a person to gain knowledge of relevant cultural practices, in addition to one's ability to execute such knowledge, attitudes and skills within interactive real communication regardless time constraints;
- Attitudes ("*savoir être*"),including inquisitiveness and openness, willingness to dangle erroneous beliefs about one's home culture and its counterpart learnt culture;
- Critical cultural awareness("*savoir s'engager*"), referring to the capability of rationalassessment of beliefs, behavioursand products of one's home culture and that of other cultures and countries according to a clear set of identified criteria.

1.2 The Role of Drama-based Group Projects in Sustaining Learners' Spoken Intercultural Competence:

With the significant advance of active, interactive learning, traditional methods have been altered to endorse a process of collaborative learning via which learners are often highly engaged in a process of constructing and learning, rather than passively receiving knowledge. Drama-based group projects has become an omnipresent tendency in EFL classes as instructors lean to mimic real life contexts and bring them alive.Boulton (1968) states that drama is not mere literary work; it is rather the literature that can exhibit real talk.Such a tendency towards the implementation of drama transcends the classical theatrical description of the technique to a pedagogical approach which Verriour(1994)describes as an attempt to generate an imaginary portrayal of the world through which learners play diverse characters to investigate cultural issues that are appealing to them. Drama-based group projects are deployed as a process that necessitates logic and inquisitiveness that would lead to aesthetic pleasure and joyfulness.

Implementing drama-based group projects is advantageous and beneficial according to many scholars who have outlined the potential feasibility of deploying drama-based activities in EFL speaking classes (Barakat, 2023).Godfrey (2010) asserts the feasibility of drama-based learning as he argues that drama is a dynamic approach that surpasses language conventions to encompass societal communication and cross-cultural interaction beyond language precincts. Participating in drama as a fabricated context enables the participants to be familiarized with a communal moment of immersion that reflects inner sentiments, body language, such as facial expressions, movements, motions and a sensitive consciousness of different others that would not have been depicted outside a drama-based milieu. In other words, drama grants a resourceful social experience that involves students to share their inner feelings and maintain a realistic exposure to non-verbal signs and cues while using the language in context. Therefore, drama-based learning fosters interpersonal and intrapersonal growth which can be notified through a fictitious context.

Furthermore, drama-based learning evokes students' ability to think creatively and critically as it applies an inquiry-based approach through which learners are challenged to come out with a deeper understanding of intercultural issues and interpersonal communication norms via fabricated life-like situations. Drama, hence, is used in language teaching to ease the process of acquiring meaningful and smooth interaction in the target language with a consequential absorption of prosodic features and pronunciation in a communicative mode (Boudreault, 2010). It is also seen as a container of fully contextualized vocabulary and structures required to acquire the language in context (Wessels, 1987).

2. Methodology

2.1 Methods and Materials:

The present sample is based on a sample of thirteen teachers of oral skills at the Department of English, Faculty of Languages, Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University. They were selected randomly during the academic year 2023-2024.They taught oral skills at various levels: first year, second year, third year and first-year Master.

In order to explore the teachers' practices and perceptions as regards implementing drama-based group projects in the speaking class for fostering students' spoken intercultural competence, a descriptive quantitative method has been opted for. As far as the data collection instrument is concerned, a Teacher Questionnaire (See the Appendix) has been used. The latter consists of fourteen closed-ended questions, divided into three major sections:

- Section One: Background Information;
- Section Two: Teachers' Practices with Regard to Drama-based Group Projects Integration into Teaching Speaking; and
- Section Three: Teachers' Perceptions of Incorporating Drama-based Group Projects into Their Teaching of Speaking.

The questionnaire provides a variety of options, reflecting nuances ranged between "*Strongly disagree*" to "*Strongly agree*" with a mid-point option of "Neither agree, nor disagree" to account for neutral responses. The scale also takes into consideration the respondents' practices via a psychometric measurement of the variation of frequency with reversing nuances between "*Never*" and "*Always*". Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the data gathered is analyzed quantitatively via the use of JASP 2019(standing for Jeffreys' Amazing Statistics Program: an open-source software for statistical analysis).

2.2 Results and Discussion:

The results of the current investigation are analyzed and discussed in relevance to the aforementioned three sections.

2.2.1. Section One: Background Information

This part of the questionnaire (1-2) attempts to provide basic information about the respondents' background including their gender and teaching experience.
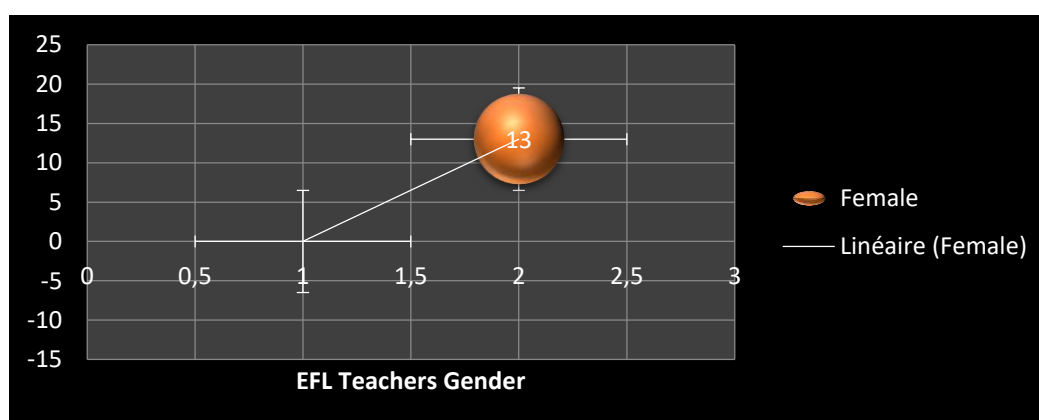
Figure 1: Participants' Gender

Figure1 exhibits the gender of the EFL teachers who participated in answering the online questionnaire. The findings from a sample size of 13 EFL teachers, consisting entirely of female participants, offer valuable insights into the perspectives and behaviors of this specific homogenous demographic population. Besides, the scrutiny of the responses will help uncover potential insights into the informants' practices and perceptions, shedding light on the factors that may influence their decision-making processes. It is worth mentioning that the small size of the sample may enable a more in-depth analysis, facilitating a deeper understanding of individual practices and perspectives. However, with such a small sample size, the potential generalizability of the results might be limited.

