

EFFECTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF LANGUAGE LEARNERS THROUGH DRAMA TECHNIQUES

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ABSTRACT

This paper brings out the issue of poor participation of learners in classroom activities at tertiary level to the foreground. It tries to probe the reasons for poor participation of the learners in the language classroom. In order to find actual participation of the learners in different contexts using different variables the study collected data from the target group of students on their participation in the classroom activities. The active participation of the learners in the classroom determines the effective learning in the language classroom. The data collected using random sampling from 16 colleges from Telangana show that 20 percent of students actively participated, 46 percent of students participated moderately and 34 percent of students were passive participants. Upon inquiring the students and teachers and classroom observation it was understood that the poor participation is due to selection of teacher dominant methods of teaching. So, this study tried to experiment with the drama techniques for maximum level of student participation in the classroom. This paper shares the finding of the empirical study which used drama techniques to enhance the participation of learners in the given context. It also discusses the changes brought by the intervention classes. Finally, it showcases the difference between the pre-intervention classes and post-intervention classes.

Keywords: Learner participation, engagement in the classroom, drama techniques, Teaching methods and approaches, Telugu learners

Introduction:

Learners' participation is defined as student being active and engaged in the classroom activities, mingling and sharing the roles and responsibilities in the classroom. It is often recommended that there should be more student talk or participation than the teachers' talk or engagement in the teaching and learning scenario. Sometimes expert suggest that there should be 80 percent of student engagement or talk and 20 percent of teacher talk or engagement in the classroom situation for the effective learning of language. At least experts agree that there is an equal amount teacher and student participation in the language learning classroom. "A major trend in language teaching in recent years has been the adoption of learner-centered approaches to curriculum development. Learner centered approaches are characterized by the involvement of the learner, and the utilization of information about the learner in all aspects of the curriculum process (Nunan 1988: 6) and (2004: 78). This is not always the case, however, the idea that teachers should think of students' active participation for the better learning and acquisition of language. The participation of the students is often determined with the approach and method of teaching which enforce the nature of student roles and responsibilities in the learning environment. It also depends of the strategies used by the teacher for the engagement of the learners and the use of content for the delivery of language skills. It also depends on the learning styles and strategies and accommodation of the students in the given classroom. It has been there since the beginning of the language teaching that the active involvement of the learners in the classroom in order to facilitate the curriculum of language learning and resources provided and the duration of the classroom to

enhance the active participation of the learners. Contrary to this many classroom teachings end with the high participation of the teacher and low participation of the students usually lead to ineffective language learning.

Statement of the problem:

It is often complained about the students' participation in the language learning classrooms across the country in many research journals and academic discourse. Though the students willingly attend the educational institutions to acquire a degree and learn some skills in the college. Unfortunately, many of them usually habituated to passive participation. Due to this passive participation, learners in the language classroom fail to acquire the language in the due course of time. Because, pedagogically there is a strong correlation between the participation of learners and acquisition of language in the behaviorist approach, without active participation of learners it is very difficult to impart language skills. The passive learners develop interest in receptive skills and the active learners develop their interest in productive skills. In general, students with productive skills are appreciated and considered for higher education and employment. The crucial factor for developing production skills is their engagement with the classroom activities. The classroom participation of the learners is understood in terms of their active engagement in face to face individual, pair or group work.

There are many reasons for poor participation of learners in oral communicative activities in English- giving speech, participating in interviews, involving in group discussion and debates. The reason for low participation of learners in the classroom activities could be not employing communicative approaches to language teaching. Due to overcrowded classes and other issues and sometime selection of wrong method of language teaching leads to low participation of learners in the language learning activities in the classroom. It is also clear from the available evidence that some of the students have linguistic competence; but they often do not get the opportunities to participate in classroom activities in English with their fellow students as well as with their teachers, and others in the classroom and out of the classroom situations. The lack of participation of learners in this study involves the engagement of learners in the given communicative situations like i) participation in group discussion, ii) participation in meetings, iii) participation in interpersonal conversations, iv) participation in public speaking.

Hypothesis:

Drama techniques give scope for the involvement of all the learners in the classroom.

Objectives of the study: To make the learners to actively participate in the classroom learning process.

Research Question:

Do drama activities involve the learners in the classroom and enhance their participation in the classroom activities?

Research Methodology: This study used direct participatory observations, teachers' interviews and learners' interviews to collect the data on learner participation in the classroom before and after the intervention classes using drama techniques. This study tried to study active participation of learners in classroom speeches, meetings, conversation and group discussions. It studies the ways and means to the total classroom involvement in the language activities which foster their ability to communicate well with others in desired contexts and situations. A study was conducted to see the participation of learners at tertiary level. "It was observed that only some learners managed to participate in the target language (TL) communicative situations, whereas the majority fails (Amita 1998: ii). The main reason was that most of the language classes usually taught in the lecture mode. Where the teacher usually, give a lecture per class and the learners usually listens to her or him (teacher). The other important fact is that there is a huge gap between the 'low performance

group' and the 'high performance group' of students in the English classroom. In the classroom activities, the low performance group always restrict themselves to be silent or calm. They never participate in the language activities while only a few students actively take part in classroom activities. Even if they know answers to the questions, they murmur among themselves, but most of the time they never answer or they do not dare to answer. The problem is more evident in the case of non-English medium learners. The other interesting thing is that learners are more or less good communicators in their mother tongue and do well in their optional subjects. Nevertheless, many of the students in English classroom do not participate at all, especially in the speaking activities like individual speaking activities, pair activities-conversations, group discussions, classroom debate, etc.

