**THE IMPACT OF DRAMA AND THEATER GAMES ON DEVELOPING THE ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN SRI LANKA**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Even after years of English language instruction, many Sri Lankan students find it challenging to communicate in English. Though effective communication contains various aspects such as ideas, emotions, appropriateness, adaptability, grammar and vocabulary, the typical English language class does not provide many opportunities for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to use the English language or oral communication or to develop the articulateness in it.

An ESL teacher’s aim in teaching oral English is to develop students’ ability to communicate in second language (L2) freely and instinctively. To achieve this aim, teachers need to give students the opportunity to use the L2 inside the classroom. As the use of traditional teaching/learning methods cannot create enough motivation and interest in ESL learners, teachers implement new strategies to teach L2 in an active and interesting manner.

Larsen-Freeman (2012) emphasizes that implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the ultimate goal of enhancing the speaking skills of students. This is important for helping students become communicatively capable in the language classroom. Students must master certain elements of the taught language to accomplish this goal.

Implementing drama and theatre games as a CLT approach in the ESL class can make lessons more interesting, joyful and relaxing. They can provide opportunities for the learners to practice real-life scenarios in a classroom context while providing opportunities to practice speaking skills.

Holden (1981) states that drama offers opportunities for learners to use their imagination and memory to express themselves through verbal expressions and gestures.

Oxford and Crookall (1989) states that role-playing and drama not only help students improve their oral language expertise in the target language, but also offers opportunities for students to respond to the types of linguistic behavioural patterns that they have to encounter outside the classroom.

Richard Clark (2013) identifies theatre games as an ideal strategy for language acquisition as they enable both learners with or without language/ learning difficulties to overcome their struggles in language acquisition.

This study focuses on the impact of drama and theatre games on developing the oral proficiency of ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

Objective

The objective of the study is to investigate the impact of drama and theatre games on developing the oral proficiency of ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

Research hypotheses

 Zero Hypothesis (Ho hypothesis): There is no impact of drama and theatre games on developing the oral proficiency of ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

 Alternative Hypothesis: There is an impact of drama and theatre games on developing the oral proficiency of ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed using quantitative research methods. The data were collected via a pre-test, a study program/treatment, post-test and researcher’s observation. To test the research hypotheses, the same level of Diploma in English students (those who have completed the General Certificate of Examination, Advanced Level (GCE AL)) at Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy, Pallekele, Kundasale were selected as an experimental group and a control group. These two groups consisted of 34 randomly selected students. (17 from each group).

Primary Data Collection Procedure

In order to determine their passive knowledge of English language, a pre-test was given to both experimental and control group prior to the treatment.

A performance-based test was used as the pre-test and the post-test.

Pre-test and Post Test:

Procedure:

The teacher introduces a scenario to each pair (ex: Two friends/co-workers find a buried treasure) and asks them to create and perform an impromptu drama on the given scenario by taking the roles of the given characters (ex: two friends/co-workers). Each pair is given 05-10 minutes to rehearse before presenting the act to the class. They have to use dialogues, body language, facial expressions and gestures to enact the scenario they were given. Afterwards, each pair is commented by the researcher at the end of their performance.

Below are the sample scenarios used at the tests:

• Two friends/co-workers find a buried treasure

• An unsatisfied customer complaining to chef about a meal in a busy restaurant

• Two thieves planning a robbery

• Uber driver and a customer (extension: you are late to go to work)

• Introducing your girlfriend/boyfriend to your parents for the first time.

• Farther and mother arguing over a holiday destination

Researcher’s observation and evaluation:

The researcher observed and scored the learners’ performances to check their fluency in the L2 by using the researcher-made rubric scale. The researcher kept each student’s records to evaluate by comparing them with the post-test’s results. Below is the rubric scale used by the researcher at both the pre and the post-test. The researcher adapted and developed the rubric from (www.rcampus.com, 2020).

