

**Analysing the role of Drama in the Teaching- Learning of the
English language for Specific purposes: A case study**

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Abstract

For many years now teachers and curriculum developers have ventured to come up with new ways and means to facilitate effective learning. In this process various researches and experiments have been carried out so as to determine the right materials suited for an occasion and a purpose. In the teaching of the English language and Communication skills too, attempts have been made to incorporate many resources to enable teachers to inculcate the four skills of language learning i.e. Speaking, Writing, Listening and Reading. These skills are often identified as active and collaborative processes the training of which results in the growth of personality, character, knowledge and wisdom. In this context, Drama has been identified by many as an effective component of literature and language learning that can foster these four skills by creating an atmosphere that can enhance receptive and productive learning. Its inclusion in the syllabus ensures the familiarisation of the learner not only with the language but also connects their emotions and thoughts with situations that leaves much room for reflection of the self, expression of feelings and opinions, improvisations and improvement when the need arises. The present paper sets to analyse the role that drama can play in the teaching- learning of the English language for Specific purposes. To this end, an experiment was undertaken with the students of a technical institution as subjects and a dramatic activity as a medium for realising the objective. Besides, secondary sources like e-journals and books were also studied and referred to, to draw an inference between the effective use of drama for the teaching and learning of the English language especially for specific purposes. The subjects

were chosen thus keeping in mind the relevance and appeal with regards especially to their communicative needs, functional aspects and requirements in their professional field . The analysis puts forth ways and means to project the same as an integrative and practical approach for the teaching and learning of the language in the classroom especially where the language is taught for specific purposes.

Key Words: Drama, Communication, Skills, Role play, Non- Verbal.

Introduction

The employability factor of a person does not only depend on the hard skills that he/she has acquired from education and training. The way in which a person communicates at his workplace also plays a vital role in the individual and organisational developments that take place. Therefore most curriculums designed for the learning of the English Language for specific purposes are characterised by their being either skill or need based. This is so because the sole objective in teaching learners the language, is to enable them to use the acquired skills while working in an organisation or a company. The contents therefore lean mostly towards the technical and practical aspects of the language. However the introduction of drama and its incorporation in the teaching of the language cannot be under estimated. Indulging the learner in dramatic activities in the classroom opens up new vistas for learning where the methodology leans more towards fun and entertainment with its primary objective in motivation and experiences while the result is the enrichment of their knowledge of the target language and their skills and confidence in using it. According to Susan Holden Drama is defined as “any kind of activity where learners are asked either to portray themselves or to portray someone else in an imaginary situation.” Exposing the learner to an imaginary situation brings out the best of their creative faculty in terms of language and expression. In doing so it fosters the communicative abilities of the learner in every aspect. When Drama is used in the class the students are exposed to a situation which is the plot of the play. In such circumstances the traditional ways of instructing is put aside. In other words the learner learns and is instructed by being involved in a situation.

Problems in learning the language.

Despite the fact that the curriculum designed for specific purposes is characterised for its technical and practical aspects, yet a number of problems are frequently encountered by the learners.

1. Learners were not encouraged to orally express themselves in the English language in school which dissipated them from using it frequently.
2. The pull of the mother tongue especially with tribal learners resulted in the mispronunciation of certain words.
3. The sudden introduction of a technically based curriculum failed to capture their interest.

4. Most of the learners failed to understand the proper use of the tenses in speech, sentence connectors, voice, modals and identification of the parts of speech.
5. Learners had minimal confidence in using the target language in communication.
6. The present curriculum designed catered mostly to the theoretical aspects of communication for specific purposes rather than the practical appeal and usage.

Activity

The case study to determine the relevance of the claim was conducted in the class at regular intervals for different batches of learners in which they were given scripts of different plays while each individual was instructed to assume a character. The selected group of learners were asked to rehearse and to make other arrangements such as may be needed for the final performance in the classroom. However while preparing and designating a script the following pre requisites were adopted.

1. The plays chosen were not too long.
2. The language used in the play was not too complex.
3. The themes of the plays were realistic, captivating and practicable.
4. The summary or outline of the plays was explained to the different groups to familiarise them with the situation.
5. Proper instruction was given as to the restricted time period allotted, clarity of words, intonation, voice modulation, concepts which have already been familiarised to the learners in theory, for effective dramatic and communicative results
6. It was ensured that everyone included in a group activity took active part in the plays both as enactors and as observers.
7. Arrangements were made to ensure participation of all learners hence, the selected group of participants varied in every individual play enacted to ensure inclusion of all learners.