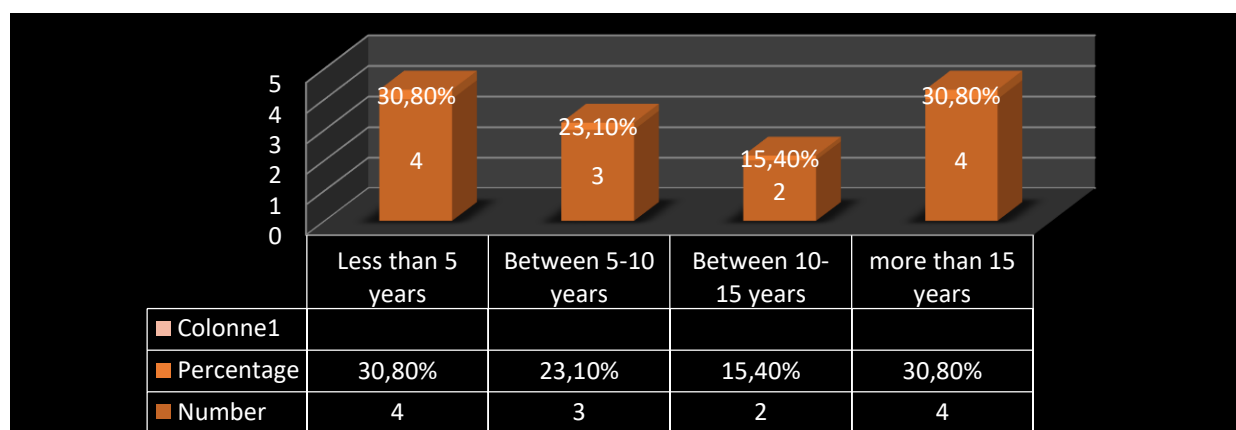**Figure2: Participants' Teaching Experience**

Figure 2 displays the informants' teaching experience, ranging between less than five years to more than fifteen years of teaching of speaking skills at the Department of English regardless of the level; 30.80 % of the respondents have an experience of more than 15 years of teaching. An equivalent portion of 30.80 % of teachers has less than five years of teaching. 23.10% represents those who have an experience of less than ten years of teaching followed by 15.4% who have an experience of more than ten years of teaching.

2.2.2. Section Two: Teachers' Practices with Regard to Drama-based Group Projects Integration into Teaching Speaking

The second section of the teacher questionnaire (Items 3–8) aims at answering the subsequent two research questions:
– Do the Oral Expression teachers under study employ drama-oriented group projects in their speaking class?
– How do they implement drama-based group projects in their teaching of the oral skills?

Figure 3: Frequency of Incorporating Drama-based Group Projects in Speaking Class
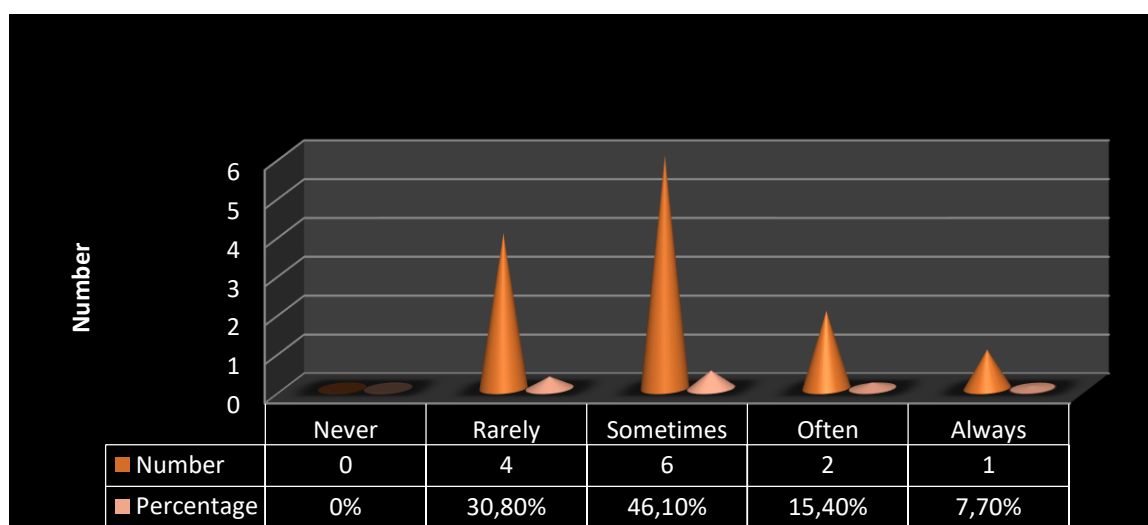
Interestingly, the data presented in Figure 3 indicates varying levels of drama-based group project implementation at the targeted Department/institution. The largest part of the respondents;46.20%, reported that these projects are incorporated "sometimes", implying a moderate frequency of

utilization. Besides, a proportion of 30.80% reported rare integration, indicating that drama-based projects are not a common occurrence in speaking classes. Only a minority of 15.40% said they "often" incorporate such projects in their speaking class. This distribution of responses suggests a spectrum of teaching methodologies in EFL speaking classes, with the biggest part of the teachers embracing such drama-based group projects less often than others.

