

Students' Perceptions Of Using Drama In Developing Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT: *In the ESL learning context, the main focus is on writing and reading skills ignoring the other language skills such as speaking and listening. The learning language can be obstructed by different factors such as due to shyness, lack of confidence and stage fright and so on so forth. The present paper attempts to explore the students' perceptions and views of using drama in the classroom to improve speaking skills at the undergraduate level. The sample comprises of 60 professional students who are studying in a professional college, Hyderabad, Telangana, India. The students' questionnaires are used as a research tool for collecting data from the target group. Then, the collected data was analyzed and interpreted to answer the research questions and to prove the research hypothesis. The findings of the study revealed that the students' oral skills had improved significantly when the drama is used in language instruction among the learners. Students also expressed that when drama techniques are incorporated for teaching speaking skills in the classroom, it boosted students' self-confidence and overcame their stage fright. In conclusion, it was found that the use of drama aided to develop students' speaking skills.*

KEYWORDS: *Drama, speaking skills, oral skills, students' speaking skills*

1. INTRODUCTION

In English as Second Language (ESL) learning context, the main focus of students is on writing and reading skills neglecting other skills such as speaking and listening. These skills are significant components of any language. Speaking is regarded as one of the language skills and the most natural form of communication among human beings. It can be obstructed by various factors such as shyness, lack of self-confidence, stage fear and laziness and so on so forth. Zheng (2008) claims that when students are required to complete the speaking activity, their stage fear level can be increased. In order to overcome these difficulties, the drama can be used as a teaching technique in the classroom. As Fleming (2006) states that drama is a medium to perform personal, social and emotional development as well as communication and language development.

There are some other ways for teaching speaking skills such as public speaking and debates where the teaching conditions would not be ideal as anticipated by the teachers because of the big size of the class and the students' proficiency levels (Miccoli, 2003).

Drama to develop speaking skills

During the drama, students step into different roles with the intention to enact it. Prior to enacting, they memorize, improvise, and rehearse. It provides a great opportunity to practice their speaking skills (Ronke, 2005). It is an enthralling activity for developing speaking skills where the learners are assigned different roles so that they can perform in real-world contexts. The drama activities such as role-play, simulation, drama games, guided

improvisation, acting play scripts and prepared improvised drama are commonly used in the English language teaching context (Scrivener, 1994). These activities provide learners an opportunity to experiment with imaginative thoughts, creative views from the real world context to perform.

Objective

The objective of the study is to explore students' perceptions about the use of drama in the development of speaking skills in ESL classrooms.

Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following research questions.

- Can the use of drama in the classroom, aid to develop students' oral skills?
- What are students' views about the use of drama techniques/activities in the classroom?

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that there is a significant improvement of students' speaking skills when drama techniques are incorporated in classroom teaching at the tertiary level.

The present study can be productive for tertiary level students, teachers and course designers. This may be helpful for students to develop their speaking skills through the application of dramatic activities in the classroom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The section provides a review of literature about the use of drama in the classroom and previous studies about the use of drama for developing language skills.

In the teaching-learning context, the drama is used as a learning tool for the initiation of learning. It can be used as a technique for teaching the English language. Drama can be used to facilitate language skills as well as often neglected elements such as pronunciation and body language of the learners. The students can acquire the language through an authentic activity i.e. drama in this context, acts as an authentic activity where students can relate their experiences in the activity.

Micccoli's (2003) study investigates the value of using drama at the university level. The study focused to find out the advantages of using drama in the learning context for promoting meaningful interaction and learning. It also encouraged the learners to use drama for transformative and emancipatory learning at large.

Bobkina (2015) in her study stated that drama techniques helped students to involve in pair and group activities where they can interact orally with others confidently. It was also found in the study that the students participated actively and they had the opportunity to interact with other learners more time.

In another study by Kondal (2016), it was found that drama aided to develop all the language skills in the teaching-learning context. In his study, the teacher played a significant role as a facilitator in the implementation of drama in an ESL classroom. It was also revealed in his study that language learning happened through drama in a natural manner without any inhibition.

In another study by Shraiber and Yaroslavova (2016), they expressed that drama techniques in the EFL context are considered a learner's role-related behavior. In their study, the drama techniques included role-play, simulation, mime and improvisation in the teaching-learning situation.

3. METHODOLOGY

The sample, research instruments and the research procedure of the study were discussed in this section.

Sample

The sample of the study comprises of 60 professional students who were studying in their first year of a technical degree course. Among them, 42 are male and 18 are female students. The students had heterogeneous backgrounds – different media of instruction throughout their education.

