

A CASE STUDY OF READERS THEATRE IN A PRIMARY EFL CLASS IN DENMARK

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Abstract

This article presents a case study of the use of Readers Theatre (RT) in which 16 participants, divided into small groups of 3 or 4 pupils, rehearsed and performed parts of the Robin Hood story adapted into a play. The study was conducted in a fifth grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Denmark. The study wanted to find out the influence of RT on the student's pronunciation, reading fluency, and confidence and motivation in reading aloud. Data was gathered using voice and video recordings to gain information about students' pronunciation and fluency, a questionnaire to the students to collect information about their attitudes and perceptions, and an interview with the teacher to obtain information about her experience. The evidence gathered demonstrates the positive impact that RT has in the established aims, in line with prior research on RT in contexts involving young language learners.

Keywords: EFL classrooms, Readers Theatre, pronunciation, fluency, motivation.

Resum

Aquest article presenta un cas d'estudi de l'ús de Readers Theatre (RT) on 16 participants, dividits en grups de 3 o 4 alumnes, van assajar i interpretar parts de la història de Robin Hood adaptades a una obra de teatre. L'estudi es va dur a terme en una classe d'anglès com a llengua estrangera (ALE) de cinquè curs a Dinamarca. L'estudi volia esbrinar la influència de la RT en la pronunciació, la fluïdesa de lectura i la confiança i la motivació dels estudiants per llegir en veu alta. Les dades es van recopilar mitjançant enregistraments de veu i vídeo per obtenir informació sobre la pronunciació i fluïdesa dels estudiants, un qüestionari als estudiants per recopilar informació sobre les seves actituds i percepcions, i una entrevista amb la mestra per obtenir informació sobre la seva experiència. L'evidència recopilada demostra l'impacte positiu que l'ús de RT té en els objectius establerts, en línia amb investigacions prèvies sobre la RT en contextos que involucren joves estudiants d'idiomes.

Paraules clau: aules d'ensenyament de llengua anglesa, *Readers Theatre*, pronunciació, fluïdesa, motivació.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un caso de estudio del uso de Readers Theatre (RT) en el que 16 participantes, divididos en grupos de 3 o 4 alumnos, ensayaron e interpretaron partes de la historia de Robin Hood adaptadas a una obra de teatro. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) de quinto curso en Dinamarca. El estudio quería averiguar la influencia de la RT en la pronunciación, la fluidez de lectura y la confianza y motivación de los estudiantes para leer en voz alta. Los datos se recopilaron mediante grabaciones de voz y video para obtener información sobre la pronunciación y fluidez de los estudiantes, un cuestionario a los estudiantes para recopilar información sobre sus actitudes y percepciones, y una entrevista con la maestra para obtener información sobre su experiencia. La evidencia recopilada demuestra el impacto positivo que tiene el uso de RT en los objetivos establecidos, en línea con investigaciones previas sobre la RT en contextos que involucran a jóvenes estudiantes de idiomas.

Palabras clave: aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera, *Readers Theatre*, pronunciación, fluidez, motivación.

1. Introduction

Based on the premise that language is a means of communication which is used as an interaction tool, enhancing speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has been considered one of the most important skills to develop and improve in language learners (Bsharat & Barahmenh, 2020). Speaking a language requires more than just understanding the linguistic components of the message; developing language skills also entails more than developing grammatical comprehension and vocabulary memorization (Pishkar, Moinzadeh & Dabaghi, 2017). Because interaction is a two-way process involving both listeners and speakers, it does not only imply comprehensibility but also intelligibility (Grant, 2014). Speakers are intelligible when listeners recognise individual words and sentences despite phonological differences between two speakers' productions. However, interaction also includes the listener's perception of how easy or difficult the speaker's utterances are to understand. As a result, oral communication skills should be valued and enhanced because speaking is our natural way of communicating.

According to El-Bassuony (2010), students require a lot of practise and interaction using various motivating activities in order to avoid speaking problems, which are frequently caused by affective factors like anxiety. One of the strategies that can be used to develop different language skills is Readers Theatre (RT) which entails students reading aloud, performing with a purpose, and bringing enjoyment to both, themselves and their audience. RT has a positive impact on personality traits like confidence, self-concept, empathy, and cooperation which are related to language development (Kerry Moran, 2006). Therefore, it becomes a great method to promote in EFL classrooms because it may aid students in mastering various language abilities as well as overcoming various psychological obstacles that may prevent the development of these abilities.

The main aim of this study was to find out the connection between RT, language development and students' confidence and motivation. Therefore, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How does RT influence the student's pronunciation?

RQ2: How does RT influence the student's reading fluency skills development?

RQ3: How does RT influence the student's confidence and motivation in reading aloud?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. What is Readers Theatre?

Readers Theatre is a type of practise that dates back to ancient Greece when someone would storytell in front of a crowd. Years later, RT made its way into schools because it was thought to have the potential to enhance instruction in both mother tongue and foreign languages (Drew, 2020). Nowadays, it is defined as an instructional activity that engages students in practising and performing scripts in front of a crowd (Worthy & Prater, 2002). According to Myrset & Drew (2016), RT is a dramatic form of reading aloud a wide range of text genres, such as speeches, poems, dialogues, fables, and factual texts in groups. It can be performed as a form of drama on stage or used as an educational method in a classroom. The idea is to break the text up into smaller fragments that can each be read by a single reader. Shepard & Wallis (2004) present two models of RT: the developed model and the traditional model. In each model, the scripts are visible to the audience. In the developed model, each participant reads a part of the text, which is always read by the same reader. Readers are free to move around the room, sit or stand while reading and using body language but there are no dramatised scenes. On the other hand, in the traditional model, readers are fixed in place as they read, standing or sitting in a line or in a semicircle. This model blends dramatisation and reading aloud, but it makes a distinction between the two. While some students read aloud, the other students dramatise the scenes that go along with the reading. These actions never occur at the same time (Myrset & Drew, 2016). Dramatization is, therefore, used in some forms as a way to complement the reading.