Figure4: Frequency of Implementing Culturally Thematic Extending Drama-based Group Projects into Speaking Class

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Number	3	2	4	4	0
■ Percentage	23,1	15,4	30,8	30,8	0%
■ Colonne1					
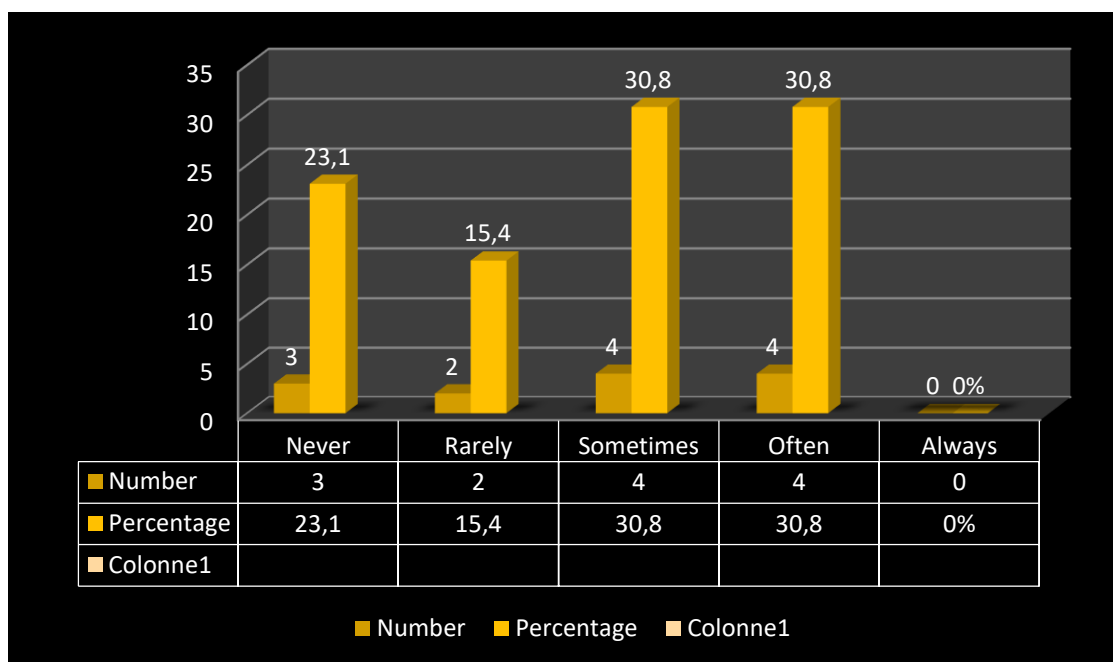
In fact, Figure 4 indicates the frequency of implementing culturally thematic extending drama-based group projects during teachers' speaking classes. It reveals that a significant portion, comprising approximately 61.60%, either "sometimes" or "often" incorporate these projects into their teaching classes. Consequently, a noteworthy implementation towards utilizing drama-based group projects to explore cultural themes within speaking classes and oral competencies. The absence of instances where such projects are always implemented could imply that while they are valued as a pedagogical tool, there might be constraints or variability in their applicability or effectiveness across different teaching contexts. However, it is encouraging to see that none of the respondents reported never implementing these projects, indicating recognition of their potential educational value. Overall, the results imply a moderate level of the teachers' engagement with culturally thematic extending drama-based group projects.

Figure 5: Raising Awareness of Culturally Related Nonverbal Prompts Via Drama-based Projects
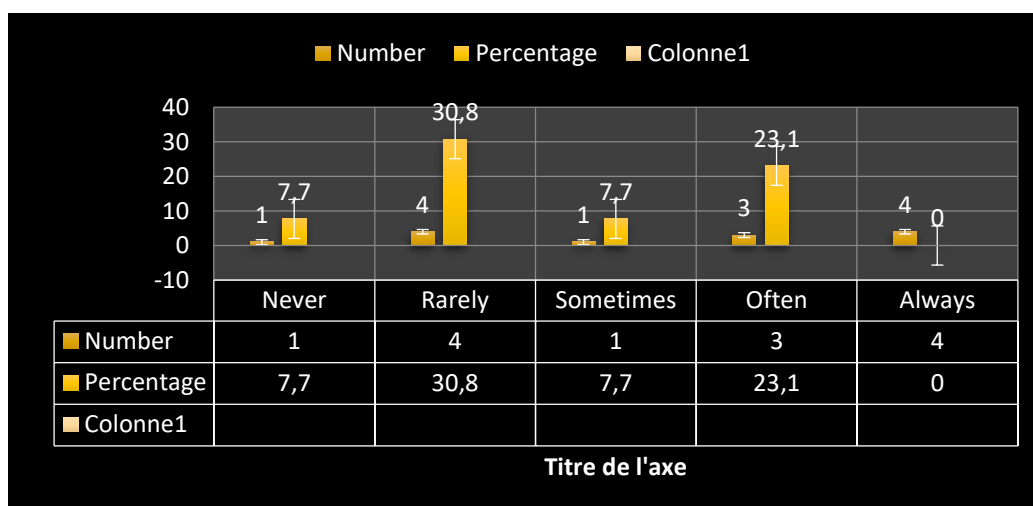
Remarkably, a notable proportion of EFL teachers (a total of 61.60%) either "often" or "always" incorporate drama-based projects to raise awareness of culturally related nonverbal cues as well as to maximize spoken cultural/intercultural competencies. This indicates recognition of the value of integrating practical, experiential learning by employing methods for enhancing EFL students' understanding and proficiency in non-verbal communication. It is worth noting, however, the presence of responses indicating rare or occasional utilization, suggesting that while there is acknowledgment of the significance of these cues, there might be varying levels of emphasis or consistency in their implementation across different teaching environments. These results suggest a promising trend towards the integration of drama-based projects to address culturally related non-verbal cues in speaking classes, with some variability in the extent of implementation.

