

WE CAN ENHANCE LEARNERS' FLUENCY AND ACCURACY IN ENGLISH THROUGH DRAMA ACTIVITIES



It seems that Gabon is one of the countries in the world in which English is vulgarized and is becoming a key to success. As a matter of fact, many branches of industry need that their employees or those who apply for a job have some knowledge of English. This encourages and motivates many Gabonese to learn this language. Even some students, despite their branches of learning, are required to have some knowledge of English to obtain training in firms or enterprises. What is more, pupils from secondary schools must take an English oral test during national examinations, namely BEPC and baccalaureate. This last point clearly shows that English is part of the school curriculum in the

Gabonese education system. The Gabonese government have been inserting English in the Gabonese school curriculum for many years. So, English is taught from *Sixieme* to *Terminale* in Gabonese secondary schools. And every year, many students from the UOB or some pupils who have just passed baccalaureate sit for the ENS entrance examination. Many of them pass it and are trained as teachers. Those who opt for the Department of English are thus trained as teachers of English. So the first role that a teacher of English has to fulfil is to help his or her learners speak English through the four skills namely speaking, listening, writing, and reading. The latter can be summarised in two words, namely 'fluency' and 'accuracy'. These are two skills that someone who is said to speak a language well must possess. So if a person says he/she speaks English fluently and accurately, he/she speaks it very well by pronouncing words correctly, and using the right grammar rules. In addition to this, there is understanding. This implies the fact that the speaker must also understand what his/her interlocutor says.

Taking into account what has just been said above; we really wonder whether good measures are taken to help our learners enhance their level in English. Do we (teachers) really use the right methods, strategies, or techniques to make pupils improve their fluency and accuracy? As pedagogues, we are learners' guides; we are those who show them the way. As facilitators, do we make clear what seems ambiguous? Do we make easier what seems difficult? Do we really make our teaching easier to motivate learners to be interested in English and develop their

skills? It seems to us that learners have some difficulties in speaking English fluently and accurately because something is missing in our teaching. Could this not be a new technique that gives learners the opportunity to study in an enjoyable and entertaining environment? To what extent can drama play this role?

Drama is an oral activity during which actors perform not only to entertain the audience, but also and above all to inform and educate them. Before performing, the actor learns a script, mostly written in Standard English, by a dramatist. By attending such a performance, people can just take advantage by improving their vocabulary, grammar or even pronunciation. Likewise, learners can gain by being taught through drama. It can help our learners easily develop their ability to memorize what they learn. Drama can also make pupils feel more at ease, for it depicts real life situation. But we have to admit that many teachers and particularly English ones do not find it necessary to use drama activities in class. They seem to ignore them. They may think that they are just fun and games. Drama is certainly first of all fun and games, but it can create a very effective learning atmosphere through its various activities, namely dialogue, sketches, tales, poems, etc. In the Gabonese context, learners really need such a technique in the classroom, for when they are not at school they have nothing that can help them to be entertained. In fact there is no amusement parks, no playroom; in a word there is no place where young people can enjoy themselves in Gabon. Drama will give them the opportunity to find in their classrooms what they are not offered outside. In the context they will learn by having a good time, laughing, dancing, playing, etc.

Besides, the British Council (2009, 2) state that *“as teachers we are aware that the main aim (...) is to develop students’ language...”* This means that drama is here a pretext we use to help our students be better at English. The teacher uses it to teach by creating a good interaction and atmosphere in the classroom. The British Council (2009) adds *“when teaching drama we can expect:*

- *A fairly high level of conversational noise*
- *Different groupings, with students standing, moving, sitting, and using space to express themselves*
- *Different groups working at different paces towards different goals”*

This atmosphere, far from being morose, seems to be suitable to help the teacher and his or her learners work self-confidently.

Here is a practical example of a lesson taught emphasizing drama activities.

Lesson plan one

Lesson plan: HIV/AIDS

Teacher: **Hubert Xavier ONDO ESSONO**

Class details

Level: 2nde LE1

Size of the class: *64 pupils (26 boys/ 38 girls)*

Duration: *50min*

Teaching aids: *board, chalk, text, hand-outs, and flip charts*

Rationale

I have chosen this text because it is a dialogue. This can be used as a dramatic activity. As far as I am concerned, drama can lead my learners to be motivated and to improve their fluency and accuracy. This text also drew attention to its very important and interesting topic: HIV/AIDS. In addition, this text is easy to understand.

Objectives:

General objective

- To improve fluency and accuracy through a dialogue.
- To know more about AIDS.

Specific objectives

At the end of this lesson my learners will be able to:

- use new words related to HIV/AIDS.
- speak by using the past continuous.
- use the past continuous and the past simple in the same sentence.

Text: Welcome Home

by Wai Ming Chan, Consuelo Chapeta, Altagracia Mejia

Jenny: Maria, This evening Karen will come back home from the hospital...