According to Kerry Moran (2006), RT is both text and performance based because it requires the interpretation of a text throughout the human voice. Jordan and Harrel (2000) stated that RT is an effective drama activity for providing authentic speech practice, especially in teaching reading fluency as well as increasing comprehension for emergent readers. In educational contexts, drama is a personality-centered method which aims at providing children greater freedom to play in order to develop their ideas while also promoting creativity, spontaneity, and communication skills, so better preparing them to face real-life problems (Zafeiriadou, 2009; Kovacs, 2014). Drama is also described as any activity which asks the student to play the "as if" game in which they need to portray themselves or another person in an imaginary situation (Giebert, 2014; Kovacs, 2014). It

is an action in which children actively participate in a text, language is personalized and thus learning becomes more meaningful (Phillips 1999).

In short, RT is based on performing or reading a text in a way that is expressive, meaningful, and satisfying to the audience, in which drama can also be included as an action that is used to make learning more student-centered, entertaining, active, meaningful, communicative, and contextual.

2.2. Why using Readers Theatre for English teaching

Language does not exist independently because people always communicate with a purpose of sharing thoughts, opinions, feelings, cultures, ideas among other things (Hu, 2011). Some researchers consider Readers Theatre as a potential strategy to use in EFL contexts to improve or work on the oral, reading, listening and writing skills.

Keehn, Harmon & Shoho (2008) conducted a six-week study with two distinct groups studying the Readers Theatre's effects. While one group used RT instructions, the other received more traditional literary and vocabulary instruction. The findings reveal that the RT group statistically demonstrated significant improvements in the fluency, expressiveness of oral reading and vocabulary learning while maintaining their motivation and interest. Lee and Yoon (2017) investigated the impact of repeated reading interventions to increase reading fluency, as well as, Martinez et al. (1998) who detail a 10-week project in which two second grade classrooms used Readers Theatre activities every day to help students transform their hesitant reading and make it more fluent. In addition, Peebles (2007) states that Readers Theatre can boost struggling readers' fluency and it can also be a motivational tool for conceptualising the rhythm and flow of fluent reading. Reading fluency is thought to be a sign of automaticity, allowing students to concentrate on meaning. Thus, since fluent readers are more likely to comprehend a text, reading comprehension and fluency go hand in hand.

RT's effects on other cognitive abilities, like pronunciation, have also been the subject of extensive research. According to Trousdale & Harris (1993), RT can help with word recognition skills, provide practice for pronouncing words, and increase reading fluency. In more detail, Dewi (2019) investigated how the students felt about using pronunciation practice sessions during Reader Theater rehearsals. The findings of this study revealed

that every student agreed that Reader Theater had a positive impact on their pronunciation and fluency because reading the text aloud several times made it easier to get used to the difficult pronunciation features in order to achieve oral reading fluency.

Prosody, which describes the melodic elements of language to provide expressiveness in oral reading, is also related to fluency. To deepen the impact of the text, it involves changing the tone, volume, pace, pitch, and using the right phrasing (Young, Durham, Miller, Rasinski, & Lane, 2019). Therefore, a crucial part of the Readers Theatre process is the rehearsal of the script by the readers before it is eventually performed. To provide a meaningful oral representation of the script, participants must consider the text's overall meaning as well as the oral expression that reflects it.

Considering the results of the studies mentioned above, RT has an impact on some aspects of language learning. They demonstrated the effectiveness of using RT to improve some language skills. RT activities were shown to have some benefits, transforming the method into a powerful instrument for implementation.

2.3. Advantages to the use of Readers Theatre in the EFL classroom

Starting with the premise that motivation is required in any learning context, using RT in the EFL classroom can boost the students' motivation. Gozcu & Caganaga (2016), affirms that children should have the opportunity to break away from unusual routines because they are essential in terms of motivation and challenges. According to Zalta (2006), *children have an innate desire to play through drama* (p.25). They enjoy playing, pretending, and imitating situations from their daily lives, particularly adult situations. RT, which is directly related to drama, fosters and sustains student motivation not only because children are natural players and these methods imply playing, but also because it is an activity that can be modified and adapted to children's levels. This means that anyone can take part and achieve a satisfactory result (Phillips, 1999). Moreover, it is a learner-centered technique since it can only be created with the active participation of students. It implies cooperation as children must work together to achieve their common goals, listening and respecting each other's suggestions, finding ways to resolve their disagreements, and drawing on the strengths of each member of the group.

Working cooperatively demands understanding how to cooperate as a group and share specific roles in order to achieve the goal. This organisation reflects the experience of living in society, and one of the responsibilities of education is to transfer the abilities learned in the classroom to the outside world. Both RT and drama are a language acquisition strategy that stresses the establishment of social interaction settings, which aids in the transfer of knowledge from the academic context to the real world. The fact that an infinite number of topics can be worked on defines the approach as a cross-curricular methodology since you may select from an endless number of themes, allowing the activities' aims to be tied to other subject areas. For Giebert (2014), RT enables participants to work in different contexts where the language is used differently, which develops children's language awareness. In other words, *students have the opportunity to develop the language required in social contexts* (Mehdiyev, 2020, p.4).