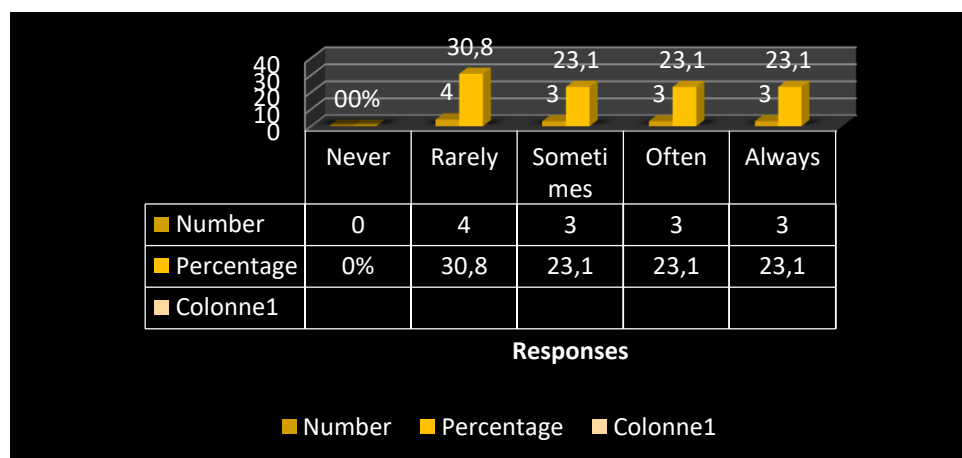**Figure 6: Raising Students' Awareness of the Spoken Language Norms While Performing Final Drama Acts**

Figure 6 suggests that while a significant proportion of the teachers said they "sometimes", "often" or "always" raise their students' awareness to the spoken language norms during learners' final drama acts, there is still a significant percentage who do so "rarely" or "never".

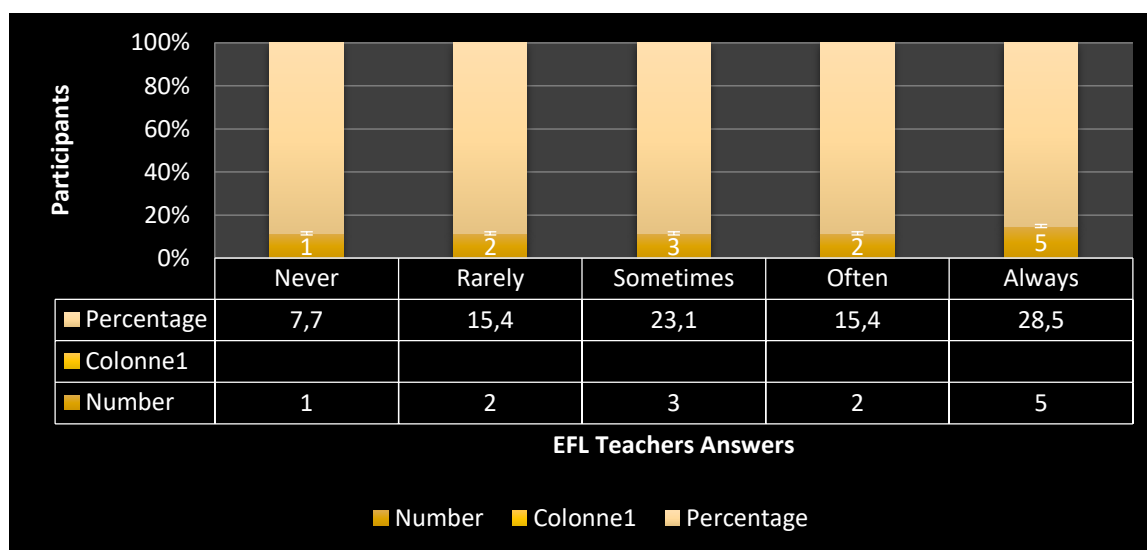**Figure 7: Students' Group work for Performing Drama-based Projects**

Figure 7indicates the distribution of responses regarding the encouragement of learner group work to perform drama-based projects.38.50%of the teachers said they "always" encourage students to work in groups in order to perform their drama-based projects. Additionally, 23.10% noted that group work is "sometimes" encouraged, while 15.40% "often". Interestingly, 07.70% stated that group work is "never" encouraged in their implementation of drama-based projects. While this percentage is relatively low, compared to the other ones, it still highlights a minority's viewpoint that may warrant further exploration or consideration. The results underscore the significance of promoting collaborative group work in the context of drama-based projects.

