

## **DRAMA AS INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

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Twentieth century saw a paradigm shift in the way English language is taught and learnt in the world. With the ever growing education and development, the researchers and the linguistics proposed a plethora of teaching methods, techniques and approaches that altered the whole scenario and atmosphere in the English classroom. With the spread of the industrialization and globalization, the world felt an urgent need of English language to be taught in a simpler and effective manner so that the learners may acquire fluency and mastery over the language with minimum efforts and in a short span of time. This could not become possible with the traditional methods and techniques of language teaching as they had several unjustifiable problems that made those methods antique. They were felt to be incapable and insufficient to cope with the problems and requirements of the modern generations. Thus there was a need to evolve new methods and techniques of language teaching and learning and the scholars gave many new methods like Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Reader-Response Method, etc.,. However, even these methods came to be felt obsolete for the post-modern generation who is more intelligent than the earlier ones. Here I am trying to propose the Dramatic Technique of foreign language learning that can prove to be of immense aid for the modern teachers and learners.

The present paper explores how various skills and competencies of English language like Reading, Speaking, and Comprehension of the Language can be improved and strengthened by encouraging the pupils to act in simple English plays. Such motivation can spur and boost their confidence in language learning and also in building their capacity in undertaking more difficult tasks for making the language stronger. It will be an attempt here to prove the utility potential and advantageous features of drama in the language class as far as language learning is concerned.

There is a well-known Chinese proverb- *“tell me and I will forget; teach me and I will remember; involve me and I will learn.”* This simple maxim has underlined and encompassed everything a teacher should know and everything that the teaching method should have. Merely

exposing the pupils to the bulk of information, guiding them remaining objective to their needs and skills, or providing them books are not sufficient in the modern times at all to teach anything like English language. The conventional methods proved to be of no use in sorting out the problems and teaching the foreign language to the learners. “The conventional English class hardly gives the students an opportunity to use language in this manner and develop fluency in it, and this is because students lack the adequate exposure to spoken English outside the class as well as the lack of exposure to native speakers who can communicate with the students on authentic matters”(Dr. Zyoud).

### **Value of Drama in Language Classroom**

Today, the instructors and teachers are expected to be united with the students and involve them in some activity so that they may learn things practically. This requirement made the scholars to think of drama as a modern technique of teaching and learning language which facilitates the learning process. The term drama does not mean here the kind of drama performed on the stage. Here, drama refers to the dramatic activities that the students can do in a controlled situations, and the purpose of this is not to produce actors and actresses, but to improve language skills and competencies of the pupils. Drama is an activity that boosts all the skills of the learners. Drama signifies any kind of activity where learners are asked either to portray themselves or to portray someone else in an imaginary situation. As Paul Davies has described, “In other words, drama is concerned with the world of 'let's pretend'; it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person.” The very advantage of the enacting drama gives opportunity to the students to learn things practically which he or she may not acquire so easily. The learners are benefitted in many a ways, that is , not only in the improvement of their competency and skills, but also in the strengthening of their courage and guts. As **Dr. Shibani Banerjee** opines that if drama is taught as a practical learning experience, it can give amazing results. According to her,

For example, “If a learner of English asked you ‘What is a blind person?’ you might simply reply, ‘A blind person cannot see’, and this probably may satisfy him intellectually. But if you replied, ‘Shut your eyes and try to find your pen on the desk in front of you’, you would be involving him in the actual experience of being blind, and would thus satisfy him not only intellectually, but emotionally as well, and possibly inspire feeling of empathy with all blind people. He would be more likely to remember the meaning of the word as a result of this moment of direct experience. Such potential in drama can be of immense help while teaching and learning a foreign language like English in meaningful way.

### **Advantages of Drama in Pedagogy**

Before enumerating the advantages of the dramatic activities for the language learners, let us first understand the term dramatic activity. Dramatic activity is not, to say again, concerned with the performance the professional actors do on the professional stage and theatres. It is confined to the uses it can provide in the language learning. The dramatic activities may be defined as those activities by which the learners are asked to do or pretend to be something in a controlled situation under the supervision of the instructors so that some language skills and competencies might be strengthened. Dr. Munther Zyoud has talked elaborately on such dramatic activities as,

Dramatic activities are activities which give the students an opportunity to use his own personality in creating the material in which part of the language class is to be based. Drama activities can provide students with an opportunity to use language to express various emotions, to solve problems, to make decisions, to socialize. Drama activities are also useful in the development of oral communication skills, and reading and writing as well. Drama activities help students to communicate in the foreign language including those with limited vocabulary.