Maria: What! She's coming back this evening. Oh no! I don't want to live with her again. Tell her to find another place to live. You know, she has AIDS.

Jenny: Do you really know what the difference is between HIV and AIDS?

Maria: Of course I know. If people have AIDS, they will die soon. AIDS is a deadly disease.

Jenny: You're confused, Maria. HIV is different from AIDS. AIDS is the final most severe stage of HIV. She's only HIV positive. It doesn't mean she has AIDS.

Maria: Is it true? I've never heard about that.

Jenny: More, people can't get HIV by touching, hugging, using the same toilet seat, shaking hands, kissing on the cheek, eating food prepared by an HIV positive person. So living with Karen is not a problem.

Maria: Do you know how Karen got it? I know she **was not sleeping around**.

Jenny: I remember one day, she **was feeling** bad. And she had a blood transfusion. Maybe this is why she is HIV positive. I feel sorry for her.

Maria: Me too, are you sure we won't get AIDS from her?

Jenny: Yes, I'm sure. (...)Now, can Karen come back here?

Maria: Ok, she can. And If she won't spread AIDS to me, I'm going to help her too.

Adapted from HIV/AIDS A Collection of Stories and Skits, students in Lee Hewitt's Intermediate ESOL class at the Adult Learning Program Jamaica Plain Community Centers, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education

I. PRE-READING ACTIVITIES (5 MINUTES)

Warm-up (2min)

The teacher enters the class and greets the learners.

Teacher: *Good morning class.*

Students: *Good morning, Sir.*

The teacher asks six of his learners to stand up and say anything they want in English by using gestures and movements like a theatre actor. He asks the rest of the class to repeat each learner's words. They can say something like:

'I love English. Isn't it an interesting language?'

And the class repeats *'we love English. An interesting language!'*

The teacher also plays with his learners. After the six learners' performances, he explains what to do to the learners. He says (like a theatre actor) *'I think you are ready for the lesson. Aren't you?'*

And the class say: *'we are ready for the lesson. Yes, sir, we are reedy.'*

Lead-in (3min)

The teacher introduces the lesson by acting the role of someone who is coming out of the PNLS (Programme National de Lutte contre le Sida) after being informed that he is infected with HIV/AIDS.

The teacher asks his learners to tell his problem.

Teacher: *Class, I have just left the PNLS. My attitude shows that I have a problem.
Who can tell what the problem is?*

Student1: *Sir, you are ill.*

Teacher: *What is the name of my illness?*

Student2: *You are infected with HIV, Sir.*

Teacher: *Very good. I am infected with HIV/AIDS. So, today we are going to talk
about HIV/AIDS*

II. WHILE READING ACTIVITIES (35 MIN)

Silent reading (2min)

The teacher gives the text to his learners and asks them to read it silently. He asks the learners to take their note books and note down both words in bold type and those that are underlined.

Loud reading (2min)

The teacher reads the text once. He just asks the learners to listen carefully. He does not ask them to read. They will perform this task later as a dramatic activity.

Vocabulary (10min)

The teacher asks his learners to take an interest in the underlined words.

Presentation (4min)

The teacher gives the meanings of the words orally, through miming, etc. like a theatre actor.

Flatmates

Deadly disease

Hugging

Before they match the words to the right meanings, the teacher asks the learners to answer the following questions.

- 1) Is it good or bad to share a flat with somebody else? Justify your answer.
- 2) According to you can deadly diseases be completely eradicated?
-if yes, how?
-if no, why?
- 3) Can you be infected if you hug a sufferer of a sexually transmitted disease? Justify your answer.

Flatmates	•	•An illness that kills inevitably.
Deadly disease	•	•People who share an apartment with you.
Hugging	•	•It is when you put your arms around someone and hold them in friendly way.

Activity 1: Group work (6min)

Form groups of three learners and make a short play. These words: **flatmates** **deadly disease** **hugging** must be used. You are given two minutes to consult each other.

After the learners have consulted each other, the teacher picks three groups at random to perform.

Grammar (15min)

The past continuous

To introduce the lesson, the teacher asks the learners to go back to the text. He asks them to read the words in bold. The teacher writes the words on the board and asks the learners to give the tense in which the verbs are conjugated.

were helping were sharing was not sleeping around was feeling

Teacher: who can tell me in which tense the verbs are conjugated?

Learner: the verbs are conjugated in the past continuous.

Teacher: So, class we are going to study the past continuous.