However, RT does more than just provide opportunities for language learning. It is a whole-person approach, because it requires interaction and response with the learners' intellects, emotions, and natural instincts in addition to spoken language (Almond, 2005 cited by Nanda, 2016). It encourages children to feel more confident and abandon embarrassment or shyness because it allows them to escape their everyday identity by transforming into someone else. This assists shy students who do not normally enjoy speaking in English or participating in group activities (Zalta, 2006). The fact of experimenting with different roles in various situations encourages and develops their creativity and imagination, while also offering opportunities to practise the language. So drama has a unique value as a pedagogic technique because language education is understood as a creative process (Zafeiriadou, 2009).

To sum up, implementing RT in the EFL classes has many advantages regarding children's self-esteem as it builds their confidence when using the target language, and language development. It is a teaching tool that makes the learning process communicative, active, exciting and contextualized. In other words, it is a way of learning by experiencing.

3. Study

3.1. Research questions

To find out the impact of RT on the motivation, reading and pronunciation skills of young primary learners, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How does RT influence the student's pronunciation?

RQ2: How does RT influence the student's reading fluency skills development?

RQ3: How does RT influence the student's confidence and motivation in reading aloud?

3.2. School context

The present study was conducted in a small state school located in the south-east of Denmark. The educational offerings range from daycare to sixth grade; it welcomes students aged 0 to 13 years old. The school has 145 students and 15 teachers who work alongside 35 pedagogues. There is not much diversity due to the small number of varying backgrounds and the school's proximity to a wealthy area where the majority of families reside.

Even though the language of the school is Danish, they also teach English and German. English language instruction for the students consists of three 45-minute lessons per week. When they are between 6 and 7 years old, students begin to learn the language. The content is presented through cooperative, dynamic, and gamified activities that are complemented by some book exercises. Additionally, in the higher grades, they also develop projects.

The school also provides a reading project that encourages students to read because they believe that fostering a reading habit in youth is important to develop reading habits which seem to be replaced by technology. As a result, the library becomes one of the main axes of the school where children can find any type of books to read for pleasure or to search up a specific piece of information.

3.3. Participants

The total number of participants in this study was 16 students from 5th grade of primary education between the ages of 12 and 13. The class was made up of 8 girls and 10 boys whose first language was Danish. Two of the participants had a learning disorder, which

made reading challenging because they had trouble recognising speech sounds and learning to associate them with letters and words. Additionally, due to anxiety and stress issues, two students just attended school for some hours a week, therefore they were only able to attend some classes. However, the sessions were adapted to meet the needs of the students to ensure their participation at all times and facilitate the learning process.

3.4. Readers Theatre text

The text used to work on Readers Theatre was the story of Robin Hood adapted to a play where a variety of characters appeared. It was picked out by the class teacher and was taken from the English textbook named *A Piece of Cake* from the publisher Alinea¹. Because the story had eight scenes, the class was divided into four mixed groups made by the teacher and each group was assigned two consecutive scenes of the play.

3.5. Methodology

The implementation of the RT experience took two weeks to complete and was developed over the course of seven 45-minute sessions. To find out the impact of Readers Theatre on reading skills, the participants were introduced to the Robin Hood story which is adapted into a play. As a result, the class was split up into four groups, each of which was given two consecutive scenes to work on.

3.5.1. Data collection tools

Data was collected using three different instruments to gather the necessary information: voice and video recordings, an interview to the teacher and a questionnaire to the students. All instruments used were supervised and received the approval of the school.

a) Voice and video recordings

Video and voice recordings were used to gather information in the classroom to analyse and compare the rehearsal and performance related to the podcast and the dramatisation of the groups in order to document the student's reading progress. It was an effective way to identify reading-related issues related to pronunciation in order to provide a detailed overview of the mispronounced and wrongly recognised words from the rehearsal and the performance, as well as, the students' reading fluency by contrasting how long it took

¹<https://apieceofcake.bog.alinea.dk/>

each of the four recorded groups to read through their texts during their first rehearsal with how long it took them to do so during their performance. (See Appendix 1)

b) Interview

At the end of the intervention, an interview of seven questions was given to the class teacher in order to obtain subjective information about the teacher's experience, perceptions, insights, and beliefs regarding the implementation of Readers Theatre. (See Appendix 2)

c) Questionnaire

A questionnaire was also provided to the participants because it is a quick and effective way to gather relevant information. The questionnaire consisted of eleven closed questions with a series of predetermined responses they could choose from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The purpose of conducting a questionnaire was to collect information about the learning student's perceptions as well as how they felt about the Readers Theatre experience. (See Appendix 3)

3.5.2. Sequences of the activities by sessions

In this part, the sequence of the activities to implement the Readers Theatre is presented. During the learning experience, the role of a teacher was to observe the groups as they worked independently while also making sure that any students who had trouble identifying letters had someone to help them.

- Session 1: First recording

In the first session, the Readers Theatre project and its objectives were introduced as well as the Robin Hood text. After that, they were given time to read the text in groups while recording their voices.

- Session 2: Pronunciation

During the second session, we focused on the relationships between the letters of the written language and the sounds of spoken language. Each group's voice recordings from the first session were to determine which words the students had mispronounced.

