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Efficacy of Role Play in Developing Communication Skills of English Language Learners

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Abstract:

It is needless to say that English has become the most essential language in the world. Almost all the people from many different countries around the world use it to communicate. In learning communication skill, the students often find some problems. The problem frequently found is that their native language causes them difficult to use the foreign language. Other reason is because of motivation lack to practice the second language in daily conversation. Many techniques can be applied including role play because many research findings say that this technique is effective to use in teaching speaking. Role play is very important in teaching speaking because it gives students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. In addition, it also allows students to be creative and to put themselves in another person's place for a while. The role play is an ideal activity in which students could use their English creatively and as it aims to stimulate a conversation situation in which students find an opportunity to practice and develop their communication skill. For these reasons, the research is interested in analyzing the use of role play in teaching and developing communication skill, and has therefore tried to take a look at "Efficacy of Role Play in Developing Communication Skills of English Language Learners" in this research paper.

Keywords: Role Play, Communication Skills, English Language Learners, Teaching.

It is a universal grievance in many states of India that the undergraduate students of various faculties are not able to communicate in English very effectively. It is needless to say that accurate developed communication skills are indispensable for the job market today. In India, with the spread of globalization and constant enhancement of international contacts in various fields, a great deal of attention is being paid 'accurate developed communication skills.' For many years, teaching of English was limited to translating prescribed texts in the vernacular language in the classroom! Of course, such traditional methods of teaching could not attract the students in the classroom and on the contrary it resulted in poor participation on the part of the learners. However, in 21st century, winds of change are blowing up, the spread new direction of ELT in India demands development and designing of new course and methods that can attract the learners' interests and satisfy their needs.

It is needless to say that English has become the most essential language in the world. Almost all the people from many different countries around the world use it to communicate. In the international relationship, English speaking ability is very important to be able to anticipate in the wider world of work. The speaking skill is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language. This reality makes teachers and parents think that speaking ability should be mastered by their students and children. Based on the reasons above, in recent years, English language teaching has focused on teach the English language rather than teach about the English language. The emphasis is not only on linguistic competence of the language learners but also on the development of their communicative ability. In order to develop the learners' communicative ability, the teacher needs to create a scenario to teach the target language in a vibrant, active and interesting manner.

In learning speaking skill, the students often find some problems. The problem frequently found is that their native language causes them difficult to use the foreign language. Other reason is because of motivation lack to practice the second language in daily conversation. They are also too shy and afraid to take part in the conversation. Many factors can cause the problem of the students' speaking skills namely the students' interest, the material, and the media among others including the technique in teaching English. Many techniques can be applied including role play because many research findings say that this technique is effective to use in teaching speaking.

Role play is very important in teaching speaking because it gives students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. In addition, it also allows students to be creative and to put themselves in another person's place for a while. The role play is an ideal activity in which students could use their English creatively and as it aims to stimulate a conversation situation in which students find an opportunity to practice and develop their communication skill.

For these reasons, the research is interested in analyzing the use of role play in teaching and developing speaking skill, and have therefore tried to take a look at **“Efficacy of Role Play in Developing Communication Skills of English Language Learners ”** in this research paper.

In Cambridge International Dictionary of English, role defined as the person whom an actor represents in a film or play, while role play is a method of acting out particular ways of behaving or pretending to be other people who deal with new situations. It is used in training courses language learning and psychotherapy.¹

In this case, Gillian Porter Ladousse illustrated that when students assume a 'Role', they play a part (either their own or somebody else's) in specific situation. 'Play' means that it is taken on in a safe environment in which students are as an inventive and playful as possible.² According to Crookal and Oxford, there is a little consensus on the terms used in the role playing and simulation literature. A few of the terms often used

interchangeably are simulation, games, role play, simulation game, role play simulation, and role playing game.³

There seem to be some agreement; however, simulation is a broader concept than role playing. Simulations are complex lengthy and relatively inflexible events. Role play, on the other hand, can be a quite simple and brief technique to organize. It is also highly flexible, leaving much more scope for the exercise of individual variation, initiative and imagination. And role play also included in simulation as well.⁴

