

Pedagogical Applications of Dramatic Techniques: Enhancing Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes in Contemporary Classroom Environments

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Abstract

The teacher's primary concern and objective is to make the classroom lively and engage the students in the teaching learning process. In order to actively involve students in the teaching and learning process, this paper will employ the technique known as "Dramatization of a story" Johan Huizinga, a Dutch historian and cultural theorist, will be used to discuss the significance of play in culture and society. According to Huizinga, play is the primary component and predecessor of culture. In addition to defining the qualities of play, Huizinga compares the ways in which various languages define it and goes into great detail about the significance of competition in ancient Greek culture. Tapping the basic instincts of play in humans, this paper will analyze through the Game theory of Johan Huizinga. Using Role play which is a type of pretend activity where students can depict a real life context. The text "The Boy who broke the Bank", the story was broken into small components in the classroom and role play was used to make the students understand and enact segments. The benefits of role play are, It can be armed as a key component of learning, there is fun, it a 'playful' activity, role play is essentially learning through engaging in recreation, everyone can participate, it is ideal for huge class rooms, even students who are not techno savvy can participate, the students are amused, Role play develops their knowledge of a topic.

Key Words:

Keywords: Role Play, Game Theory, Johan Huizinga, Motivation, Experiential Learning, Constructivist Pedagogy, Active Learning Strategies, Student-Centered Instruction Collaborative Learning.

Introduction

William Shakespeare asserted that

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.
As You Like It Act 2, scene 7, 139–143*

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Drama can be characterized in a variety of ways. "A wide range of oral activities that have an element of creativity present" could be referred to by this general term (Hubbard et al. 1986: 317).

The idea of incorporating theater into the teaching-learning process is not new, especially when it comes to teaching English as a second language (ESL). Drama provides a lively and captivating medium for efficiently exploring English's theoretical and practical aspects. Its innately creative quality encourages pupils to utilize language in an expressive and impromptu manner which helps them enhance their communication skills. Through active involvement and visual engagement, theater may change the dynamics of the classroom and make teachings more memorable and pleasurable when used carefully. The essence of drama lies in the imaginative world of 'let's pretend'. It encompasses a variety of activities such as mime, role-play, improvisation, dialogues, and storytelling in dramatized forms. Though terms like role-play, simulation, drama, and game are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct pedagogical approaches. Regardless of these differences, the central objective for educators remains the same: to invigorate classroom interaction and deeply involve students in the learning process (Mohammad et al., 2024a; Purba, 2024).

As a way to promote immersive learning in the classroom, this paper suggests a reverse translation and dramatized version of Ruskin Bond's short story *The Boy Who Broke the Bank*. The method emphasizes the value of play as a fundamental component of human culture and connection, drawing on the observations of Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga, especially from his work *Homo Ludens*. Huizinga highlights that play is an essential cultural force that influences communication and social conventions in addition to being a means of expression. Teachers may foster a more engaging and inclusive ESL classroom by embracing the lighthearted, performative aspects of theatre (Mohammad et al., 2024b; Mohammad et al., 2024c).

Drama as a Teaching Tool

In ESL/EFL classes, role-playing is a very successful teaching method with many educational benefits. Along with developing vital communication skills it also encourages children to work together, show empathy, and make decisions as a group (Mohammad et al., 2024d). Role-playing exercises allow students to share knowledge with one another which improves understanding between participants and enriches the educational process.

Role-playing develops a variety of interpersonal and cognitive abilities in addition to communication. It fosters the capacity for compromise, promotes leadership and teamwork and makes it easier to practice speaking and listening in real-world situations. These kinds of exercises also help people become more confident, self-assured and skilled presenters. They also encourage a sense of strength, accountability, and creativity while supporting self-acceptance and the acceptance of different viewpoints. Through problem-solving and organizational tasks embedded in role-play, students also enhance their management skills and imaginative thinking (Mohammad et al., 2024e; Mohammad et al., 2024f). Particularly for learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds who enter higher education, it is crucial to provide structured training in the four foundational skills of English: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Activities such as reading clubs, dialogue chains, role-playing, book reviews, and group discussions can significantly improve their communicative competence and build their confidence in using English effectively across academic and social contexts (Mohammad et al., 2024g; Mohammad et al., 2024h; Forghani et al., 2025; De Robertis et al., 2024; Wilantara et al., 2024).