In order to be aware of their pronunciation, the mispronounced words that contained challenging sounds to produce were selected and written on the whiteboard. Then, the students were asked to read the words aloud so that they could discuss whether or not they were properly pronounced. To make sure we were pronouncing words correctly, we used the Forvo website². It was a useful exercise to learn that pronouncing words incorrectly can make it difficult to understand what is being said because we might be changing the meaning of the word. After that, they had a box with words that contained the mispronounced sounds. The students were required to read the word and then match it with one of the words written on the board that shared the same sound. It became a way for both practising the sounds and repeating the incorrectly pronounced words aloud to match the sounds. To finish, they had time to work in groups and read the texts while considering how they should be pronounced.

- Session 3: Intonation

On the third day, the intonation concept was introduced to understand that the pitch or tone of our voice when we read or talk changes depending on what we want to express, and consequently the meaning of the message can vary. To prove its influence in the meaning of the message, the students were divided into pairs and each pair had the same short dialogue between two people, but a different context was given to each group. For instance, one friend visits another friend in the hospital. They were asked to practise and then read the dialogue while the rest of the class, with their eyes closed, needed to guess and understand what was happening. The students had the chance to understand what it's like to listen to someone speaking without any visual aids. They could then be aware of how intonation influences the meaning of the message.

We also find out the importance of where the story was happening. In the previous activity we saw that the context can give the reader clues to know how the character is feeling or what the purpose of the message is. Reading comprehension is therefore necessary. In order to use the proper intonation, they had time to work in groups to practise and comprehend what was happening in their texts while the teachers were assisting the groups.

²<https://forvo.com/languages/en/>

- Session 4: Intelligibility

In the fourth session, the intelligibility concept was introduced. Some online videos of English-speaking speakers from around the world were used to demonstrate what intelligibility means. It was a way to experience that the concept is based on the extent to which a speaker is understandable and whether the words used by the speaker are difficult or easy to decode. Moreover, in the first voice recording I noticed some of the children tended to close their mouths while reading. It was also a good chance to practise vocalisation. To do so, they had a box full of sentences from the Robin Hood text and were required to select one sentence and read it aloud to the class while holding a pen between their teeth. Then, the rest of the class had to be able to comprehend the sentence. It served as a reminder that when reading, one should open one's mouth because doing so makes understanding of what is being said simpler. The chosen sentences contained words that were frequently mispronounced or wrongly intoned in order to keep practising their pronunciation and intonation.

The four groups were then instructed to take the Robin Hood texts and conduct a first reading with their respective teams while keeping in mind their pronunciation, intonation and being intelligible. Following that, each group worked together with a different group. While one group was reading the text, the other group was listening in order to provide feedback after the reading. The purpose of this activity was to make suggestions to the other group related to their pronunciation, intonation and intelligibility. Each person was paired with a student from the other group, making it simpler for them to concentrate on a small section of the text and provide feedback regarding the concepts covered in earlier sessions.

- Session 5: Podcast recording

After working on their reading skills by practising pronunciation, intonation, and intelligibility, they recorded the podcast while keeping in mind that the listener must be able to visualise the events as they are happening.

- Session 6: Dramatisation rehearsal

After working on the text, students acted out the scenes as they listened to their recordings. Therefore, there is no need for them to memorise the lines, and they can be focused on the dramatisation.

- Session 7: Dramatisation

During the last session, each group dramatised the scenes in front of the class while the class listened to the podcast recording. They had the opportunity to listen to one another's voice recordings and listen to the full story.

4. Results

In this part, the results obtained from the voice recordings, students' questionnaires and teacher interview of this study will be presented and described.

4.1. Voice recordings

In Table 1, the data collected from all the groups extracted from the voice recordings analysis is shown. As displayed on the table, four items related to the mispronounced and misread words during the first rehearsal and performance were observed in each group. In the first rehearsal, the groups made up a total of 57 mispronounced words and 20 misread words. On the other hand, during the performance the number dropped to 8 mispronounced words and 6 misread words. We can observe that each group's total word count significantly decreased from the first rehearsal to the performance.

Table 1. Groups mispronounced and misread words.

GROUPS	Mispronounced words first rehearsal	Mispronounced words performance	Misread words first rehearsal	Misread words performance
G1	18	3	5	3
G2	19	3	8	1
G3	5	1	3	1
G4	15	1	4	1
Total	57	8	20	6

A detailed overview of the mispronounced words and the wrongly recognised words is provided in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2 lists the 57 words that were mispronounced during the first rehearsal along with a transcription of how they were said. The included words were recognised from the voice recordings. As a result, identifying the sounds that the students were mispronouncing in order to work on them was successful. The words that have numbers next to them indicate how many children mispronounced that word; if a word has no numbers, only one child mispronounced it.

Table 2. Mispronounced words during the first rehearsal.

Word mispronounced	Pronounced during the first rehearsal	Word mispronounced	Pronounced during the first rehearsal
Robin Hood (x3)	/'gɒbɪn/	castle	/'kes(ə)l/
Sheriff (x2)	/'ʃeɪf/	powerful	/'paʊə(r)fʊl/
Nottingham (x3)	/'nʌθɪŋəm/	interesting	/'ɪnterɪstɪŋ/
ruled	guled	prisoners	/'pɪz(ə)nəgz/
soldiers	/'səʊldɪərs/	scum	/'sʃʌm/
Sherwood (x2)	/'ʃɪ:rwʊd/	friar (x2)	/'fɪaɪə(r)/
travellers	/'tɹæv(ə)lə(r)s/	friend (x3)	/'frend/
Forest (x2)	/'fɒɹɪst/	here	/'hɪə(r)/
certainly (x2)	/'sɜ:(r)t(ə)ntli/	everything	/'evɹɪθɪŋ/
supper	/'sʌpəɹ/	crusades (x2)	/kru: 'seɪd/ and /kru: 'seɪdes/
reigned	/geɪn/	hang	/'heɹŋ/
arrows (x2)	/'erəʊ/	Richard (x3)	/'rɪtʃəɹd/ and /'rɪkəɹd/
man	/mæn/	majesty	/'mæɪ:stɪ/
right	/gaɪt/	herbs	/'ɜ:(r)bs/
birds	/bɜ:ɹds/	wandering	/'vɒndəɹɪŋ/
drank	/'dɹæŋk/	instruments	/'ɪnstɹəmənts/