Table 1: Rubric scale used at both the pre and post-test

Skills Excellent

(04 marks) Good

(03 marks) Fair

(02 marks) Poor

(01 mark)

Pronunciation and Fluency Dialogue is fluent, speaker pronounces all words correctly.

Uses native-like flow of speech. Almost all words were pronounced correctly with the exception of 1-2 words.

Uses language with pauses or chunks. Some words were pronounced correctly with the exception of 3-4 words.

Uses language with pauses or chunks. Many words were pronounced incorrectly.

Language is choppy and disconnected.

Tone and Intonation Showed excellent uses of tone and intonation.

Both tone and intonation were appropriate for the context of the role play. Showed good use of tone and intonation, however, the tone or intonation was inappropriate for the context at times. Showed little change in tone and intonation. Speech was slightly robotic, showing very little emotion or inflection. Showed lacked tone and intonation completely. Speech was robotic and monotonous, showing no emotion or inflection at all.

Acting and Originality Great clarity, voice projection, no laughing that obscures scene, speaking in complete sentences. Missing one of the previous elements (clarity, voice projection, no laughing, speaking in complete sentences). Missing 2-3 of the previous elements (clarity, voice projection, no laughing, speaking in complete sentences). Missing many of the previous elements (clarity, voice projection, no laughing, speaking in complete sentences) or can’t hear or understand.

Movement Moves expressively, using a variety of gesture, body movement, and facial expression to effectively illuminate character. Moves cleanly, using gesture, body movement, and facial expression to illustrate character. Attempts to use gesture, body movement, and facial expression, but execution is weak. Use of script inhibits performance. Uses limited or inappropriate movement. Use of script in hand detracts from performance.

Character Communicates L2 expressively, illuminating the life and world of the character. Communicates L2 clearly, expressing the life and world of the character. Attempts to communicate L2 clearly and express the life and world of the character, but execution is weak. Uses limited or inappropriate L2 communication and acting techniques to create character.

Treatment/ Study program

The drama and theatre games oriented ESL lessons were implemented in fifty-two sessions (02 hours per day; 03 sessions per week) from Monday to Wednesday for four consecutive months. In each session, the experimental group studied the English language through drama and theatre games, whereas the control group studied it following conventional methods.

Table 2 shows a sample lesson plan of the different methods applied to each group.

Table 2: Sample lesson plan of the Drama and Theater Games Oriented Teaching vs. Traditional Teaching

Experimental group Control group

Topic: What are you doing now?

(Present Continuous Tense) Topic: What are you doing now?

(Present Continuous Tense)

Lesson (120 minutes)

• Power-point presentation which explains the Present continuous tense formula (S + be + verb+ ing) and the use of it (20 min.)

• “icebreaker games” as warm-ups or introductory activities (find your partner, what is he/she doing?)

(5 min)

• Role play/Improvisation (pair work) (40 min.)

• Teacher’s feedbacks (10 minutes)

• Filling exercises in course book (20 min.)

• Question and answer session with the teacher (checking the answers of the given exercises) (15 min)

• Summary of the lesson (05 min)

• Feedback (05 min.) Lesson (120 minutes)

• Power-point presentation which explains the Present continuous tense formula (S + be + verb+ ing) and the use of it (20 min.)

• Writing sentences (20 min.)

• Filling exercises in course book (20 min.)

• Correcting books by the teacher (30 minutes)

• Speech task - Describe what is happening in a given picture/ a scenario/ at the moment (20 min)

• Summary of the lesson (05 min)

• Feedback (05 min.)

• Learner-centered teaching • Teacher-centered teaching

• Students develop language skills (integrated) through tasks and cooperative learning • Teacher delivers content, students are the recipient of content

• Audiovisual and kinesthetic setting • Audiovisual, speech tasks and writing activities

• Use of techniques where students practice their oral skills in real life scenarios • Use of traditional methods where students mostly write, give speeches and answer questions of the teacher

After the treatment, both groups were given the same pre-test which is mentioned in the methodology as the post-test to evaluate their progress in L2 oral proficiency. The analysis of the post-test results was used to clarify the hypotheses of this study; there is an impact of drama and theatre games on developing the oral proficiency of ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

Secondary Data Collection Procedure

Secondary data were collected using resources such as: books, research papers and web articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the findings of the study.

