

TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH DRAMA ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

Language acquisition is a multifaceted process that requires learners to engage in meaningful and authentic activities. Incorporating drama into language teaching has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach to enhance language skills. This paper explores the theoretical foundations, benefits, and practical strategies of using drama activities to teach language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Drawing on research and practical experiences, this paper highlights the transformative potential of drama in language education and offers insights for educators seeking innovative methods to engage and empower language learners.



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Keywords: drama activities, English language teaching, drama and art integrated learning.

INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency is essential for success in today's globalised world, yet traditional approaches to language teaching often fall short in engaging learners and fostering meaningful communication skills. In response to these challenges, educators have increasingly turned to innovative pedagogical approaches, such as drama activities, to enhance language learning experiences. Drama offers a rich and immersive context for language practice, allowing students to engage in authentic communication, develop interpersonal skills, and explore cultural nuances. The significance of art integration for experiential learning and deeper comprehension of subjects is emphasized in the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023) (NCF-SE 2023) which suggest art integrated education as a mainstream approach.

Traditional methodologies in ELT, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method, have long been foundational. These approaches emphasize grammatical rules, vocabulary

acquisition, and translation exercises. While these methods can be effective in developing reading and writing skills, they often fall short in promoting communicative competence. Drama pedagogy within the communicative approach of language teaching can be a powerful tool for engaging students in active learning and enhancing their language skills.

The use of drama in language teaching is grounded in several educational theories. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the importance of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development. Drama activities provide a social setting where learners can engage in meaningful communication. Additionally, Gardner's theory (1983) of multiple intelligences supports the use of diverse teaching strategies to address different learning styles. Drama activities cater to kinesthetic, interpersonal, and linguistic intelligence, making them particularly effective for a diverse classroom.

Traditional language teaching methods often focus on rote memorisation and mechanical exercises, which may not fully engage learners or foster meaningful language use. In contrast, drama activities offer a dynamic and interactive approach that stimulates learners' creativity, imagination, and linguistic proficiency.

METHODS AND APPROACHES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

THE GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD:

The Grammar Translation method is a growth of a lingual technique. It is used in language learning. Grammar is given more importance in this method. Learner understands the grammar rules better. The exercise in this method put the learner into the active problem-solving situation. In the schools, the teachers often follow the traditional method of translation technique. It is an easy way to explain things. Great Indian leaders in the past had attained remarkable progress in this method. Reading and writing are the major focus. Vocabulary selection is the based solely on the text used. The words are introduced through bilingual words lists dictionary and memorization. The grammar rules are presented. A list of vocabulary items is presented with their translation meaning. Translation exercises are prescribed. Grammar is taught inductively. Mother tongue is the medium of instruction.

THE DIRECT METHOD:

The Direct Method was introduced in France and Germany. In the U.S., it is known as the Bertilitz Method. The main aim of this method is to help the students to speak the target language fluently and correctly. In this method, a short test is presented and difficult words are explained in L2 to the learners. The understanding is tested by questioning and the students learn grammar rules

on their own. Question answer sessions, interaction, exercises, intensive classroom drills, dictations, free composition, pronunciation are done in the classroom to develop and strengthen L2.

THE BILINGUAL METHOD

Dr. C. J. Dadson developed the Bilingual method. This method needs L1 and L2. The approach begins from Bilingual and becomes monolingual at the end. The teacher uses both mother tongue (L1) and the target language (L2) in the classroom. This method can be considered as a combination of the Direct Method and the Grammar Translation Method.

THE AUDIOLINGUAL METHOD

Learning a language is not only learning its words but also its syntax. Vocabulary is presented through grades. The four skills of (LSRW) Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are presented in order. Sentence patterns exist and can form the basis of a language course. Classroom teaching and learning are made enjoyable. Concrete linguistic items are taught through Demonstration. Abstract ideas are taught through association. It helps to develop learners' competence in the use of structure in L2.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT):

CLT is a functional approach to language learning. In 1992, this language course was proposed in Europe. The main aim is to develop the communicative competency of the learner. His need of understanding and expressing in the L2 is the main focus of this method. It is an eclectic approach. CLT involves classroom activities like group work, pair work, language games, role play, and question-answer session. It is not confined to any set of text books. The learners are monthly introduced task based and problem solving situations.

ECLECTIC APPROACH

The eclectic approach is the label given to a teacher's use of techniques and activities from a range of language teaching approaches and methodologies. The teacher decides what methodology or approach to use depending on the aims of the lesson and the learners in the group. Eclectic approach for teaching foreign language is commendable when circumstances do not allow for the adoption of a single method. Learners of foreign languages nowadays are prepared to invest less time than before in learning a foreign language. However, they expect to become sufficiently competent in that language in order to be able to perform well under particular circumstances. It is neither a teaching tool for the teacher nor a learning method for the learners. It is a whole way of doing things such as listening coordinated speaking with subsidiary elements like pronunciation and

form of the language.

TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS: THE PRESENT SCENARIO

The English medium schools are those where the medium of instruction is English. The entire curriculum transaction is in English language. Thus, we can say that the learners are getting exposure to the language right from the time they enter their schooling life. Manjunath and Venkatesh (2004) mentioned, “The last four decades have seen more parents opting for English as a medium of Instruction for their children.” With the promises made by the English language, the new aspirations of the parents and a changing political scenario, there is an increased demand for English medium schools. The scenario in Gujarat has changed there has been an exodus from government schools to private English medium schools. Pathak (2010) observed, “There are several English medium schools that have come up in the last few decades in Gujarat. Teachers have their plans and methods of teaching language without having a clear understanding of second language learning or acquisition. They simply think of making the students pass the examination and have adopted such methods that can make learners score enough marks.”

National Curriculum Framework (2005) stated, “the current poor status of the curriculum and pedagogy being employed for the teaching of English and the failure of our research and development institutions to address this idea of curriculum research. If an effective pedagogy that successfully provided children with English proficiency began with class IV until class X, then this demand would not have come up. Even with the new demand, there is an urgent need for the curriculum and educational response to be on sound cognitive and pedagogic footing.”

Elizabeth (2004) mentions that many teachers of English who are teaching the subject are not competent. Much of the literature and evidences support that language learning in general proceeds in order of listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, majority of schools started teaching English by emphasizing writing at a very early stage of language learning. Students would have mastered reading and writing with some relative competence, however, their listening skills would be poorly developed. It is the most neglected one.

Sindkhedkar (2012), 'states that the teacher has to attempt to train the students to accomplish the skills of language and there is no need to acquire knowledge about the language. He also mentions that teachers are hard-pressed for time to cover the syllabus and cannot spare much time to handle language items. Students will also make complaints that the teacher has not taught the lesson. There is more emphasis on writing while assessing the students in the English language and less emphasis on other skill areas. Krishnaveni (2010) states that performance in examination takes precedence over actual performance in using language effectively. She also mentions that language

teaching in India gives more importance to reading and writing, ignoring the important skills of listening and speaking. In the process of teaching English, it is believed that once the students master reading and writing, they will develop other areas. Thus students are provided with fewer opportunities to speak and listen in the English classrooms compared to reading and writing.

These are the several Methods and Approaches to teaching the English language. It has been observed that English teachers in India popularly use the Grammar Translation Method and Direct Method. There has been an emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching in schools by the state. However, the findings of several researches cited above indicate that language skills are not being developed in learners as they should be. Teachers need to adopt interesting and innovative methodologies in the teaching of English. Teaching English through drama would help in enhancing communication skills in English.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF DRAMA IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

NEP(2020) states that in all stages experiential learning will be adopted, including hands-on learning, art integration, and storytelling-based pedagogy among others as standard pedagogy within each subject. To close the gap in achievement of learning outcomes, classroom transactions will shift, towards competency-based learning and education.

There are many reasons in favour of using drama activities and techniques in the language classroom. Maley (2005) listed many points supporting the use of drama and these are:

1. It naturally integrates language skills. Careful listening is a key feature. Spontaneous verbal expression is integral to most of the activities; and many of them require reading and writing, both as part of the input and the output.
2. It integrates verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication, thus bringing together both mind and body and restoring the balance between physical and intellectual aspects of learning.
3. It draws upon both cognitive and affective domains, thus restoring the importance of feeling as well as thinking.
4. By fully contextualizing the language, it brings classroom interaction to life through an intensive focus on meaning.
5. The emphasis on whole-person learning and multi-sensory inputs helps learners to capitalize on their strengths and to extend their range. In doing so, it offers unequalled opportunities for catering to learner differences.
6. It fosters self-awareness (and awareness of others), self-esteem and confidence; and through this, motivation is developed.

7. Motivation is likewise fostered and sustained through the variety and sense of expectancy generated by the activities.
8. There is a transfer of responsibility for learning from teacher to learners which is where it belongs.
9. It encourages an open, exploratory style of learning where creativity and imagination are given scope to develop. This, in turn, promotes risk-taking, which is an essential element in effective language learning
10. It has a positive effect on classroom dynamics and atmosphere, thus facilitating the formation of a bonded group, which learns together.
11. It is an enjoyable experience.

Drama used as a method of instruction allows students to explore and effectively master the subject. It takes advantage of the basic theatre methods such as role-play, improvisation and interpretation, but it also exploits traditional methods of other school disciplines such as interview, description or debate. However, these methods are applied in such a way that they become a part of the drama and they result in the accomplishment of the set pedagogical, but also dramatic goals.