delighted	/dɪ'laɪt/	beloved	/br'ʌvəd/
trees	/tri:/	minstrel	/'mɪnstgəl/
Marion	/mə'gɪən/	rich	/'rɪtʃ/
borrowed	/'bɒrəʊ/	prison	/'pɪz(ə)n/
church	/tʃɜ:tʃ/	indeed	/ɪn'ded/

In Table 3 the 20 misread words during the first rehearsal obtained from the voice recordings are illustrated. The original word from the text is presented next to the wrongly recognised word.

Table 3. Misread words during the first rehearsal.

Word in the text	Read during first rehearsal	Word in the text	Read during first rehearsal
impudent	imprudent	craftsmen	craftman
trap to set	trap set to	right	white
guests	guest	plenty	plant
friar	fire	were	was
sire	sir	here	her
Tuck	truck	our	your
who's	who	king's	king
his	her	drank	drink
prisoners	prison	will	would
men	man	this	it

As listed in Table 4, a detailed overview of the 8 mispronounced words and 6 wrongly recognised words from the performance with the original word from the text and the word that was actually verbalised is provided.

Table 4. Misread and mispronounced words during performance.

Word in the text	Misread word read during performance	Word in the text	Mispronounced word read during performance
impudent	imprudent	Nottingham	/'nʌθɪŋəm/
trap to set	Trap set to	friar	/'fɹaɪə(r)/
guests	guest	man	/mæn/
friar	fire	right	/waɪt/
sire	sir	arrow	/'erəʊ/
Tuck	truck	crusades	/kru:'seɪd/
		beloved	/br'ləvəd/
		Richard	/'rɪtʃəgd/

As illustrated in Table 5, the amount of time it took to read the text in each group during the first rehearsal and the performance is shown, revealing the interval between the first and last readings. All groups' reading performances were shorter than the first rehearsal because their reading was more fluid, with the exception of one, which took 0:18 seconds longer than the first rehearsal.

Table 5. Reading speed.

GROUP	First rehearsal time (minutes and seconds)	Performance time (minutes and seconds)	Time difference (minutes and seconds)
G1	3:02	2:30	-0:32
G2	4:44	3:19	-1:25
G3	2:35	2:53	+0:18
G4	2:47	1:46	-1:01

4.2. Students' questionnaires

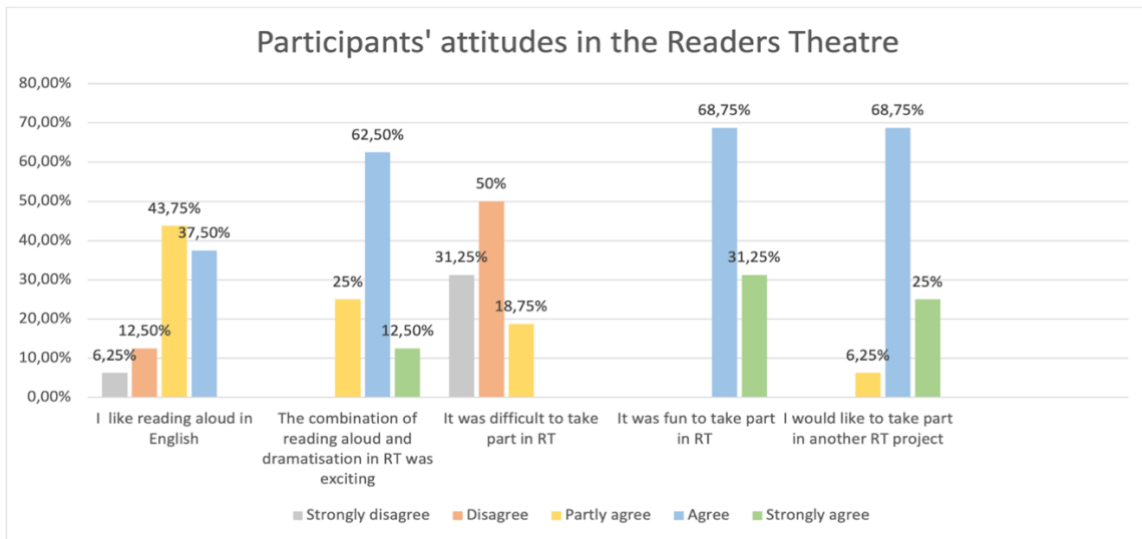


Figure 1. Percentages of the results from the participants' attitudes in Readers Theatre.

In Figure 1, the bar chart corresponds to the first part of the 5th grade students' questionnaire results. Five different items were posed regarding the attitudes of the participants during RT sessions. Above each item, the results obtained are calculated in percentages and represented in different colours that correspond to the number of students who strongly disagree, disagree, partly agree, agree, and strongly agree.