Research Tools

The students' questionnaire was a research tool for the present study. The questionnaire was administered to the students in order to elicit the data. The questionnaire has divided into three parts, the first part deals with personal information, general information about language skills in the second part, and in the final part, the students' perceptions related to speaking skills.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The gathered data with the aid of students' questionnaires were examined and inferred to obtain an understanding in order to get the findings of the study. Each item of the questionnaire was analyzed and interpreted systematically.

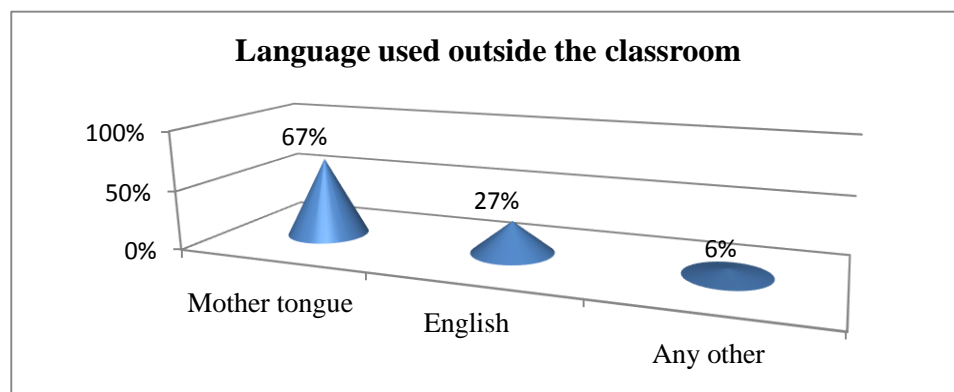


Figure 1: Language used outside the classroom

It was found in figure 1 that the majority of the students (i.e. 67%) used the mother tongue for speaking outside the classroom, whereas only 27% of them used English for speaking outside the classroom.

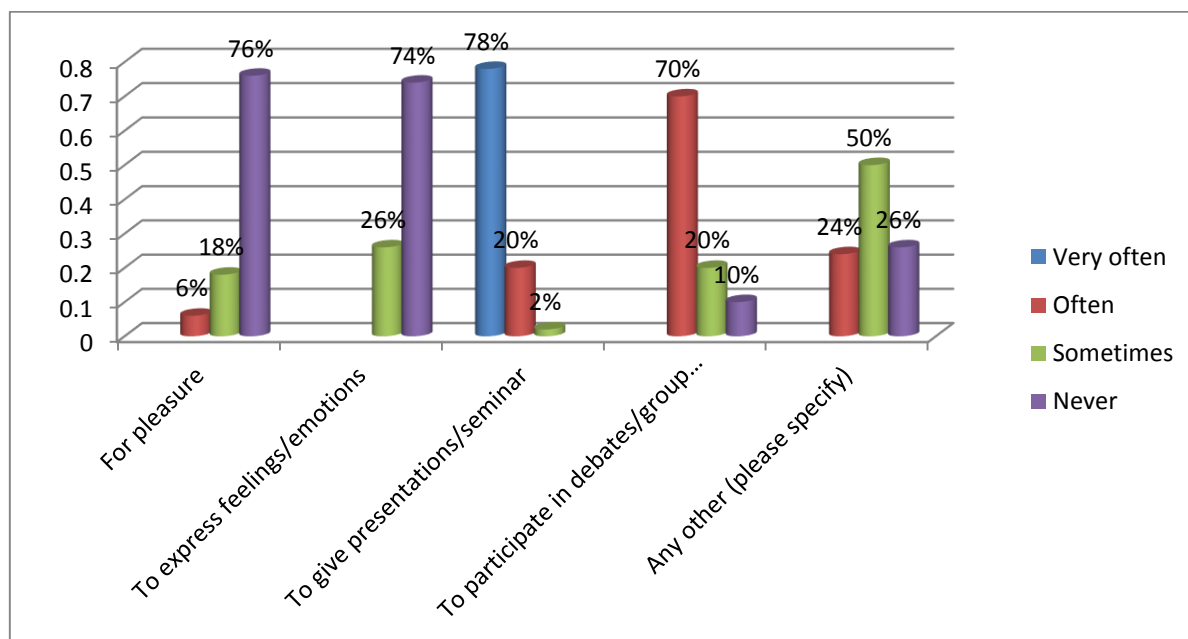


Figure 2: Purposes of speaking English

It was observed on the figure 2 that only few of the students (i.e. 6%) often speak in English for pleasure outside the classroom whereas the majority of students (i.e.76%) never spoke English outside for pleasure.

It was found that a few students (i.e. 26%) sometimes used English to express their feelings/emotions whereas the majority of them (i.e. 74%) never used English to express their emotions/feelings.