Once the students are involved in dramatic activity with a particular task or story, they take fun in enacting, as has been described above, for drama provides good opportunity to their dormant qualities to be open and come out. The learners get more and more involved in the activity as they enjoy doing it and practice their role-dialogues. Thus they also practice communicating with each other through foreign language. There is no need of separate classes as they understand the very basic grammatical nuances in the very process of enacting while trying to speak the dialogues correctly. In this way, drama also contributes in improving the communicative competencies. “The goal of language learning is communicative competence”(WAN YEE SAM), and these competencies can easily and effectively be strengthened and improved through dramatic activities. Wan Yee Sam also talks in his paper about some communicative activities that can prove to be of incentive in the teaching and learning process of language.

Communicative activities' refers to the techniques which are employed in the communicative method in language teaching. Examples of such activities are games, exercises, practices and projects which make use of the Target language. The activities involve 'doing' things with language e.g. making choices, evaluating and bridging the information gap. The language-using activities for communication is not restricted to conversation and may involve listening, speaking, reading, writing or an integration of two or more skills.

Thus, the use of drama which has been neglected so far in teaching a foreign or second language is essentially imperative in that, it fosters and sustains the language qualities of the pupils that cannot be done in any other way easily. It also “fosters and sustains learners' motivation as it is fun and entertaining and because it engages feelings it can provide a rich experience of language for the participants”( Zafeiriadou). So far the language teaching has been result oriented which had negative impact on the pupils. But drama provides enough motivation and involvement and hence the learners feel delighted to learn everything. The effect of this motivation is so positive that the learner's whole personality is changed in the process of enacting the activity.

Further, the dramatic activities does not only improve communicative competencies, but also fosters psycholinguistic faculties of the learners in that, through the process of dramatic activities, the pupils who are involved in this inevitably give hand to the other important features of their personality like, self-esteem, courage to face difficulties, spontaneity, etc,. As Pual Daives opines, “that drama heightened self-esteem, motivation, spontaneity, increased capacity

for empathy, and lowered sensitivity to rejection. All these facilitate communication and provide an appropriate psycholinguistic climate for language learning.”

The advantages of drama and dramatic activities are innumerable and inexhaustive which cannot be enlisted in a single paper. Still, Wan Yee Sam has tried to give a list of very distinguishing features of the drama and dramatic activities:

1. Drama releases imagination and energy and this could be considered as an educational objective. It encourages students to exercise their sensitivity and imagination and thus makes learning more realistic and meaningful.
2. As an educational tool, the use of drama fosters the social, intellectual and the linguistic development of the child. Drama centers around language development, personal awareness, group co-operation, sensory awareness, and imaginative growth.
3. Drama increases motivation and provides the incentive to work hard. The activities using drama tend to be purposeful. The student sees the need to communicate and concentrates on how to go about a task since drama provides him with a meaningful context.
4. Drama fosters a sense of responsibility and co-operation among the students. Drama activities normally take the form of group work and students cannot afford to stay passive for too long. There is a need to belong to the group and to complete the task. The students develop a sense of self-worth of themselves as they work together.
5. Drama has a therapeutic effect. It can help solve emotional and behavioural problems. It is a way for a 'troublesome kid' to expend his energy and encourage the shy and uncooperative student to participate.
6. Drama encourages students to exercise their sensitivity and imagination. Temporary suspension of the ego occurs when students participate in dramatic activities. They have to perceive an experience through the roles they, take on which are often different from their own. In role-play for example, a student is given a chance to understand and relate to the feelings of others. This develops a sense of empathy in the student as he learns to look beyond himself. Drama develops moral and social qualities in a student.
7. It motivates the teacher to meet the needs of the student. The drama activities provide opportunities to understand the thoughts and feelings of the students as they express themselves in the drama activities. From the constant feedback provided by the activities, the teacher can plan better strategies for more effective learning and teaching.
8. Drama can lead pupils to an appreciation of drama as an art form.