As shown in the bar chart, data analysis showed that 6.25% of students strongly disagree and 12.50% disagree about liking reading aloud in English. The remaining 43.75% partly agree whereas the 37.50% consider that reading aloud is enjoyable. Regarding the combination of reading aloud and dramatisation 25% partly agree that it was exciting while 62.5% agree and 12.5% strongly agree that it was a thrilling experience. However, the fact that it was their first time taking part in a RT project, led 18.75% to partially agree that it was a challenging process. The remaining percentages, 50% of students and 31.25%, disagree or strongly disagree that the experience was difficult. Fourthly, 68.75% agree that it was fun to take part in RT and 31.25% of the participants strongly agree with the statement. As a result, 93.75% agree or strongly agree to participate in another RT project in the future, with only 6.25% partially agreeing.

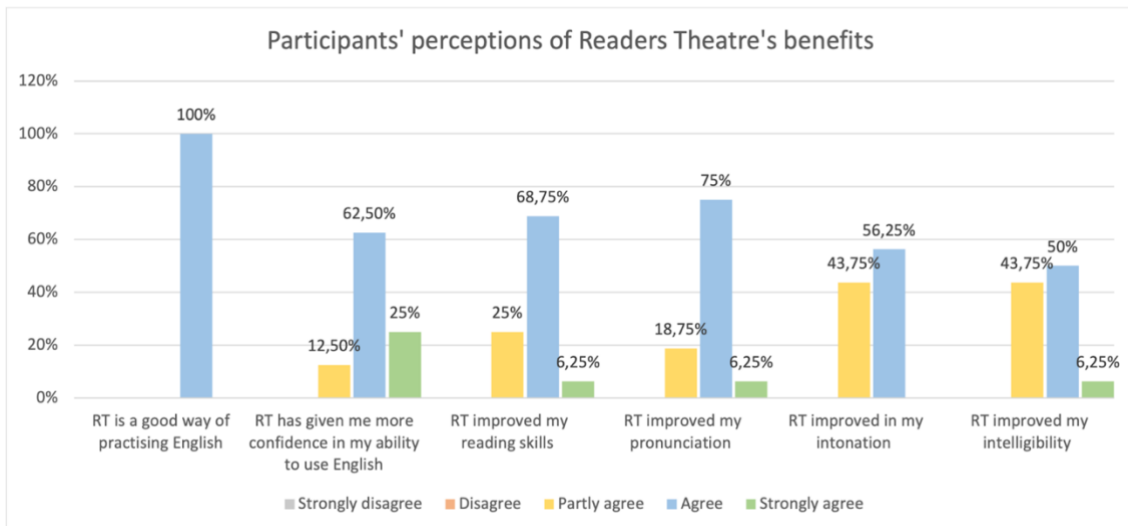


Figure 2. Percentages of the results from participants' perceptions of Readers Theatre's benefits.

In Figure 2, the bar chart corresponds to the second part of the 5th grade students' questionnaire results. Six different items were posed regarding participants' perceptions of RT benefits during the sessions. Above each item, the results obtained are calculated in percentages and represented in different colours that correspond to the number of students who strongly disagree, disagree, partly agree, agree, and strongly agree.

As displayed in the bar chart, data analysis showed that 100% of the students agree that Readers Theatre is a good strategy for practising English. In consequence, 75% consider that working from this strategy has improved their reading skills while 25% of participants partly agree. The second item, related to their confidence in their ability to use English, 12.5% partly agree with the statement, while 62.5% of the students agree and the remaining 25% strongly agree that RT improved their confidence to communicate in English. For the fourth item, which is related to the improvement of their pronunciation, 18.75% partly agree, 75% agree that there has been an evolution as well as the students who strongly agree are represented by 6.25%. Concerning the fifth item, 43.75% partly agree that their intonation has improved since the first reading, and 56.25% agree that they have noticed a progression. Finally, when it comes to their intelligibility, 43.75% of the students partially agree, and 56.25% agree or strongly agree that RT helped to improve it.

4.3. Teachers' interview?

As for the interview, the teacher expresses that she was familiar with Readers Theatre because *“in the school, they value and encourage the creation of reading habits in the school and at home”*. As a result, and using the teacher's words: *“we wanted to develop a project related to reading in Danish classes and learned about the Readers Theatre strategy”*. She later describes RT as an effective way to enhance English skills because *“it is based on reading a text, speaking skills because they practise their pronunciation, vocalization and intonation and...listening skills because they need to listen to each other and understand the text”*.

When she was asked about her thoughts on the students' responses throughout the project, she stated that *“they were actively engaged throughout the project because the reading experience was presented in a different way. Therefore, it helped students create a different relationship with reading that made them more engaged and motivated to read”*. She also affirmed that *“the playful approach with the pre-reading and drama activities were enjoyable for the pupils and everyone could take part...making the experience exciting and motivating”* including those who had dyslexia. As a result, she does believe that RT can help students develop a different relationship with reading and become more engaged, motivated, and inclined to read.

To summarise, the overall experience was described by the teacher as an active, motivating method in which children appear excited and happy to be engaged, allowing them to improve their English skills during the Readers Theatre experience.

5. Discussion

Gains from the triangulation method, which included voice recordings, the students' questionnaires, and the teachers' interview, helped to develop a deep understanding of the data gathered in order to assess whether research aided in achieving the objectives set forth to address the research questions.

As evidenced by the voice recordings, various vowel and consonant mispronounced phonemes were identified. Regarding vowel phonemes, /æ/ phoneme is often pronounced

as /e/, and /i:/ is often pronounced as a short vowel /i/. When it comes to consonant sounds, a challenging phoneme to treat that is frequently used is the /r/ phoneme which in Danish is pronounced by using the back of their tongue. The /w/ phoneme is typically replaced by a lax /v/ because it doesn't occur in Danish, and finally, /dʒ/ is not present in Danish, making it difficult to pronounce. The findings are supported by Swan (2002) who conducted research on the impact of Scandinavian languages as a first language for learning English.