Observations

When the teacher introduces such dramatic activities in the class room he/she is fostering an indulgent learning process for the learner who now knows what he has learnt through practice. However there a great many things that stands to project Drama as a boon to language learning. During the conducted case study a number of observations were made:

1. Dr.Munther Zyoud states that according to Maley (2005) the use of drama integrates language skills in a natural way. Careful listening is a key feature. Spontaneous verbal expression is integral to most of the activities while many of them require reading and writing, both as part of input and output. It can be understood that the use of drama enables the learner to understand and use the language in the proper manner. Attention to the use of the correct parts of speech in oral communication, tenses, voice, linkers, modals, possibility, probability etc. in the dialogues of the play displayed to the learner the practicability of the components of language most of which they have only been able to learn in theory and were too afraid to practice using them before. This encouragement to orally express themselves, stemmed from the fact that the pre determined dialogues instil a sense of confidence and motivation to use the same. In terms of Listening, the plot and story of the play created a sense of interest which indulged them both in the physical process of hearing and the mental process of listening. In addition, the role assigned to each one of them compelled them to listen attentively and to immediately respond as and when the character was in play. The script provided to all the participants necessitated them to read and understand the dialogues and characters. In doing so, the learners had to exercise their reading skills which in turn allowed the participant to assume the proper role as an enactor. In the process of memorising the script of the play, the learner tried to pre-read for a brief understanding followed by an effort to understand certain meanings of new or old words used in the context. This exercise resulted in an intensive and extensive reading of the script for a more comprehensive understanding of the structure of the story. When the play designated to the students had been performed, the teacher needed to facilitate more of the dramatic activities as a follow up. In this regard learners were asked to write or reproduce an original script using the same structure and pattern. In such cases, the writing skill of the students were tested and subsequently enhanced as they have already been familiarised with such material.
2. Adopting dramatic activities in the classroom exposes the students to an environment where they had to assume a role. Role play enables the learner to assume an imaginary character something he or she is well acquainted with in the real world. Roles like that of a teacher, law enforcer, a parent, administrator etc helped the learner to understand a real life situation. Besides role play encourages the participant to express oneself with

confidence while assuming different characters which is also a pre-requisite in preparation for interviews, presentations and public speaking, course contents that form part of English for specific purpose. In addition, using the assigned vocabulary and observing the correct oral communicative techniques while participating, polishes the theoretical knowledge attained in class.

3. On the other hand introducing dramatic activities in the classroom also nourishes the spirit of fellow feeling and collective participation. The designated roles compelled each to learn, to listen and to express themselves when they had to which is a desirable trait when participating in Group discussions, a part of the course content of English for specific purposes (ESP). Group participation also paved the way for self and peer evaluation. When errors in diction or action were made by a participant, the flow of the plot was affected in totality. This puts everyone on the edge whereby any slight mistake was immediately identified and subjected to rectification, thus reducing the errors made in communication to a minimal extent.

4. According to Maley and Duff, the most important aspect of Mime activities is that they provide a real stimulus to the imagination whereby a message is constructed from verbal clues. The effect drama in the employment of non verbal communication therefore cannot be sidelined. Positive body language, eye contact, facial expressions all form an important aspect of non verbal communication in language learning. Drama on the other hand makes it necessary for an enactor not only to express oneself verbally but also to express emotions and passion like love, anger, excitement or sorrow in the form of gestures. In this regard the learner is unconsciously using all the gestures without the intention to do so. Any emotion dictates the gestural behaviour of a person. At the end of the play the teacher has to however make the learner aware of the fact that he or she has been communicating non-verbally throughout the play. Using gestures in drama however needs good direction that can come either from the teacher or his/her peers which also paves the way for peer learning.

Role of the Teacher.

In all of this a question may arise as to the role of the teacher in the whole process of learning. It is crystal clear that the traditional role of the teacher in the classroom is completely replaced by a student centred learning environment. In such cases the teacher acts only as a

facilitator and a guide during the whole process of rehearsing and the final performance. The teacher interrupts only when he or she sees that there is a possibility of an unidentified error on the part of the learners. Yet it must not be misconstrued that the role of the teacher is not an important one. In this context It was actually the job of the teacher to provide the learners with relevant plots and materials in relation with the futuristic requirements of the learners. The plays that the teacher chose for the students required themes affiliated with their communicative needs in the technical sense. At the end of the play, another important job of the teacher was to give feedback that is appraising the students about things they rendered well and also providing assistance and advice, in cases where there was room for improvement. Besides, the teacher also had to initiate every aspect of the play. In other words the teacher in such a scenario is viewed as the overseer or theatrically speaking the passive director.

Conclusion

The teaching of English language to non native speakers is not an easy feat to be accomplished. Yet the ever broadening development in different aspects of life and globalisation necessitates the learning of the language even for specific purposes. If drama succeeds in propagating that end, then its inclusion in every course of learning English for specific purposes should be made mandatory. The positive implications of drama in language learning by equipping the learners with practicable skills of communication are highly commendable. Besides this, drama can also be instrumental in developing the requisite soft skills like motivation, confidence building and teamwork, skills that will ensure that a well qualified learner is employable.

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