These features are only a few of the most availing qualities of the drama. Let us now see the dramatic activities that we can use in a controlled atmosphere of a classroom to teach a foreign language.

### **Dramatic Activities for Foreign Language Teaching**

So many scholars have contemplated over this issue as to what kind of activities can avail us to boost the confidence as well as competency of the learners. Some scholars have given importance to Role-playing and Simulation, whereas the others have proposed complete dramatic processes and activities. “There is a whole range of role-play activities. It ranges from the simple to the complex, from the structured to the unstructured. Some examples of the types of role-play are socio-drama, sketches, story dramatization, mock interviews, business meetings and even debates”(Wan Yee Sam). Paul Davies also enumerates some activities, “In more specific, concrete terms, drama includes mime, role-playing, extended role-playing (or improvisation), simulation, interaction activities such as various forms of dialogues, and dramatized story-telling. Apart from these, there are some dramatic processes that require the pupils to act in them and speak dialogues in foreign language resulting in improvement of various language skills. Lindsay Clandfield gives six such activities that the actors use for rehearsal or warm up.

- 1) **Greetings:** The students are asked to move around in a room and greet each other. Students just shake hands, move on, and greet the next student they meet. Then ask the students to greet each other in a more specific way.
- 2) **Channel Hopping:** The students are asked here to make groups and the teacher uses remote as a prop to make them act just in the way the channels are changed.
- 3) **Alphabet Dialogue:** This activity consists of 26 lines of dialogue. The first line starts with a given letter (say 'R'). The reply to that line must start with an 'S', and so on, until the whole alphabet has been covered.
- 4) **Dubbed Movie:** The students are asked to play or pretend scenes or roles without moving lips like a dumb play and two or more students sit in front of the action, and do the speaking.
- 5) **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly Advice:** Three students are nominated in this activity and the other students ask them advices on problems. They rank it as good, bad or ugly and the roles are then switched around so that different people get a chance to provide different kinds of advice.
- 6) **The Fortune Teller with Two Heads:** Two students are nominated as fortune teller and are asked by the other students ask them about their future. The fortune tellers speak one word torn by turn of the sentences they want to speak.

Vani Chauhan also talks about three activities in her paper that can be effectively used in classrooms.

**Activity One: Questioning in Role or Hot Seating:** Questioning in role/hot seating involves one of the learners (preferably the teacher) being questioned in a role about their motives, character and attitude to a situation or other people and so on. The class is told that they are newspaper reporters at a press conference to interview the character after his/her adventures.

The 'character' sits in the front, facing the rest of the class and answers

questions posed by the reporters. The reporters ask not just questions, but, also take notes in order to write a news story or a more descriptive feature article for the next edition of their paper. This technique can be used for deepening characterization and boosting comprehension of the learners.

**Activity Two: Telephone Conversations:** The class is divided into groups of two learners. The learners sit with their backs to each other so that they can only hear their telephone conversation partner. The learners in each group are to imagine that they are two different characters. A particular situation from the story/text is taken for which every pair has to build up a telephone conversation. Telephone conversations test the learners' ability to react quickly and help in enhancing the speaking-listening skills of the learners.

**Activity Three: Soliloquy / Thought Tracking:** This drama technique can be exploited for interpretation of the literary text and, especially, for understanding a fictitious character. In this particular technique, the learner gets into the skin of the character and thinks from his/her point of view. He totally empathizes with the character. The class is divided into groups of five or six students. In groups, learners are to select an important point of time in the main character's life in their text. It could be a time of success, failure, disappointment, loss, rejection, elation, isolation or struggle, a time when the character has a monologue with himself.

## Conclusion

The above discussion about the uses and advantages of various dramatic activities underlines the importance of this drama technique in the pedagogy of foreign language. Dramatic technique is one of the most innovative and productive as compared to the other orthodox methods and techniques. It fosters not only linguistic competencies of the pupils, but also shapes and forges the confidence and personality of them. In short, we can say that drama is the only tool that has potentiality of fulfilling the goals of teaching foreign language.

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