Results show that their pronunciation skills have improved because each group's overall number of words that were mispronounced or misread decreased significantly from the first rehearsal to the performance, thereby supporting previous research (e.g. Trousdale & Harris, 1993; Dewi, 2019). As a result, their reading speed was affected, which in turn affected their fluency (e.g. Lee & Yoon, 2017; Martinez et. al,1999; Peebles, 2007), as well as their motivation and interest (e.g. Keehn, Harmon & Shoho, 2008). Furthermore, Drew (2020) states that positive experiences in one aspect of language learning can serve as a springboard for success in other areas of the subject. The statement can be supported by the teacher's prior experience, implementing RT, in which she points out that it was a good way to improve students' reading abilities as well as their speaking abilities because they practised their pronunciation, vocalisation, and intonation—all of which are essential when reading aloud—and listening skills as well because they need to listen to each other to understand the text.

According to the questionnaire's findings related to their experience, they showed to not be particularly amused with the fact of working on reading aloud. It was their first time working with RT, and they always approached oral reading in the same way, either by reading a text aloud to the class without any instruction, individually or with the entire class participating. The prior employed methods were neither motivating nor meaningful for them to approach English reading. As stated in previous research, children should have the chance to break away from unusual routines because they are important in terms of motivation and challenges (Gozcu and Caganaga, 2016). Working from RT made it easier for them to break free from the negative associations they had with reading in English. The results were satisfactory, because more than 80% of the class expressed that they had a great time, that the process was enjoyable, and that they would like to participate in more RT projects in the future. It turned out to be a very positive experience

for the children as well as for the teacher. She describes the experience as an opportunity for students to create a new relationship with reading as a result of promoting their reading abilities through more enjoyable and playful activities, which raised their engagement and desire to read.

The study also proved the Readers Theatre's influence on their reading pronunciation and fluency, as well as the potential to boost the self-confidence and reading motivation of the readers. Due to the flexibility of the activities, the ability to modify them to suit the children's abilities and working in small groups contributed to the creation of a welcoming learning environment. Thus, by making it easy for anyone to take part and complete the activities with satisfactory results, the students' motivation and self-confidence, throughout the lessons improved, supporting Philips's (1999) findings. Moreover, the fact that they had to focus on the character encouraged children to feel more confident and abandon embarrassment or shyness because it allowed them to escape from their identity by transforming into someone else. In line with previous research, it has a positive impact on shy students who do not normally enjoy speaking in English or taking part in group activities. Additionally, aids to overcome psychological obstacles such as anxiety, because it takes place in a relaxed environment (Zalta, 2006; Kerry Moran, 2006; El-Bassuony, 2010).

As a result, 80% of the class agrees that RT improved their reading skills and transformed reading practise into a pleasant experience, showing that feeling safe and secure in your working environment aids in the development of melodic elements that provide expressiveness in oral reading, and are connected to fluency as stated in previous research (Young, Durham, Miller, Rasinski, & Lane, 2019). Furthermore, all participants value RT as a good way of practising English, confirming prior investigation by Zalta (2006) who agrees that motivation, self-confidence, and lack of anxiety are crucial for successful reading and language acquisition in general. Therefore, we could state that how a student experiences foreign language instructions impacts their attitudes towards learning.

Even though comprehension of texts was not specifically studied, Jordar & Harrel (2000) research supports the findings that RT increases comprehension because during the preparation process, students had to consider the author's intended meaning and convey the message with prosody that reflected the text's meaning. Furthermore, after recording

the final podcast, they dramatised each part of the text in front of the class while listening to the recorded text in the background, so a thorough understanding of the script was needed. To do so, they cooperated with one another during the sessions, which significantly reduced their fear of reading aloud because, from the teacher's experience, *“It seems to be very meaningful to the pupils to do their best in the group...they also feel “safer” not reading aloud for all classes and I see they help each other in a good way”*. This confirms that RT is a learner-centered technique which implies cooperation as children must work together to achieve their shared objectives and requires them to listen to and respect one another's ideas, find solutions to their differences, and make use of the individual strengths of each group member.

To sum up, the evidence gathered shows that the participants' pronunciation, fluency, and motivation improved as a result of working from RT, which is in line with previous research.

6. Conclusions

Though there has not been much debate on the subject, this study contributed to the limited body of knowledge on RT with young EFL learners. The study demonstrates how a RT project developed in a fifth grade EFL classroom in Denmark enhanced the learners' cognitive and affective skills. This is made evident by the fact that over the course of the study, three different data collection tools were employed in order to respond to and support the research questions regarding the students' pronunciation, fluency, confidence and motivation in reading aloud. The comparison of the voice recordings from the first rehearsal to the performance has demonstrated that RT implementation significantly improved students' pronunciation. This was because the number of mispronounced and misread words considerably reduced and therefore increased their reading fluency. The results of the students' questionnaires reveal that working in a relaxed atmosphere improved the students' motivation and confidence when reading aloud, which had a positive effect on how they perceived RT in terms of their reading abilities. RT thus proved to be a fruitful experience for the cognitive and affective abilities backed up by the teachers' interview. She expresses that it can help students develop a different relationship with reading, becoming more engaged, motivated, and inclined to read

because it is a playful approach in which everyone can take part, which boosts both reading skills and willingness to read. As a result, RT develops into an effective strategy to improve students' pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and motivation in reading aloud.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1. Voice recordings

Link to the group's voice recordings of the first rehearsal and performance:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wIuneQeZcaDLzsDA3H5N6hX_jB9PwWi-?usp=sharing

Appendix 2. Teacher interview

1. Have you heard of the Readers Theatre method? (If your answer is "yes") How and where did you learn about the strategy?