In defining role play, Donn Byrne gave comments that role play is a part of drama activity. In details, he described that there are three terms to cover the drama activities. They are mime (mimicry-memorization), role play and simulation. He distinguished the terms as follows:

- a. **Mime**, the participants perform actions without using words (although as we shall see, this activity leads naturally on to talk).
- b. **Role play**, the participant interact either as themselves in imaginary situations.
- c. **Simulation**, this involves role play as defined above. However, for this activity the participants normally discuss a problem of some kind with some setting that has been defined for them.⁵

Both role play and simulation are commonly used in foreign language classes to facilitate communicative competence. Whereas mime seems more appropriate as a language game. It is performing actions without using words.

For instance, if someone mimes and action, the others try to guess what it is. Another definition is stated by Joanna Budden in British Council Teaching English (BBC) in her article, she rightly said that role-play is any speaking activity when you either put yourself into somebody else's shoes, or when you stay in your own shoes but put yourself into an imaginary situation.⁶

What is meant by imaginary people is that students can become anyone they like for a short time. The President, the Queen, a millionaire, a pop star, the choice is endless. Students can also take on the opinions of someone else. 'For and against' debates can be used and the class can be split into those who are expressing views in favour and those who are against the theme.⁷

Functional language for a multitude of scenarios can be activated and practiced through role play in imaginary situations. 'At the restaurant', 'Checking in at the airport', 'Looking for lost property' are all possible roleplays.⁸

From those explanation above, the researcher views that role play is a technique which involves fantasy or imagination to be someone else or to be ourselves in a specific situation for a while, improvising dialogue and creating a real world in scenario. It aims

at the students to encourage thinking and creativity, lets students develop and practice new language and behavioural skills in a relatively non-threatening setting, and can create the motivation and involvement necessary for learning to occur.

Types and Procedures in Using Role Play

In view of the persons taking an actor, Gillian explained that there are several types of role. The first is the roles which correspond to a real need in the students' lives. In this category, it involves such roles as doctors dealing with patients, or salesman traveling abroad. The second type of role is one where the students play themselves in a variety of situations which may or may not have direct experience. The example which include in this category is a customer complaining or a passenger asking for information. The third type is the type that few students will ever experience directly themselves, but it is easy to play because the teachers have such vast indirect experience of them. The television journalist is a good example of this type and it is very useful kind of role taken from real life. The last type is fantasy roles, which are fictitious, imaginary, and possible even absurd.⁹

In case of role play activities, according to Donn Byrne, role play can be grouped into two forms, scripted and unscripted role play. In details, those types of role play activities described as follows:

I. Scripted Role Play

This type involves interpreting either the textbook dialogue or reading text in the form of speech. The main function of the text after all is to convey the meaning of language items in a memorably way.¹⁰ For more details, Adrian Doff gave an example of scripted role play dialogue and reading text and how the process is:

Angela : Good morning. I want to send a letter to Singapore.
 Clerk : Yes, do you want to send it by air mail or ordinary mail?
 Angela : I think I'll send it air mail. I want it to get there quickly. How much does it cost?
 Clerk : To Singapore? That will be 30 pence, pleas.
 Angela: (give the clerk 50 pence) Here you are.
 Clerk : Here's your stamp, and here's 20 pence change.
 Angela : Thank you. Where is the post box?
 Clerk : You want the air mail box. It's over there, by the door.
 (Adapted from living English book 2 : A.G. Abdalla et al)

To demonstrate a role play activity based on the dialogue, the procedures given by Adrian Doff is as follows:

- 1) First, the teacher guides the role play by writing these prompts:
 (where? / air mail / how much? / post box? / thanks). Talk as you write to show what the prompts mean.