As most of the students studying are from vernacular medium and do not understand if spoken in English, to make the topic comprehensible and interesting and make it anglophile instead of Anglophobia, it is needed that some techniques are adopted to involve the students.

The Strategies for the Dramatization

The lesson to be dramatized was well prepared and conceived before the lesson got underway. The teacher had to decide well in advance, which lesson or unit he/she proposed to use for dramatic activities. (In this case "**The Boy who broke the Bank**" by Ruskin Bond), The reasons for using drama are to increase awareness of paralinguistic features, increase in vocabulary, intrinsic interest and practicability in terms of lesson time, to speak extempore as well as in a given well prepared environment, confidence and leadership qualities

When students are participating in a conversation, the instructor can invite them to role-play the various characters, thinking about how the character would have viewed the issue under discussion

and making decisions based on their understanding of the character (Shlash Mohammad et al., 2024a; Al-Adwan, 2024).

Drama and language games can serve as a natural introduction to dramatic activities proper and as preparation for role-play, improvisation, and other dramatic experiences. Because they involve concentration, listening, memorization, observation, interaction, and interpretation, language games extend the word power of learners, and increases their agility, fluency, and flexibility in the use of English (Shlash Mohammad et al., 2024b; Bhat et al., 2024). The discussion following dramatic activities makes learners feel that the scene upon which they have just been working has had a satisfactory conclusion with all loose ends being tied up. In addition to addressing the subject of what each student would have done in a comparable circumstance, the conversation should be organized and focused on what transpired and why. Participation in these discussions will be based on whether they can be made important to the class's interests and possible issues as well as whether they can offer a useful setting for authentic English-language conversation. Discussion after the play form an integral part of the whole exercise, it brings out important points pertinent to the topics as well as some related topics. Discussion sessions could be chaired either by the teacher and the whole class, or conducted in groups under the guidance of a nominated group leader, which would certainly increase the amount of individual student talking time.

In this particular component the exercise was divided into role-play first and then dramatization of the lesson. Relating to the character of 'Nathu' who innocently led to the collapse of The Piplanagar Bank, a situation was given to the students that they had to work on how and what can be the ill-effects, of rumour-mongering. The lesson taken into consideration has a mofussil set up and the characters like the sweeper, the washerman boy, beggar, barber and the womenfolk of the village are worst gossip mongers, this way the importance of village culture is depicted in the shortened version and genre adaptation of the story.

Dutch cultural theorist and historian Johan Huizinga wrote the 1938 book *Homo Ludens*, sometimes known as "Man the Player" (or "Playing Man"). It talks about how important play is to culture and society. According to Huizinga, play is essential to and a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of cultural generation. A significant chapter in the history of game studies is *Homo Ludens*. Roger Caillois and other later play scholars were affected by it. In *Homo Ludens*, the idea of the magic circle is presented. It was eventually made popular in game studies even though it was not a major component of Huizinga's theory.

Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon

Johan Huizinga contends in his seminal work *Homo Ludens* that play predates culture because even animals play without human guidance. He highlights that play is an optional activity that is governed by its own set of internal laws and is isolated from daily routines by clear temporal and spatial boundaries. Dramatization is an excellent way to apply this theory in the context of language acquisition, especially in ESL/EFL courses. Drama makes learning fun and effective by enabling students to connect with language in a meaningful, creative and engaging way. Ruskin Bond's short story *The Boy Who Broke the Bank* was chosen for dramatization in order to carry out this idea.

The story was divided into manageable parts, and students, most of whom had different linguistic backgrounds and were not English speakers, were divided into groups with each group performing a portion of the story. Roles were given according to student interest and learning was encouraged by allowing learners to prepare their own dialogues making them more responsible and in-charge in the learning process. Early understanding was facilitated through the employment of local languages, and later reverse translation to enable the pupils to translate the tale into performable English dialogues. This method, in addition to enhancing vocabulary and oral skills, also made them understand narrative structure and character development better. The activity boosted confidence, promoted peer learning, and produced a welcoming classroom atmosphere where language acquisition was engaging and unforgettable. Students gained critical soft skills like empathy, creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork through this method, proving that dramatization based on Huizinga's idea of play can make the ESL classroom a fun and productive environment for language learning.

