

To Enhance Language Skills through Role play

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of an action research on role play to enhance language skills of ESL learners. In India, particularly in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the participation of students in English language classrooms is insignificant. There are various reasons for this, like low confidence level, improper exposure and practice of language skills and so on. To add to this situation, a majority of English language classrooms in Telugu medium schools is teacher centred and its affects the students' participation and thus their role and spirit are undetermined. Under these circumstances, collaborative language learning(CLL) methodology is employed by the researcher with the objective to overcome the existing problems using role play as a tool. Role play is used effectively as a tool, as it supports students' participation and enriches their social skills.CLL promotes collaborative discussions , self reflective thinking and systematic phases of problem- solving .This paper makes an attempt to enhance students' participation and their ability to use English language in a variety of academic and professional situations besides integrating LSRW skills.

Date of Submission: 08-05-2021

Date of Acceptance: 22-05-2021

I. Introduction

One of the significant observations made by several research studies on English language teaching and learning in india is lack of students participation in classroom discussions due to low confidence levels and ineffective exposure to language skills and ineffective exposure to language skills and practice.several attempts have been made to address such long standing problems in the context of second language teaching and learning students inhibitions,shyness,fear,low confidence levels and language problems have never been adressed appropriately and adequately in schools, colleges and universities. Inaddition to these,the scene of English language classrooms is largely teacher- centered and consequently the role and spirit of students is undetermined.

Many training programmes and conferences have been conducted to address and over come such critical issues of ELT in india.such programmes have helped improve teaching and learning only in certain groups but the benifits have not reached the school system in general. Moreover,English language , as reported by chatanya and bhavani(2012), has been taught like a subject rather than as ameans of expression of one's inner self and thoughts. Hence, there is aneed to empower practising teachers with the help continuous professional development programmes such as collaborative language learning(CLL), which promotes collaborative discussions, need analysis, series of systemtic problem- solving phases and self reflective thinking. Such things always become a platform for brain-storming sessions through research of various problems and their solutions in the process of effective teaching and learning.

One such attempt which was made by the research collaboratively is the issue of role play through the methodology of collaborative action research (CAR). The aim of the research is to increase student participation in and outside classrooms. It is a small scale research study conducted for three weeks in English language lab sessions. Since the attempt has attained the intedee objectivesof research to a great extent,it is decided to share the researcher's experiences with a wider teaching community.

Obejectives of the research

To encourage student's participation and to reduce their inhibitions

To integrate listening, speaking, readingand writing skills.

To improve negotiating skills and to give form to their thoughts.

To enhance students ability to communicate in real time/ authentic situations.

Sample of the study

The subjects of the research were 10 th standard students of govt high school in Guntur in Andhra Pradesh . 48 students were selected as a sample for the research. This was a heterogeneous group of students coming from various social, economic and cultural back grounds.

Research tools

Research tools such as personal observation and informal students interviews were used to elicit the response of the students. These tools were used for data collection and the data gathered was analysed using qualitative methods.

Methodology and procedure of the research

CLL methodology is employed by the researchers with an aim to overcome and find solutions to the existing problems. The study was conducted in 17 sessions of English language classrooms and each session was of 45 minutes duration totalling 11 hours and 30 minutes spread over a period of two weeks.

Role play and its significance in enriching students participation

As stated above, role play is one of the essential tools that help encourage participation and reduce inhibitions. Role play has been successfully used in ESL classrooms across the world. According to Courtney (1974), mechanisms such as play acting and thought are interconnected; they help students to test out reality, to minimise personal anxieties and inhibitions, and to hone their fields of action. Role play gives a valuable opportunity to the students to hone their English language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an integrated way. For instance, the instructions of teachers on the role play and its relevance in language classrooms. It is followed by briefing on the role play used for the session and discussion with the students on assigning roles to them. This discussion provides scope for students to interact with their teacher and peer group, which in turn contributes to their listening and speaking skills. This is followed by the teacher's advice to go through the relevant material on the intended role play, besides writing dialogues for the specific roles assigned to them. Such activities as a part of the role play promote their reading and writing skills. Thus, various phases involved in role play promote negotiating skills and communicate competence of the students.