- 2) If necessary, go through the prompts one by one, and get students to give sentences or question for each one.
- 3) Call two students to the front: one play the role as Angela and the other one is the post office clerk. They should improvise the conversation using the prompts to help them. Point out that the conversation should be similar to the one in the textbook, but not exactly the same; the conversation can be shorter than the presentation dialogue. It should just cover the main points indicated by the prompts.
- 4) Call out a few other pairs of students in turn, and ask them to have other conversation based on the prompts.¹¹

Based on these procedures, the writer views that the ways of organizing this dialogue can be carried out into pairs of students who would improvise a conversation in front of class, in turns. The teacher can also ask the students to practice the conversation privately with their partners before they act it out in front of the class.

II. Unscripted Role Play

In contrast to scripted role play, the situations of unscripted role play do not depend on textbooks. It is known as a free role play or improvisation. The students themselves have to decide what language to use and how the conversation should develop. In order to do this activity, good preparation from teacher and students is really necessary. The example and procedures of unscripted role play which is adapted from Adrian Doff's book are as follows:

One student has lost a bag.

He/she is at the police station.

The other student is the police officer, and asks for details.

To brings out this ideas:

- 1) The teacher could prepare the whole class, by:
 - a) Discussing what the speakers might say (e.g. the police officer would asks the students how he or she lost the bag).
 - b) Writing prompt on the board to guide the role play, and any key vocabulary.
- 2) The teacher could divide the class into pairs, and:
 - a) Let them discuss together what they may say.
 - b) Let them all try out the role play privately, before calling on one or two pairs to act out in front of the class.

Susan House explained that there are several procedures in using role play:

- a. Students read and familiarize themselves with the (example) dialogue.
- b. Divide the class in pairs, A and B, give A and B roles from the dialogues.
- c. Let students act out their role play, not just say them but students should read it loudly.
- d. Walk around correcting and checking.

- e. Students swap roles and repeat, those whose finish first can be asked to make up their own role play, using different words to fill the gaps.¹²

The above procedures do not mean an exact to be used. It is flexible; teacher can create or develop procedures which is appropriate and suitable with his/her own class.

Significance of Role Play in Teaching Speaking

It has been mentioned before in the above discussion that role play is one of the activities to promote speaking. Through role play activities the students learn how to express ideas, opinions, or feeling to others by using words or sounds of articulation.

Larsen Freeman explained that role plays are important in the communicative approach because they give learners an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and different social roles.

A role play is a highly flexible learning activity which has a wide scope for variation and imagination. According to Ladousse, role play uses different communicative techniques and develops fluency in the language, promotes interaction in the classroom and increases motivation. Here peer learning is encouraged and sharing of responsibility between teacher and the learner in the learning process takes place. Role play can improve learners' speaking skills in any situation, and helps learners to interact. As for the shy learners, role play helps by providing a mask, where learners with difficulty in conversation are liberated. In addition, it is fun and most learners will agree that enjoyment leads to better learning.

Several reasons for using role play in teaching speaking quoted from Ladousse as follows:

- a. A very wide variety of experience can be brought into the classroom and we can train our students in speaking skill in any situations through role play.
- b. Role play puts students in situation in which they are required to use and develop those phatic forms of language which are so necessary in oiling the works of social relationships, but which are so often neglected by our language teaching syllabuses.
- c. Some people are learning English to prepare for specific roles in their lives. It is helpful for these students to have tried out and experimented with the language they will require in the friendly and safe environment of a classroom.
- d. Role play helps many shy students by providing them with a mask.
- e. Perhaps the most important reason for using role play is that it is fun.¹³

In conclusion, the researcher concludes that the use of role play in teaching speaking is a better effective way by which the teacher makes the speaking and learning activity more enjoyable and interesting. In role play, the world of the classroom is broadened to include the outside world. This offers a much wider range of language opportunities. The use of role play makes the class more active and alive and makes the students more motivated in learning. The role play is a technique which can develops

students' fluency in target language, promotes students to speak or interact with others in the classroom, increases motivation and makes the teaching-learning process more enjoyable.

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