It was revealed that the majority of the student (i.e. 78%) used the English language to give presentations/seminars and 20% of them used English often for the presentation. Only 2% of them sometimes used English.

The data indicated on the figure 2 that 70% of the students often used English for participating in group discussion/debates whereas only 10% of them never used the English language for participation.

The data also revealed that 50% of the students sometimes used the English language for attending interviews, elocution and other competitions whereas 25% of them used English often to do so.

Is speaking skill important for engineering students?

Yes	No
86%	14%

The data indicated that the majority of students (i.e. 86%) said that speaking skill is important for engineering students to perform various professional activities.

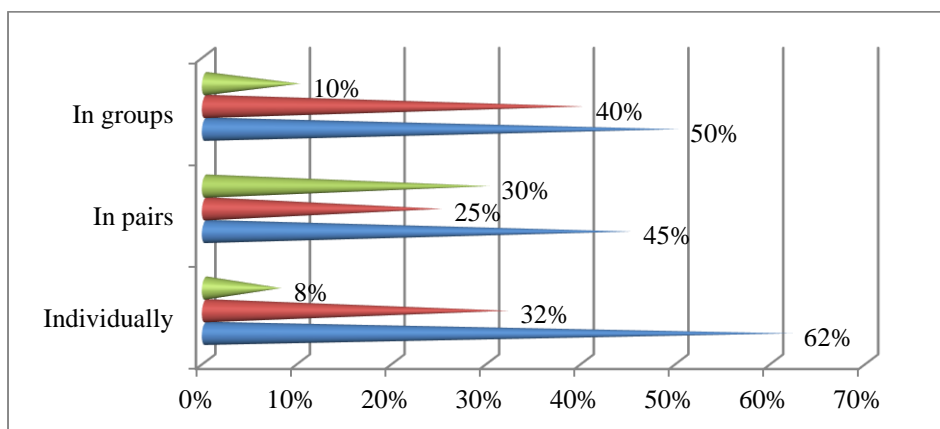


Figure 3: Mode of activity

In figure 3 indicated that the majority of students (i.e. 50%) said they participated in speaking activities always in groups whereas 10% of them said they never participated in speaking activities in groups.

The data in figure 3 indicated that the majority of students always participated in speaking activities in pairs whereas 30% of them said that they never participated in speaking activities in pairs. The data also indicated that 62% of the students always participated in speaking activities individually whereas 8% of them said they never participated in speaking activities individually.

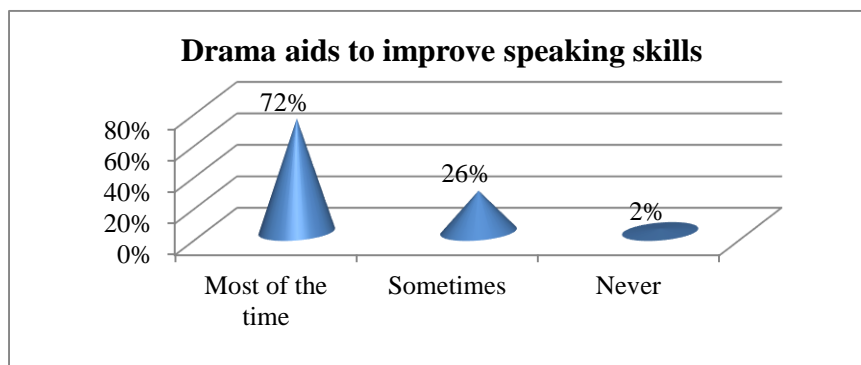


Figure 4: Drama helps to improve speaking skills

The data in figure 4 indicated that the majority of students (i.e. 72%) said they use of drama in the classroom improved their speaking skills most of the time whereas only 2% of them said that drama didn't help to develop their speaking skills.