Yes, I use it during Danish classes with younger classes, to improve their reading skills. In the school we value and encourage the creation of reading habits in the school and at home. Some years ago, we wanted to develop a project related to reading in Danish classes and learned about the Readers Theatre strategy.

2. What are your thoughts on using Readers Theatre in the class?

From my experience in Danish classes and in this project I see it as a good way to improve reading skills because it is based on reading a text, speaking skills because they practised their pronunciation, vocalization and intonation and they are important when we read a text aloud but also when we speak with someone, and is also a good way to practice listening skills because they need to listen to each other and understand the text.

3. Have you ever introduced Readers Theatre in the classroom? (If your answer is “no”) Do you think you would introduce it in class?

I introduced it in Danish classes but I have never introduced it in English classes. I think I will begin to use it more often during English classes, because the pupils seem very active during the reading theatre programme you prepared with Robin Hood.

4. Do you believe it is an effective way to enhance reading abilities?

It seems to be very meaningful to the pupils to do their best in the group. Maybe they also feel “safer” not reading aloud for all classes and I see they help each other in a good way. In that way I see it as an effective way to improve reading skills.

5. Do you think it helps students develop a different relationship with reading and become more engaged, motivated, and inclined to read?

Yes, I do. I saw that they showed amusement when they knew it was time to practise the Robin Hood text. I felt it was motivating for them because the reading experience was presented in a different way.





6. What do you think of the students' responses throughout the project?

I think they were actively engaged through the project. From my observations, they seemed to enjoy practising their reading using a new different strategy. As I said before, I use it with younger students but not with the older. For 5th graders, it was the first time they worked on Readers Theater. I was concerned about how some students would respond due to behavioural issues in the class and those who have dyslexia. But the playful approach with the pre-reading and drama activities were enjoyable for the pupils and everyone could take part. In that way they got prepared for the next step of reading theatre. I also think that presenting a project where they need to create their own podcast using their laptops made the experience exciting and motivating.






7. How would you describe your overall Readers Theatre project experience?

I saw that the pupils were very active, motivated and happy. They help each other and pay attention to the activities. They feel free to ask questions. As I was also involved in the project, I saw they have improved their English skills during the Readers Theatre experience.


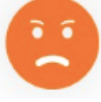



Appendix 3. Students' questionnaire model and results

	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
I like reading aloud in English.					
The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theatre was exciting.					
It was difficult to take part in Readers Theatre.					
It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.					
I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.					
Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.					
Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.					
My reading skills improved.					






I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.					
I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.					
I have noticed an improvement of my intelligibility.					

	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
1. I normally like reading aloud in English.			X		
2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.				X	
3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.		X			
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.				X	
5. I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.					X
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	






7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.				X	
9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.					X
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.				X	
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.				X	

	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
1. I normally like reading aloud in English.			X		
2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.				X	
3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.		X			
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.				X	
5. I would like to take part in another				X	

Readers Theatre project.					
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.				X	
9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.				X	
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.				X	
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.				X	






	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
1. I normally like reading aloud in English.				X	
2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.			X		
3. It was difficult/stressful to		X			

take part in Readers Theatre.					
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.				X	
5. I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.					X
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.				X	
9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.				X	
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.				X	
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.				X	






	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
					
1. I normally like reading aloud in English.			X		

2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.				X	
3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.		X			
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.				X	
5. I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.				X	
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.				X	
9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.				X	
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.			X		
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.			X		






	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
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1. I normally like reading aloud in English.				X	
2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.				X	
3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.			X		
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.				X	
5. I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.				X	
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.				X	
9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.				X	
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.				X	


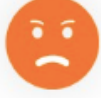



11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.				X	
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	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
1. I normally like reading aloud in English.			X		
2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.				X	
3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.	X				
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.					X
5. I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.					X
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.			X		






9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.			X		
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.			X		
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.			X		

	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
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2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.					X
3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.	X				
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.					X
5. I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.				X	
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	






7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.			X		
9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.				X	
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.				X	
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.			X		

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3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.		X			
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.				X	
5. I would like to take part in another				X	

Readers Theatre project.					
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
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11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.					X






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9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.				X	
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11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.				X	






	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
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1. I normally like reading aloud in English.		X			
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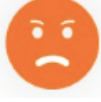



11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.				X	
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	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
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10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.			X		
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.			X		

	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
1. I normally like reading aloud in English.		X			
2. The combination of reading aloud and dramatisation in Readers Theater was exciting.					X
3. It was difficult/stressful to take part in Readers Theatre.	X				
4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.					X
5. I would like to take part in another				X	

Readers Theatre project.					
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.					X
8. My reading skills improved.				X	
9. I have noticed an improvement in my pronunciation.			X		
10. I have noticed an improvement in my intonation.				X	
11. I have noticed an improvement of my clarity/intelligibility.				X	

	Strongly disagree 	Disagree 	Partly agree 	Agree 	Strongly agree 
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3. It was difficult/stressful to			X		

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4. It was fun to take part in Readers Theatre.				X	
5. I would like to take part in another Readers Theatre project.				X	
6. Readers Theatre is a good way of practising oral English.				X	
7. Readers Theatre has given me more confidence in my ability to use English.				X	
8. My reading skills improved.			X		
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