Figure 8: Encouraging Students to Play Cultural Roles in Speaking
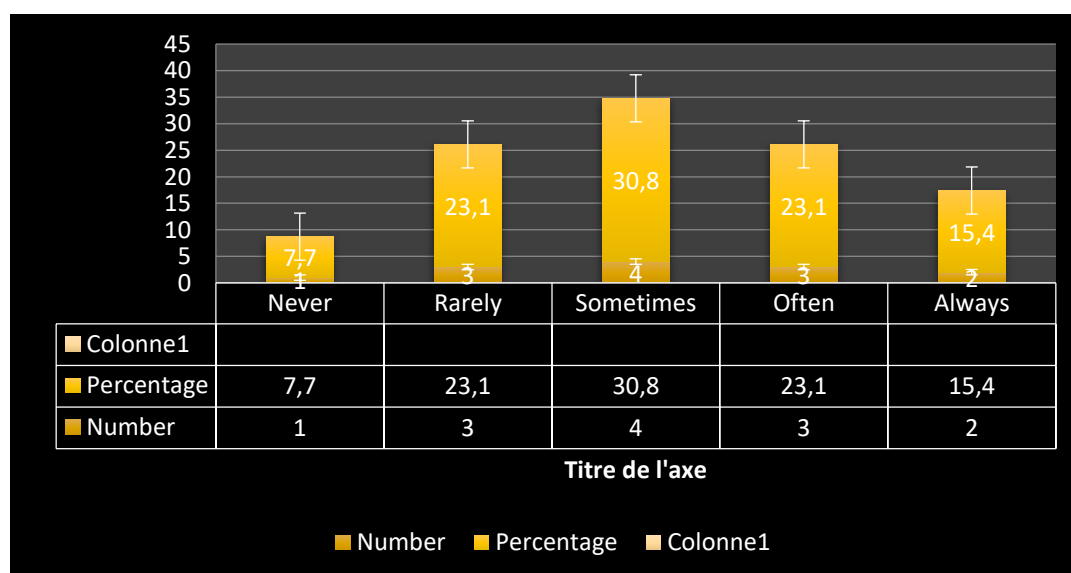
Results in Figure 8 reflect varied practices as regards encouraging EFL students to act out different cultural roles during speaking classes. While a minority of the respondents (07.70%) said that this encouragement "never" occurs, 30.80% indicated that they "sometimes" do encourage students to play cultural roles. The most common responses fall into the categories of "Sometimes" (30.80%) and "Rarely" (23.10%), suggesting that while cultural role-playing is occasionally integrated into

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EL MIEYAR

ISSN: 1112–4377, EISSN: 2588–2384

المجلد: 29   العدد 2.السنة 2025

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speaking classes, it is not a consistent practice. Additionally, a remarkable percentage of the teachers (23.10%) reported that such encouragement occurs "often". The results suggest a mixed approach to fostering cultural role-playing in speaking classes.

2.2.3. Section Three: Teachers' Perceptions of Incorporating Drama-based Group Projects into Their Teaching of Speaking

The last section of the questionnaire (Items 9–14) endeavours to provide answers to the following research question: How do the teachers under investigation perceive the integration of drama-oriented group projects into their speaking class so as to enhance learners' spoken intercultural competence?

Figure 9: Drama-based Group Projects as a Feasible Method

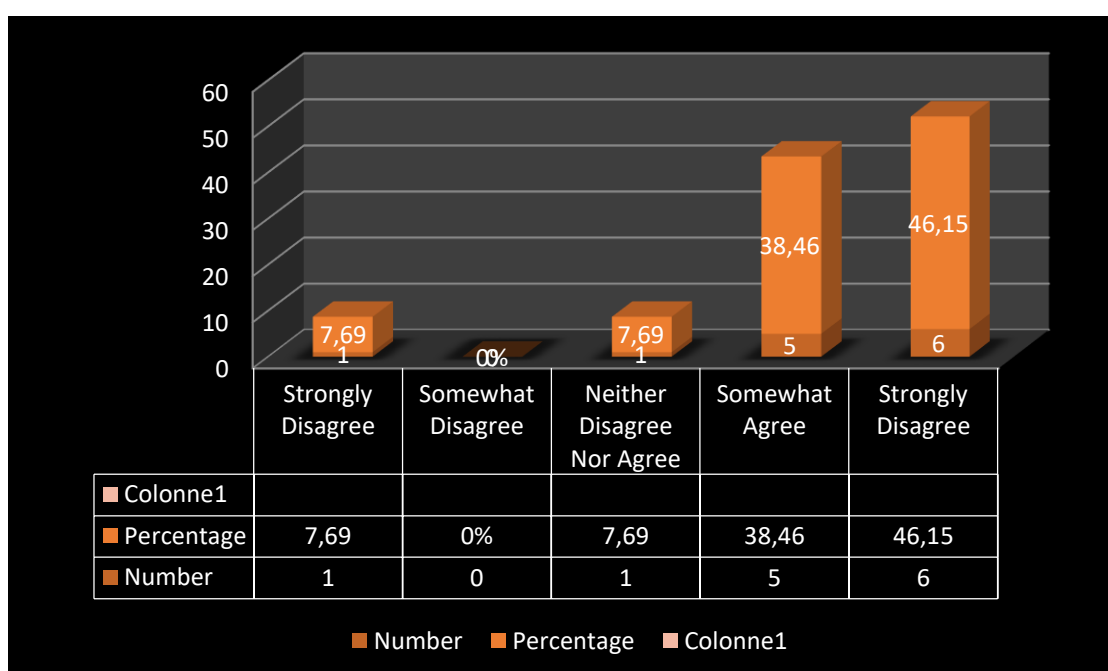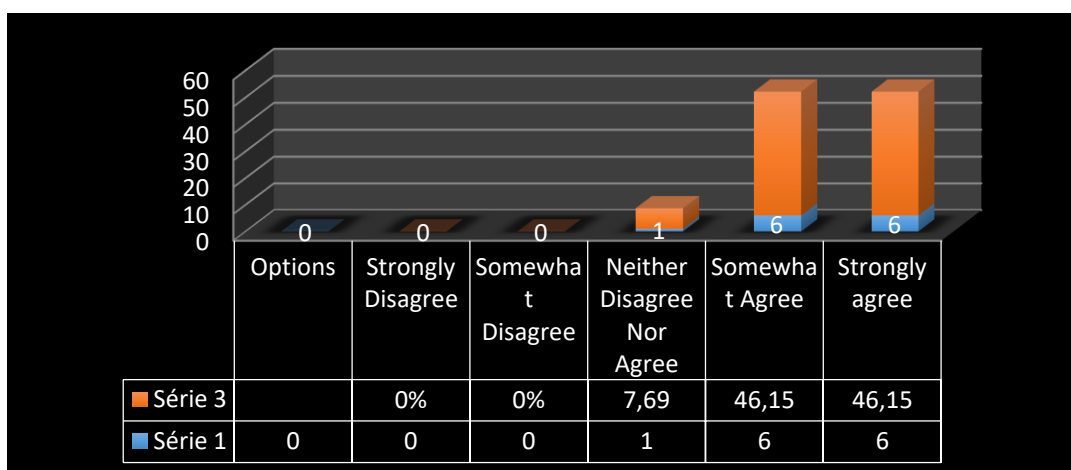|	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Disagree
Colonne1					
Percentage	7,69	0%	7,69	38,46	46,15
Number	1	0	1	5	6