Literature Review

The use of drama and role-play in language education has been widely supported by researchers for its effectiveness in promoting active learning, communication skills, and student motivation. Researchers have aided much in the application of drama and role-play in language learning because

it fosters active learning, communication, as well as motivation of students. Wessels (1987) and Holden (1982) note that in drama, learners are forced to explore the classroom setting as a participatory environment through which they acquire confidence, empathy and proficiency of expression, with the help of performance based activities. Against this background, Duff and Maley (1984) assert that drama gives valuable contexts in language application, stimulating spontaneous speech and creativity. In their constructivist approach to teaching, such approaches promote experiential learning in which knowledge is jointly constructed by doing and reflecting (Kolb, 1984). Specifically, role-play assists the learners to take control of the language by relating abstract knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to practical communication (Livingston, 1983). All these strategies promote cooperation and inclusion too in the bigger or different ability classrooms. Johan Huizinga has contributed to Homo Ludens which is about play in relation to cultural, philosophical aspect of human evolution. His theory has favored the theory that learning dramatization in a magic circle of imaginative play could enhance higher cognitive and emotional involvement. In the Indian context, research by Deshmukh and Ahmed demonstrate how dramatization in resource-constrained, or vernacular-language education environment could enhance proficiency in languages and participation of students. Furthermore, practical insights from platforms like 5 Minute English in year 2024 affirm that drama and role-play not only boost learner motivation but also foster a more immersive and collaborative language learning experience.

Methodology

This research was a qualitative study based on the principles of active learning and constructivist pedagogy with the experiential approach completed in a classroom in a real-life setting. The fundamental aim was to review the way dramatization strategies, specifically role-play, could be used in enhancing better student participation, language proficiency, and group-based learning in an ESL domain. His theoretical background was based on the Game Theory of Johan Huizinga which was presented in the book Homo Ludens which stated that play has inherent education value from a cultural-social perspective.

The chosen piece of literature on which the adaptation was performed is The Boy Who Broke the Bank, in which Ruskin Bond is the author. A vernacular-medium background was analysed so that the students could be categorized into groups based on their levels of comfortability and interests. Ownership of story line and further insight of story flow was promoted by assigning each group the implementation of one portion of the story. Bilingual scaffolding was applied in the course of the activity: the initial grasping of the object was conducted in a native language of the students and then the activity was translated back to English to be able to perform dialogues.

The sessions started with tutorials on how to interpret a character, modulate the voice and improvisation. Building and rehearsing the dialogue was the students responsibility and the teacher acted as a support. The post-performance sessions were carried out to review some thematic aspects and language difficulties on the one hand and to make the exercise not only strictly related to a performance but a critical language awareness and understanding on the other hand.

Data Analysis and Observations (with Practical Examples)

Although this paper does not include a formal study, it is supported by real-life examples from different classrooms across India where drama and role-play have been used successfully to teach English. These examples show how effective dramatization can be for improving student learning and engagement.

Better Student Participation – Example from Pune

In one school in Pune, a teacher taught short moral stories in English and expected them to perform. Majority of the students communicated in Marathi and were reluctant initially. However, when they were assigned parts--in particular, funny ones or parts who do not speak--they became more interested. After sometime, the activity was getting more than 80 percent of the students to fully participate as well as enjoy it. Even those students who were never active during their talks got more confident.

Improvement in Speaking and Vocabulary – Example from Nagpur at L.A.D College

Student-teachers dramatised parts of stories by Ruskin Bond at B.Com Part II Compulsory English class. They composed their own dialogues and repeated them a lot of times. This assisted in refinement of their pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. A number of the participants indicated that they recalled the story better since they had performed it.