Analysis of the pre-test and post-test

The objective of these tests is to understand the ESL learners’ development in L2 oral proficiency by using drama and theatre games oriented ESL lessons. Each test was scored out of 20 marks.

Number of students -

Experimental group 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Marks scored at Pre-test 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 9 9 9 10 13 14 14

Marks scored at Post-test 15 15 16 16 16 16 17 18 18 18 18 18 19 20 20 20 20

Number of students -

Control group 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Marks scored at Pre-test 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 9 9 10 10 11 13 13

Marks scored at Post-test 12 12 13 13 13 13 14 14 14 14 14 15 15 16 16 16 17

Table 3. Results of the pre-test and the post-test

Table 2. Comparison of the pre and post-test results of experimental and control group.

Group Test N Min. Score Max. Score Mode Mean/

AVG AVG gap

Experimental Pre-Test 17 6 14 7 8.7

8.94

3.34

Post-Test 17 15 20 18 17.6

Control Pre-Test 17 6 13 7 8.5

5.6

Post-Test 17 12 17 14 14.1

At the pre-test, it was found that the minimum score both experimental and control group could obtain was 06. The maximum score of the experimental group was 14 whereas the control group’s maximum score was 13 out of 20 marks. At the post-test, experimental group’s minimum score was increased by 08 and maximum score was increased by 06 marks, while control group’s minimum score was increased by 06 and maximum score was increased by 04 marks.

Considering the post-test results, the scores of the experimental group were found to be significantly higher than the control group’s as mode of the experimental group is 18 whereas the mode of control group is 14 (18>14).

The both groups have gained a higher average point (mean) at the post-test than at the pre-test. Comparing the data obtained, it is a significant positive improvement of the average points of the experimental group compared to the control group (8.94 > 5.6).

The findings revealed that drama and theatre games oriented ESL lessons have offered participants the ability to create certain everyday interactions. Participants became interested in learning and playing various roles in a real-life setting that they might experience in the future. In fact, participants benefited from the nature of the scenario they come up with, gained practice to face the real life situations by using the language terms in L2. Though the learners were shy and used limited language at the pre-test, the researcher could observe that drama and theatre games created a comfortable atmosphere and modified the normal traditional style of learning and teaching as the learners from the experimental group were much more comfortable at the post-test. They used a developed vocabulary, language terms and gestures to express themselves at the post-test. As a result, participants engaged and collaborated more in pairs or groups that enhanced positive and cooperative engagement.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study was to find out whether there is an impact of drama and theatre games on developing the oral proficiency of ESL learners in Sri Lanka.

Based on the results it can be concluded that teaching L2 through drama and theatre games would be a promising CLT strategy, as it offers language acquisition, encourages ESL learners to utilize their target L2 through enacting the real-life scenarios and thereby improve their oral proficiency. Through drama and theatre games oriented L2 learning, the monotony of a conventional classroom and language lessons can be broken and facilitates ESL learners to handle real-life situations as competent English language speakers.

Considering the discussed results, the alternative hypothesis is accepted as drama and theatre games oriented ESL lessons do have an impact on developing Sri Lankan ESL learners’ English oral proficiency.

Considering the existing state of poor oral communication skills of ESL learners, it can be recommended that the English teachers need to find forms and instruments to support their students develop their English language oral proficiency. ESL teachers can conveniently utilize different instructional methods, like drama and theatre games, where students can discover actual language experiences from actual persons outside of the language classroom. In the Sri Lankan context, it is important that authentic materials are used as majority of students have limited opportunities to practice the target language outside the classroom. Moreover, implementing drama and theatre games on teaching English as a L2 focused workshops should be held in Sri Lankan school context. Finally, the English textbooks used in Sri Lankan schools should be revised as they depend on grammar, reading, and writing skills, and not so much speaking skills.

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