Figure 9 demonstrates various perspectives on the utility of drama-based group projects in fostering EFL students' spoken intercultural competence. While 38.46% somewhat agrees with the notion, a slightly smaller percentage (30.77%) either strongly disagrees or disagrees. A minority of 07.69% neither disagrees nor agrees, suggesting uncertainty or neutrality. The results suggest that the majority of the teachers perceive drama-based group projects as beneficial for improving spoken intercultural competence, hence the need for implementing such a method on a larger scale by Oral skills teachers.

Figure10: Drama-based Group Projects Modelling Culturally Authentic Experiences

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ISSN: 1112-4377, EISSN: 2588-2384

المجلد: 29   العدد: 2.السنة 2025

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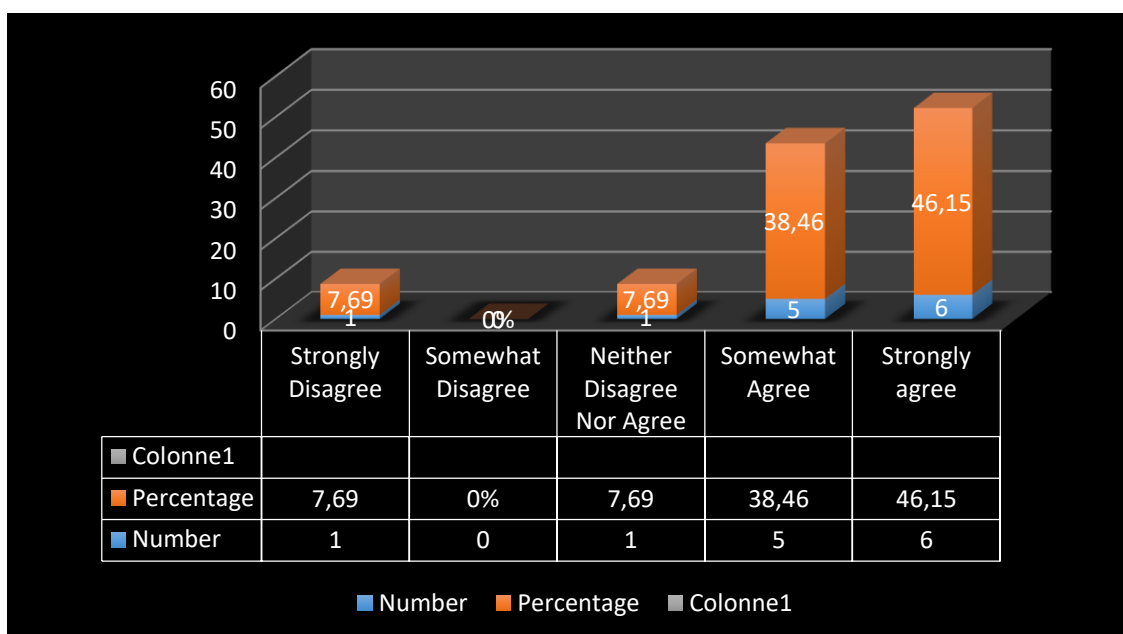
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Interestingly, the results show a clear divide in opinions regarding whether drama-based group projects accurately model culturally authentic experiences for Oral Expression university teachers. While a significant percentage (46.15%) somewhat agree with the notion, an equal proportion strongly agree (46.15%). No teacher expresses outright disagreement, but a minority (07.69%) remains neutral. This implies a need for further investigation and discussion to better understand the efficacy of drama-based group projects in representing cultural experiences.