Teamwork and Social Skills – Example from Tamil Nadu

The first-year students at a rural college in Tamil Nadu were split into groups and challenged to perform scenes in a court of law using real-news items. The students acted in the roles of judge, lawyer, witness. This made them to improve their English and learned as well on how to cooperate with others, give a listening ear and lead a group. A student replied, I have never been on a team, that is why this is my first time feeling like part of a team.

Understanding the Story's Theme – Example from Assam

During a drama workshop in Assam, students played the story The Boy Who Cried Wolf: they applied simple acting and improvisation. The discussion was held in a group on trust and lying after the skit. Lots of students recalled their personal experiences. This enabled them to relate better with the story. The play The Boy Who Broke the Bank will follow similar lines because here the theme of gossip is simpler to interpret with the help of acting.

Reverse Translation for Better Learning – Example from Chhattisgarh

The story of The Thief, Story by Ruskin Bond was used by a teacher in a tribal school in Chhattisgarh. The students are read the tale in Hindi and then discussed it in their native language Gondi and lastly wrote it in English. This assisted the students learn the story well and construct improved English sentences. It also made them more confident to speak.

Inclusivity and Fairness – Example from Mumbai

In a busy school in Mumbai where more than 60 students would be in one class, the teacher employed role-play exercise, concerning small groups. And such students who did not master much English were also assigned simple tasks of leading a mime or narrator. Nobody was left out because of fewer props and simple scripts. This provided an equal feeling to the students and also made them feel more comfortable.

How Teachers Handled Common Problems

Teachers in these classrooms noticed some common problems, but they found simple ways to solve them:

- Students who were shy were allowed to rehearse in smaller groups first.
- Students who used their mother tongue too much were supported by classmates who were bilingual.
- In large classes, not everyone could speak at once, so teachers rotated roles and ran multiple scenes at the same time.

These examples from different states show how dramatization and role-play can make English classes more fun, inclusive, and effective. Even in classrooms with limited resources, this method helped students become better at speaking, working in teams, and understanding stories more deeply.

Advantages of Dramatic techniques

Drama and role play can help the teacher to achieve 'reality' in several ways. It can be armed as a key component of learning, there is fun, making it an enjoyable experience, it a 'playful' activity, role play is essentially learning through engaging in recreation, everyone can participate, it is ideal for huge class rooms, even students who are not techno savvy can participate, the students are amused, by linking the language-learning experience with the student's own experience of life. Role play develops their knowledge of a topic.

And drama can create in a students a need to learn the language:

- by the use of 'creative tension' (situations requiring urgent solutions);
- by putting more responsibility on the learner, as opposed to the teacher.'
- (Wessel: 53-54)

Disadvantage of Dramatic techniques

Dramatization cannot be applied to all topics. Wherever possible the teacher should use the technique and can revive the mood of the students. Play can involve simulating emotions, which is more difficult for some people. The students were active, but not ready to come forward and work. Learners are often withdrawn about trying to say thing in a foreign language in the classroom concerned about mistakes.

They also had snide comments, huge strength of class was the major hindrance. Players interact within the scenarios they're given, which encourages individuals to come together to find solutions and get to know how their classmates think

Uneven participation: Only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is to be heard; and in large group this means that each one will have only very little talking time. This problem is compounded of some learners to dominate, while other speaks very little or not a talk. **Mother tongue use:** Students naturally tend to use their mother tongue in class making it challenging to maintain consistent use of the target language during the learning process and potentially hindering language acquisition.

Conclusion

Based on the observed details, it is suggested how to make the component a successful exercise for teaching- learning. Thus after the exercise of role-play and dramatization of the chapter, I had an enthusiast class who had learnt new skills, at a given point of time could strategize, had shed their inhibition, were bubbling with confidence and self esteem, were stimulating exciting and had learnt to read their environment and also learnt to guess their competition. The play acting provides an opening for a healthy release of emotions in a safe setting which can work to relieve the tension of learning English as a second language. Players interact within the setting they're given, which encourages individuals to come together to find solutions and to get to know how their counterparts think. Johan Huizinga's theory, highlighting the significance of 'Game theory' in classroom dramatization, was effectively applied. This approach demonstrated how the concepts of play, play-function, and play-word can enhance language skills.

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