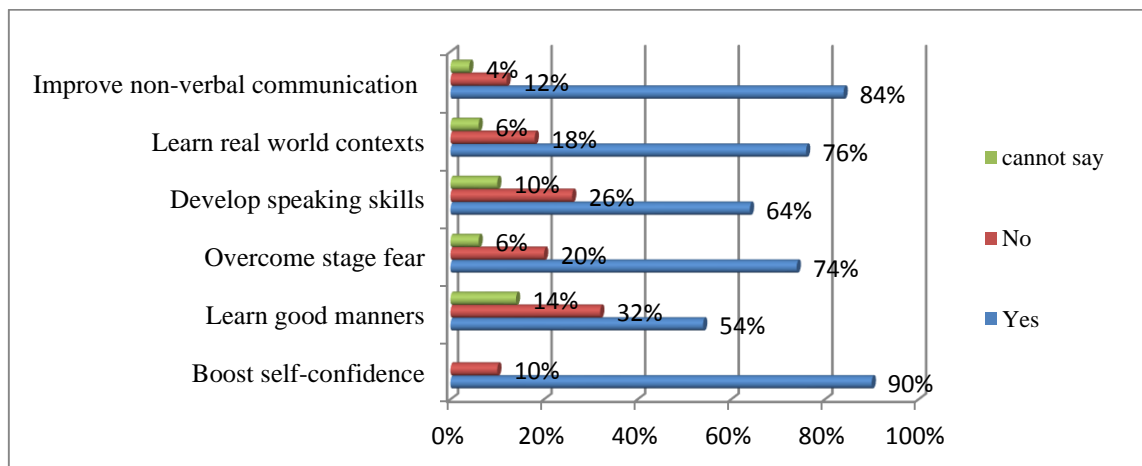


Figure 5: Aspects where speaking skills are improved

The data in figure 5, indicated that the majority of the students (i.e. 90%) said their self-confidence is boosted when drama activities used in the classroom whereas 10% of them said they did not boost their self-confidence.

The data in figure 5 indicated that 54% of the students learned good manners when the drama is incorporated in the classroom activities whereas 32% of them said they did not learn manners. The majority of the students (i.e.74%) stated that they did overcome stage fear when drama technique was used in the classroom whereas 20% of them said they did not overcome their stage fear.

The data in figure 5 exhibited that majority of the students (i.e.64%) expressed that they developed their speaking skills when the drama techniques were used in the classroom whereas 26% of them said that they did not develop their speaking skills.

The data in figure 5 exhibited that the majority of the students (i.e.76%) mentioned that they learned real-world experiences when drama activities were used in the classroom whereas 18%of them said they did not learn any experiences. The data in figure 5 also exhibited that the majority of the students (i.e. 84%) said that they improved non-verbal communication such as positive body language while participating in dramatic activities whereas 12% of them said that they did not improve their non-verbal communication.

5. FINDINGS

The data analysis and interpretation of the study provided the following findings.

- It was observed that most of the students used mother tongue than English outside the classroom context.
- The majority of the students never used the English language outside the classroom.
- The students used their mother tongue most of the time for expressing their feelings/emotions.
- In a formal context, the majority of the students used the English language for giving presentations or seminars.
- Even most of the students used often the English language for participating in group discussions/debates.
- The majority of students used the English language for official purposes such as attending an interview, taking part in elocution and any other competitive events.
- The majority of the students stated that speaking skills are important for engineering students for career advancement.

- The students also mentioned that they participated in speaking activities always individually than in pairs or in groups.
- The students stated that their speaking skills improved a great extent when dramatic activities incorporated for teaching in the classroom.
- The students boosted their self-confidence, overcame stage fright, learned real-world experiences, improved good manners and non-verbal communication especially in positive body language. As Harmer (1991) claims that in one to one communication the speaker may use a variety of facial expressions, gestures and other common body movements for communicating the message.

6. DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the study was to discover students' perceptions about the use of drama in developing speaking skills at the tertiary level. The students were undergone different drama techniques/activities in the classroom for developing speaking skills. At the end of the study, it was found that there was a significant impact of drama on the students' performance in teaching speaking skills. The use of drama as a technique in language teaching raises students' awareness of the target language. The technique helped the students to promote good manners and develop real-world experience during the activities.

Drama as an effective tool that aid learners to improve their speaking process through a systematic structure based on the type of learning. The students learn and improve their speaking skills while participating in group/pair activities through constant efforts and feedback from the peer group. They are required to express their ideas or information to fellow students in order to make the activities effective. It was also found with the results that the students are motivated to take part in the speaking activities without any inhibition. The techniques helped the students to interact with their group members confidently for completing the given tasks. However, the implementation of dramatic techniques in the classroom, may aid in developing students' speaking skills positively at a great extend.

7. CONCLUSION

The study attempted to explore students' attitudes of learning speaking skills with the help of drama in the language classroom among the tertiary level students. The results of the study exhibited that the students' speaking skills were improved when the drama techniques are used in the classroom. The implementation of drama techniques in the classroom helped students to boost their self-confidence. By taking part in a drama, the students had overcome stage fright and improved their pronunciation. The students during the drama learn by doing so that the target language is learned spontaneously and the students become self-reliant in the use of English at all levels.

The present study was restricted to develop speaking skills using drama as a technique for developing speaking skills. Similarly, it can be used to develop other language skills at different levels. It would be an interesting research area for future studies.

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