
LANGUAGE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPERIMENT WITH THEATRE

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Abstract: Acquisition of skills requires practice in the respective areas. Usually, language learners have to develop their skills in four areas - listening, speaking, reading and writing. Development of the four fold skills of language learning requires continuous practice from the part of the language learner to gain excellence. Language is an essential factor for an individual in communicating or making sense of any subject matter. So, acquisition of language skills gains importance in the life of any individual. Generally, learning a language happens in meaningful contexts and so are the language skills. Apparently, teachers play a major role in this context as language acquisition under guidance usually happens in classrooms. Theatre activity that gives immense practical experience in using language can support the language learners. Drama activities that offer exposure to four fold skills of language learning can develop language skills of learners. Assessment of language learners in terms of language skills development reveal that they have excelled in receptive and productive skills along with improving their soft skills.

Keywords: Communication, Language learner, Language skills, Theatre activity

Introduction: Language skills have become a necessity in almost all sectors of life for a human being. Day to day life of an individual demands him or her to interact with the fellow beings for various reasons. When an individual communicate with others at home or at work or with any group of people, language skills come to use. Knowingly or unknowingly, an individual makes use of language skills to put across a matter. This conveyed matter becomes clear to the receiver as a result of the language skills used by the sender in conveying the message. However, both the sender and the receiver need to have language skills. Apparently, transmission of the message between the communicators can happen easily by developing language skills. So, one can deduce that the development of language skills can enhance communication between people and will improve communication styles.

Language Skills Development: Developing language skills becomes necessary for better communication. There can be possibilities that an orator may mislead an audience due to lack of communication skills. So, good communication skills are required to become a good communicator. Proper understanding or interpretation of message between people usually happens by the wise use of language skills. Such a tactful use of language skills can lead to smooth interaction and avoid confusion during conversations. In this context, a language learner needs to realise the fact that the language learning process would become satisfactory by developing the language skills. An individual tries to express himself or herself using language where language skills are utilised.

Motivation: Contextual language learning can be helpful for language acquisition as well as for developing language skills. Generally, language comes to play during conversational situations. So,

situations that everyone has to confront in daily life would be the ideal context for learning a language. While learning language in such meaningful contexts the learner will be able to acquire language very easily. Learning by utilising real life situations can be helpful in acquiring language skills while learning a language. Gradually, the language learner will be able to use language fluently as well as enhance language skills. Interactive sessions where the learners get an opportunity to use language in contexts could be helpful in language learning and for developing language skills. Practical sessions that provide language learning experiences for the language learners would be more effective than rote learning. Such an experience is expected to allow the learners to remember what they have learnt and make use of such an experience whenever required. Retention capacity would be more while involving in an activity and trying to attain learning experience. Teacher who plays a major role in guiding the students would have to think about a language learning method considering the requirement of learning language in meaningful contexts. Usually, teaching language in the classrooms only introduces the learners to use language. Most often a language is taught by ignoring the situations in which they are to be used. Teaching language without giving importance to the contexts in which they are to be used may not help a language learner. This kind of language learning can lead to incompetency among the language learners in using appropriate language suitable for the context.

Method of solution: Activity oriented language learning that involve the learners in the language learning process would be an appropriate method to improve language learning. This activity has to be designed in such a way that it can cater to the needs of all the language learners involved in the activity. The language learners are of varied abilities. So, an activity designed for the language learner need to

consider every type of learners. Such an activity is expected to bring all types of learners together and provide a wonderful learning experience. This experience would be helpful for the learners as such a learning experience would be remembered for a long duration. Also, the learners would be able to utilise the learning experience anytime in the future. Theatre activities provide an opportunity to practice language in meaningful contexts. Activities in a theatre are usually based on themes or contexts. So, the script will be offering enormous opportunities to deal a particular situation. Eventually, contextual use of language will be made use of in the script in the form of dialogues between characters. Apart from the script dialogues the learners will be engaging in conversations between themselves. Such conversations among the language learners also facilitate contextual use of language. In both the cases, the language learners involve themselves in the language learning process.

Experiment with Theatre: Language learning in theatre happens through various phases. Every phase introduces the learner either to the receptive skills (listening and reading) or productive skills (speaking and writing) of learning. Some stages give exposure to all the four fold skills of learning – listening, speaking, reading and writing. While some stage requires the learners to work together as a group other stage requires the learners to work hard to improve their competency in the respective area. Initially, the language learners are given exposure to the theatre activities. This phase expects the learners to voluntarily participate in the activities like role plays, skits and various other theatre activities. These activities provide situations or contexts for the learners to make use of the four fold skills of learning. The learners are required to interact with the peer group, perform in front of the peer group and make use of language skills to involve themselves in the similar theatre activities. The role of the teacher is to give correction and guidance wherever required. Learners are then offered the opportunity to perform a drama. Preparations required for performing a drama on the stage was set as their target. They are given full freedom in the selection of the play, team formation and in their participation. Adaption of the play, script writing, assigning characters and performing rehearsals are done according to the interest of the learners. While giving liberty to the learners during all theatre activities teachers took the responsibility to guide them and give appropriate suggestions till the staging of the play.

Findings of the investigation: Some of the highlights of the experiment are

1. Peer group encouragement helped the learners to speak in front of others, express ideas in a group, improvise their script or dialogues and bring the

timid learners at par with other members of the group.

2. Language learners showed much improvement in their language skills after taking part in the theatre performances. Team support and involvement of the learners in the theatre activities enhanced their language skills.

3. Communication skills of the learners developed after involving in the theatre activities. Communicative activities in the theatre gave enough opportunities for the learners to improve their communication.

4. The favourable environment in the theatre helped the learners to ease of their tension while learning language. Language learning process became a fun filled and memorable experience for the language learners.

5. Learners acquired the ability to use language according to the requirements of a situation. The activities in the theatre were designed in such a way that the participants could learn the contextual use of language.

6. Theatre activities brought the learners together to work in a co-operative manner in the language learning process. They learned from each other by correcting and giving suggestions to their peer group.

7. Interactive sessions in meaningful contexts improved the use of language and helped the learners to gain confidence in using language without hesitancy.

8. Collaborative attempt and commitment shown by the language learners during the theatre activities helped them to develop their language proficiency.

9. The less motivated and diffident learners came forward to participate in the theatre activity and excelled in their language skills leading to better communication skills.

10. Guided-practice was advantageous for the learners in the language learning process. On-the-spot correction and feedback proved to be helpful for the language learners to rectify as well as clarify their mistakes.

Conclusion: The experiment with theatre has been carried out on the belief that the theatre would prove to be useful as a means to learn language and to improve the language skills. The benefit of theatre activities on the language learner has been experienced as well as observed by the writer. Initially, the writer took part in the theatre performances as a learner and experienced the impact of theatre activities on the language learner. Later, the writer observed the theatre performances done by the language learners and analysed the influence of theatre activity among the performers in terms of language learning. Both, at the learner level as well as at the observer level, the writer has come to a consensus that the theatre activities are effective in

learning a language and for developing language skills of the learners.

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