Figure11: Role of Drama-based Group Projects in Fostering Verbal and Non-verbal Facets of the Target Culture
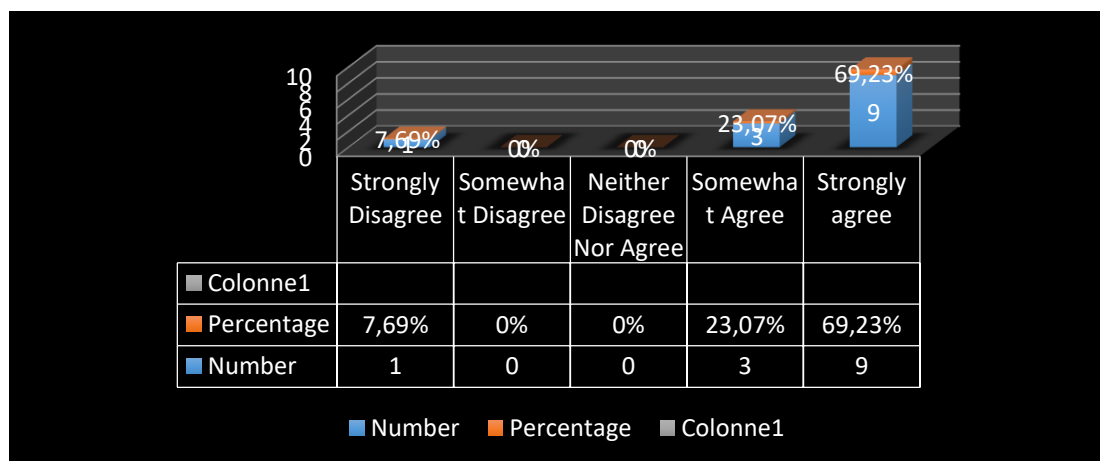

Results demonstrated in Figure 11 highlight significant attitudes towards the fact that drama-based group projects enhance both verbal and non-verbal facets of the target culture in context, with the largest part of the informants (69.23%) strongly agree. Only a minority (23.07%) somewhat agree, while no teacher expressed neutrality. This suggests a prevailing doubt among this minority regarding the effectiveness of such projects in facilitating cultural understanding through both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Figure 12: Drama-based Group Projects for Broadening Students' Cultural Perspectives

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ISSN: 1112-4377, EISSN: 2588-2384

المجلد: 29   العدد 2.السنة 2025

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In fact, the results presented in Figure12demonstrate the informants' perspectives on whether drama-based group projects broaden EFL students' perspectives on different cultures. While 38.46% of the teachers somewhat agree, a larger percentage (46.15%) strongly disagree. A minority of 07.69% neither disagrees, nor agrees. This suggests uncertainty among these teachers regarding the effectiveness of drama-based projects in expanding students' cultural understanding; however, it remains a very limited part of the participants.

Figure13: Role of Drama-based Group Projects in Increasing Learners' Collaboration
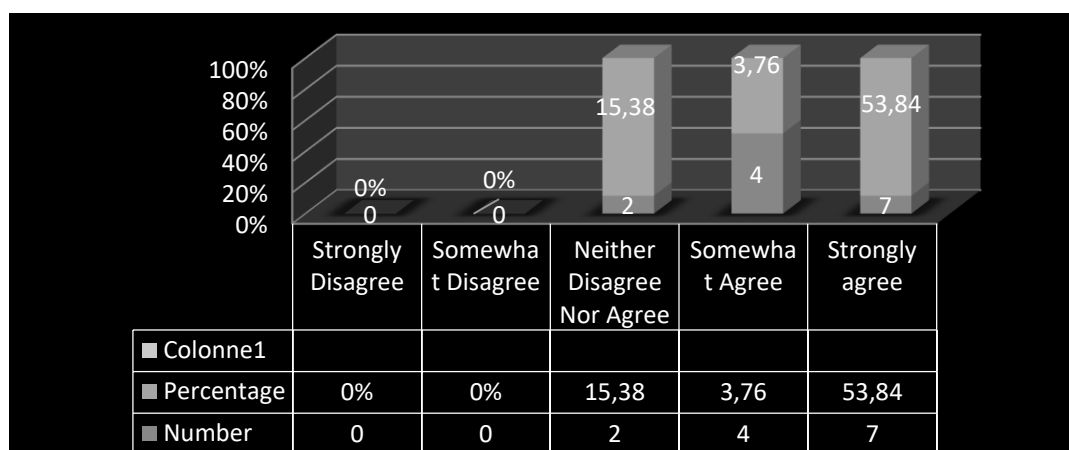
While a minority of 3.76% somewhat agree with the statement, more than the half (53.84%) strongly agree on the fact that drama-based group projects reinforce the spirit of collaboration in students. A smaller fraction (15.38%) neither disagrees nor agrees, indicating some uncertainty. Despite such results, there is a necessity for further exploration of such a pedagogical method.

Figure14: Role of Drama-based Group Projects in Improving Students' Active and Interactive Learning
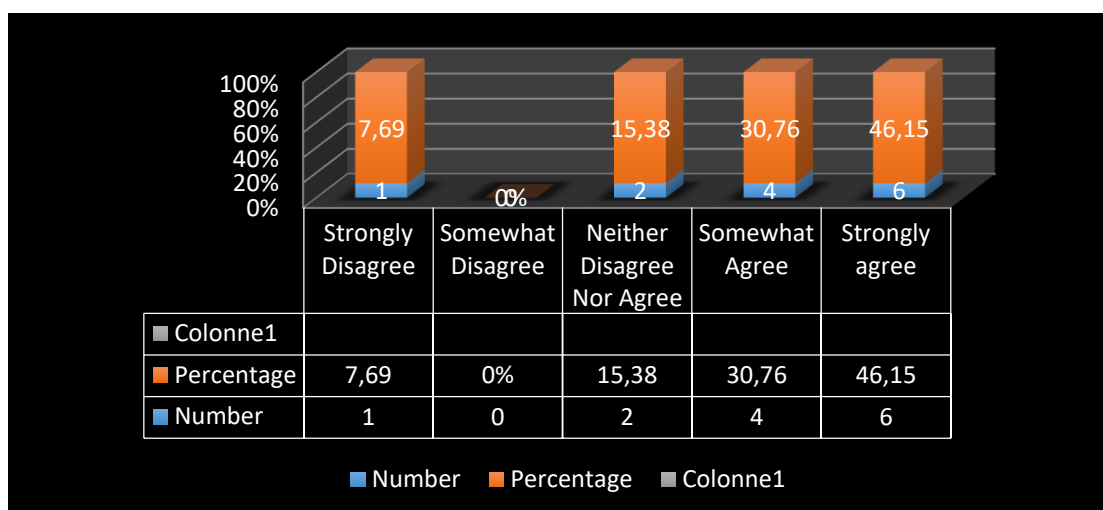
مجلة المعيار
EL MIEYAR