Teaching Language Skills Through Drama Activities

Drama-integrated instruction provides context for the learning of language skills. According to Harmer (1991), states that "It is often true that one skill cannot be performed without the other. It is impossible to speak in a conversation without listening and people seldom write without reading". A competent user of a language has to master all the skills, therefore, it is important not to neglect any of them, but to provide students with sufficient practice and focus on all the skills in a balanced way.

1. **Speaking Skills:** Drama requires learners to speak in the target language consistently. Through role-plays, improvisations, and scripted performances, learners practice articulating their thoughts, ideas, and emotions fluently and confidently. They also learn to use appropriate intonation, pronunciation, and expression to convey meaning effectively.
2. **Listening Skills:** In drama activities, learners must actively listen to their peers' dialogue and responses to appropriately react and respond. This enhances their listening comprehension skills as they focus on understanding the spoken language in context, including nuances of tone, emotion, and intention.
3. **Vocabulary Expansion:** Engaging in drama exposes learners to a wide range of vocabulary related to different themes, situations, and characters. As they immerse themselves in various roles and scenarios, they encounter new words and expressions in meaningful contexts,

leading to deeper understanding and retention of vocabulary.

4. **Grammar Awareness:** While participating in drama activities, learners naturally encounter grammar structures and usage patterns within the context of real-life communication. Through repeated exposure and practice, they develop an intuitive grasp of grammatical concepts and learn to use them accurately in their speech and writing.
5. **Reading Skills:** Scripted performances and play readings require learners to read and understand written texts in the target language. Analyzing scripts, interpreting characters, and comprehending dialogue contribute to the development of reading comprehension skills as learners engage with authentic texts in context.
6. **Writing Skills:** Drama activities often involve script writing, storytelling, and character development, which provide opportunities for learners to express themselves creatively in writing. They may write dialogues, monologues, or scenes, honing their ability to structure narratives, develop characters, and use language effectively for different purposes.

Jim Scrivener (1994) mentions the most commonly used drama activities in English language teaching classes, stating that “by bringing the outside world into the classroom, we can provide a lot of useful practice and there may also be a freeing from the constraints of culture and expected behaviour, which can be personally and linguistically very liberating.” Scrivener (1994) gives the following list of several drama activities that are commonly found in English language teaching:

1. **Role play** – Role plays enable students to step outside themselves, to accept and change into a different character. Students either improvise or create their character or they are given role cards. In either case, it has a stimulating effect and students feel freer to engage themselves in learning.
2. **Drama games** - Wessels points out that ‘drama games’ should "involve action, exercise the imagination, involve both ‘learning’ and ‘acquisition’ and permit the expression of emotion." (1987) All the elements mentioned help students to become actively engaged in learning and experience the dynamics of the learning experience. There are many forms of games with various functions i.e. ice-breakers, warm-ups, fillers, concentration games etc.
3. **Guided improvisation** – This kind of practice requires the teacher to guide students through the initial stage of an activity. When students join in and become part of the evolving activity, they use their imagination and improvisation, and then the teacher steps out and becomes more like an observer who helps if there is a need. This help might be in a form of suggestions or even joining back in the story of the progress of the students is slow or if they are finding the work too difficult. The following are examples of activities for guided

improvisation: a scene of a crime; a company meeting; a summer camp at night etc.

4. **Acting play scripts** – Cockett and Fox say that "it is important to remember that a script is not a drama so much as a 'proposal for drama'." (1999). The script becomes a starting point that provides great space for each individual to utilize his or her talents and bring personal aspects into the learning experience. Students are presented with the script by the teacher or even prepare their own. All the stages of preparation, practice, performance or even the afterwards analyses and evaluation can be very effective tools in learning and reinforcing the use of a foreign language.
5. **Prepared improvised drama** – Students themselves work and perform a story, a situation or several situations. They can also work within a given framework that is set by the teacher. It is students who are in charge of their work. The aspect of ownership provides further motivation to succeed in the activity. The whole class can be involved in a more complex drama, although for practical reasons and affectivity, it might be more beneficial to have the students work in smaller groups.

CONCLUSION

Incorporating drama activities into language teaching offers a dynamic and engaging approach to developing language skills and fostering intercultural competence. By providing opportunities for authentic communication, creative expression, and social interaction, drama activities empower learners to become confident and proficient language users. Educators play a vital role in designing and facilitating effective drama-based language learning experiences that cater to learners' diverse needs and interests. As the field of language education continues to evolve, drama activities offer a promising avenue for promoting communicative competence and cultural awareness in language learners.

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