This apart, it helps faculty to demonstrate the delivery of dialogues with requisite modulation of voice in harmony with appropriate body language. According to Brown (2010) as cited in Haug (2008), role play modestly engages offering a role to one or more members of a group and giving a goal or purpose that participants must attain. Role play is a learner-centered activity as it develops students' enthusiasm to learn the subject matter and to discuss the contents therein. According to Poorman (2002), integrating experiential learning activities in the classrooms increases interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content.

Practice of role play

The process of writing dialogues was completed with the final approval of the faculty. It led to the next step of practising their role play. The practising their role play. The practising sessions were begun in the English sessions were begun in the English sessions for about a week. During these sessions, students had an opportunity to watch performance of other groups which helped them to know the merits and demerits of the play.

This apart, a majority of the students gained confidence and shed their inhibitions to a great extent. After a reasonably good performance, suggestions were given to them to exchange their roles and practice, as it helped them to grasp the total scene of the role play. Then, students were given the suggestion to take up their own roles and practice again several times. When students gained confidence to perform role play without any assistance, they encouraged to take up the role play before the whole class.

This practice helped students to cope with the dialogues, situation, and characters in the play and to empathize with character which in turn helped them to undertake role play in the best manner possible. Thus, the practice sessions were conducted fruitfully and this led to the final phase of performing the role play before the whole class.

Performance of role play

After two weeks of rigorous rehearsal sessions, a majority of the students expressed their willingness to act in the final performance. All the students started off with a sincere approach to give their best by giving life to their roles. They were quite enthusiastic to undertake the role play. They gathered all articles and costumes that aptly suited the respective scenes. The costumes, the preparation and arrangement of articles gave the set a sense of the right ambience as described in the narrative.

All the six teams each comprising eight students showed interest and intention to take part. They had gone through preparation and rehearsals, which was reflected in their great performance. All the scenes were enacted the way they were planned. The delivery of dialogues reflected a feel for the characters. The performance and the enthusiasm of the students stimulated everyone in the class. It was a joyful and memorable language learning experience for them.

II. FINDINGS

Research tools such as personal observation and informal student interviews were great source of help for the research to elicit responses and to arrive at the findings research were positive and encouraging. Some of the key findings are mentioned below;

Role play had given the students the required impetus to communicate in a variety of authentic situations.

The whole process had encouraged the students to great extent.

A majority of the students expressed that their inhibitions had been reduced.

It was also evident from the interactions of the shy students that they had improved their negotiating skills.

As mentioned earlier, role play facilitated the integration of LSRW skills.

The procedure of the research and activity had helped give sufficient exposure for listening skills as students had to interact with faculty and peer group regularly.

This research study also provided a number of opportunities for students to voice their views on various aspects during discussion, practice and execution of the role play.

It is required students to read the original text of the role play besides other available resource on role play to enrich their abilities and contribution.

Students got a wonderful opportunity of writing dialogues for various roles besides editing and redrafting their dialogues. This process gradually enriched their writing skills.

Students expressed their willingness to participate in such events to get good exposure for participating in public speaking activities.

The activity also exposed students to the necessary social skills and etiquette to be followed.

A majority of the students had overcome the barriers of gender and socioeconomic background.

Thus the whole process had greatly enriched the interaction between the teacher and students. In addition to the above findings, such activities always cheer up the classroom atmosphere; in such settings, the teaching of the textual unit has also become quite easy for teachers and for learners to understand.

III. CONCLUSION

This is an action research study which aimed at reducing various inhibitions which hamper student participation in classrooms. The study had taken role play as tool and it employed collaborative language learning (CLL) as the methodology to conduct the research. The findings of the research show that the objectives of the research have been attained to great extent. The whole experience of the research substantiates that activities of this kind do always maximise the role of the learners, boost their morale and develop interaction levels between the teacher and the taught for the process of effective and joyful teaching and learning.

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Kandukuri Mariyadas. "To Enhance Language Skills through Role play." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 10(05), 2021, pp 01-03. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722