ISSN: 1112–4377, EISSN: 2588–2384
المجلد:29   العدد 2.السنة 2025

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	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly agree
■ Colonne1					
■ Percentage	7,69	0%	15,38	30,76	46,15
■ Number	1	0	2	4	6

■ Number   ■ Percentage   ■ Colonne1

Figure 14indicates that whilst 30.76%of the teachers under investigation "somewhat agree" that drama-based group projects foster students' active and interactive learning, a larger percentage of 46.15% "strongly agree". Only a minority (15.38%) neither disagrees nor agrees, suggesting some uncertainty.

Generally speaking, the present study has shed light on the teachers' inconsistent practices regarding the use of drama-based group projects in their speaking classes. It has also helped gain insights into the teachers'positive perceptions of the use of the targeted method (drama-based group projects) for fostering students' spoken intercultural competence. The findings contribute tomore comprehension of the intricacies encountered in implementing drama-based group projects inEFL speaking classes. They also highlight the requisites for constant support and qualified training for teachers in this particular area.

3. Implications of the Study:

Teaching English as a foreign language has stretched beyond the process of teaching the complex system of rules that govern language use and usage to clinch learners' intercultural communicative competence as advocated by Byram(1997). The process stipulates one's ability to use language effectively when interacting with different speakers with diversified cultural orientations. In this regard, teachers in higher education are expected to promote students' cultural authenticity. They could emphasize the inevitability of developing students' intercultural and interactional abilities through the incorporation of drama-based group projects. This active and interactive paradigm has been acknowledged for its utility in creating a meaningful experience for students to explore intercultural encounters through a mimic of authentic real situations in which a set of verbal and non-verbal prompts are carefully selected to overcome any potential cultural hurdles or misunderstandings.

The fabricated persona in drama-based group projects broadens students' ability to think critically and creatively beyond language boundaries. Drama-based group projects can boost students' self-esteem andlower their anxiety of utilizing the foreign language impulsively (Royka, 2002).Drama-oriented tasks have also proven to prompt collaborative leaning. Learnersneed to be equipped with a set of interpersonal and social skills required in twenty-first century classes.

The optimal integration of drama-based group projects providesstudents with opportunities to explore divergent identitiesand develop their capacity for empathy and tolerance. Fostering students' spoken intercultural competence through drama-based group projects is imperative for preparing them for intercultural engagement and global citizenship. In other words, drama-based learning as a student-oriented pedagogy provides immersive experiences that enable students to steer diverse cultural contexts with much suppleness and self-confidence.Ulas (2008) postulatesthat the active involvementof students in collaborative drama-based projects would not only shore up their language skillbut also equipthem with valuable insights into cultural nuances, fostering empathy and efficient verbal and non-verbal communication across cultural boundaries.

Conclusion:

The current paper represents a scrupulous attempt to examine teachers' tangible practices in regard of implementing drama-based tasks through students' collaborative projects. It also aims to gain understanding of their perceptions of using drama-based group projects in EFL classes to enhance students' spoken intercultural competence. In this context, the study reveals the noticeable discrepancy between teachers' perception of the effectiveness of drama-based group projects as a teaching method to be deployed and their real adaption of the approach. Most of the Oral Expression teachers at Constantine1 Frères Mentouri University surmise that drama-based group projects as a student-oriented pedagogy provides immersive experiences that enable students to steer diverse cultural contexts with much suppleness and self- confidence. They further assume that drama helps to create a meaningful experience for students to explore intercultural encounters through a mimic of authentic real situations in which a set of verbal and non-verbal prompts are carefully selected to overcome any potential cultural hurdles or misunderstanding.Yet, a minority of instructors do actually engage students in culturally thematic drama-based group projects. The apparent reluctance of teachers to adapt drama tasks might be due to lack of adequate understanding of the significance of the approach in promoting collaborative skills alongside creativity and critical thinking beyond language boundaries.

In this regard, it is significant to note that teaching English as a foreign language has stretched beyond the process of teaching the complex system of rules that govern language use and usage to clinch learners' intercultural communicative competence. In this regard, instructors in higher education institutions have to promote cultural authenticity in their teaching. Therefore, they should emphasize the inevitability of developing students' intercultural and interactional abilities through the incorporation of drama-based group projects. In addition, drama-based group projects can boost students' self-esteem; lower their anxiety of utilizing the foreign language impulsively (Royka, 2002). Furthermore, the drama planned tasks are pertained to prompt collaborative leaning and help to install a set of interpersonal and social skills required in 21st century classes.Hence, fostering students' spoken intercultural competence through drama-based group projects is decisive for preparing them for intercultural engagement and global citizenship. In this regard,Ulas (2008) postulates that the active involvement of students in collaborative drama- based projects would not only shore up their language skillsbut also get them gain valuable insights into cultural nuances, fostering empathy and efficient verbal and nonverbal communication across cultural boundaries.

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