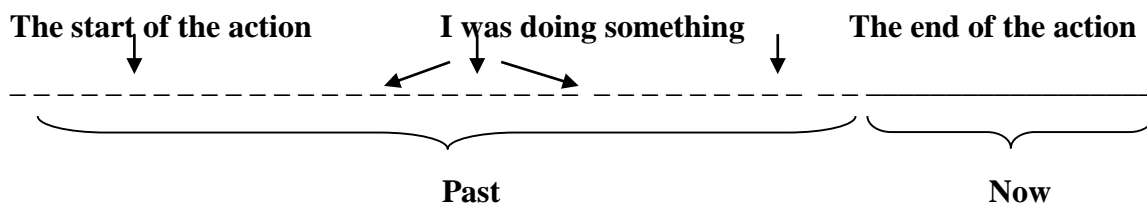
Learner: Yes, Sir, let's study the past continuous.

Presentation (5min)

The teacher, to make his learners be interested in the lesson, presents it as if he was doing a one-man show. The learners will learn in a very amusing and relaxing atmosphere. In this presentation the teacher is full of improvisation and creativeness.

I was doing something = I was in the middle of doing something at a certain time. The action had already started before this time, and it had not finished.

**An illustrative diagram*



**Structure*

Subject + was/were + verb +ING

This time yesterday **we were studying** our lessons.

I visited Mr. Ndong at 10 am, but **he was sleeping**.

**Past continuous and past simple*

We often use the past continuous and the past simple together to say that something happened in the middle of something else. And we often use the words '**while**' or '**when**'.

**Structures*

→past simple + **while** + past continuous

→past continuous + **when** + past simple

She called me **while** I was reading a newspaper.

The learners were making noise **when** the teacher entered the classroom.

Activity 2: (pair work) (5min)

What were you doing at these times? The first learner asks the question, and the second one gives their answer. The game gives the learners the opportunity to play roles. The teacher asks them to switch voices.

Example: (at 10 o'clock yesterday morning) / (read).

*Learner1: **What were you doing at 10 o'clock yesterday morning?***

*Learner 2: **I was reading a book.***

1) (at 8 o'clock last Sunday) / (go).

Learner1: **What were you doing at 8 o'clock last Sunday?**

Learner 2: **I was going to church.**

2) (at 4.30 this morning) / (study).

Learner1: **What were you doing at 4.30 this morning?**

Learner 2: **I was studying my lessons.**

3) (at 8.30 last night) / (sleep)

Learner1: **What were you doing at 9 o'clock last night?**

Learner 2: **I was sleeping.**

4) (at 8.00 p.m last Saturday). (watch)

Learner1: **What were you doing at 8.00 p.m last Saturday?**

Learner 2: **I was watching the news on television.**

5) (at 12.o'clock a.m yesterday) (lunch)

Learner1: **What were you doing at 12 o'clock a.m yesterday?**

Learner 2: **I was lunching with my parents.**

Activity 3: Pair work (5min)

Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple. Work in pair. One learner will read the original sentence. The other will read the right sentence.

A

Learner 1: Mbongo _____ (wait) for me when I _____ (arrive).

→Learner 2: Mbongo was **waiting** for me when I **arrived**.

B

Learner 1: Mbazogo Mintogo _____ (take) a photograph of me while I _____ (not/look).

→Learner 2: Mbazogo Mintogo **took** a photograph of me while I **was not looking**.

C

Learner 1: Mboumba _____ (see) Nkili in a library yesterday. He _____ (read) a book.

→Learner 2: Mboumba **saw** Nkili in a library yesterday. He **was reading** an interesting book.

Comprehension (6 min)

Activity 4: Pair work (6min)

Answer the following questions. A learner will ask the question, another one will give their answer. Each learner will play the voice of a teacher he/she looks up to.

1. Learner 1: Who are speaking in the text?

→Learner 2: **Jenny and Maria are speaking in the text.**

2. Learner 1: What is Karen's problem?

→Learner 2: **Karen is HIV positive.**

3. Learner 1: What is the difference between AIDS and HIV?

→Learner 2: **AIDS is the disease whereas HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.**

4. Learner 1: How do people get HIV/AIDS?

→Learner 2: **People can catch HIV/AIDS in three ways:**

- **when they have sex with an infected person without using a Condom.**

- **when they share needles with an infected person.**

- **and an HIV positive woman who is pregnant can give it to her baby.**

5. Learner 1: According to you, are Maria and Jenny right to keep on living with Karen in the same flat?

→Learner 2: **Yes, they are. Because living with a HIV positive individual cannot harm you. In addition Karen is their best friend.**

III. POST-READING ACTIVITIES (10 MIN)

Activity 5: Group work (6min)

The teacher gives the learners three minutes to prepare, and then he chooses two groups of four learners and asks them to perform the play (by reading) before the rest of the class. The dialogue is divided into two parts: the first part for the first two learners, and the second part for the second two learners.

Homework: Group work (1min)

Make groups of two people and learn the dialogue by heart. You will perform it like theatre actors the next Wednesday.

Administrative tasks (3min)

- Checking pupils' attendance
- Homework notebook filling

Hubert Xavier ONDO ESSONO, CAPES English teacher.