Discussion: When students are required to involve in second language situations they often find themselves inhibited by the fear of losing their self-esteem and personality. In severe cases, students can become so tongue-tied that they refuse to speak at all. One way of alleviating this problem is to give students the opportunities to experiment with speaking activities, as well as talk in a secure environment from the start. Often this involves allowing them to experiment individually or in a relaxed pair or group situation or a team work or in collaborative activities. In this case the reticence of the learners might be associated with lack of opportunities to learners to engage classroom activities due to non-participatory methods of language teaching. Especially, use of grammar translation methods, or other similar methods, where teacher only actively engages in the entire teaching and learning process, whereas the learners are pushed to a role of passive listening by nodding head or taking just notes. They rarely get opportunities to foster their language skills. It was observed that most of the students, who studied in regional language medium or non-English medium, exhibit more unwillingness to participate. The presence of such students is more in the mixed ability heterogeneous target classrooms. They always tend to feel shy and reticent to participate in the classroom activities. The actual reason for reticence was methods of language teaching. Most of the cases the classrooms were used teacher dominant methods of teaching rather involving learners effectively.

In such a scenario drama has the potential to involve both bright and dull students, male and female, rural and urban students. According to Alen Maley and Alen Duff drama can "contextualize the language, it brings the classroom interaction to life through an intense focus on meaning". (Maley & Duff 2005:1). Drama creates maximum and highest level of opportunities to the students to enact in the given situation. They can range from reading a play script to enacting the play script or just imaginary drama by using different aspects of drama: monologues, dialogues, acting a small scene from the play or creating a news item into drama. At every level the participation of learners is hundred percent. The participation of drama makes the learners to feel that 'I can do it' kind of attitude. Evans' (1984) view of drama concludes that drama provides opportunities for students to encourage language use, build up students' confidence, help focus attention, motivate students, as well as cater to the needs of students with diverse abilities.

Overall Research Procedure and Methods of Data Collection included the following steps:

- I. **Selection of the colleges** was done based on the purposive sampling. The target group learners were undergraduate college students of Osmania University. The researcher visited the degree colleges in and around Hyderabad. All these colleges are located in Hyderabad, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy Districts.
- II. **Direct Observation:** Researcher observed the target learners in a sample of colleges to assess the participation of the learners in the language classroom activities. He observed using a pre-constructed observation instrument to know the frequency of participation or non-participation of the learners in the heterogeneous classrooms.

- III. **Teachers' Oral Interviews:** Based on the fact that the teachers would know their students' strengths and weaknesses or abilities and inabilities better than any other person and they give more genuine information about the target learners, the present study considered teachers as an important source of information and conducted semi-formal oral interviews with the teachers to enquire about the participation of learners in the classroom activities.
- IV. **Students' oral interviews:** As a part of data collection, researcher also considered the students' interviews to probe the actual reasons for not participating in classroom communication activities. The researcher intends to interact with at least four students in each class.
- V. **Assessing participation of students: the observations are recorded before and after** intervention classes to measure their initial and final participation. The proficiency test was conducted in two areas: Giving speech and group discussion. All the scores of the students in pretest and posttest were recorded.
- VI. **Intervention of drama techniques:** For the intervention of drama techniques a sample of students were selected for both experimental group and control group. Then the experimental group was taught using drama techniques and the control group was allowed to learn without drama techniques i.e. regular methods of teaching/learning.
- VII. Finally checked the hypothesis that is to find out whether there is a significant difference between pre-teaching and post-teaching using drama techniques. The hypothesis was verified using statistical tool (t-test) and non-statistical tools (researcher's diary).

Direct observation of learners in the classroom participation-Justification

The direct observation includes participatory observation of the classes and interacting with students and teachers. The main objective of the direct observation includes two things: one is to observe and understand overall participation of the learners in each classroom. The second one is to identify reluctant students who are not participating in classroom activities. Data was collected from ten colleges purposively and visited the selected colleges. The colleges include both women's colleges and co-educations colleges of government and private administration. The results of those observations were useful to understand the participation of learners with different variables.

Teachers' Interviews

Teachers are the best informants of their classroom situations. So, this study certainly considers teachers' opinion on classroom participation of learners. Therefore the researcher set a questionnaire for semi-formal interviews. The questions from teachers' questionnaire were asked to probe into participation of learners in oral communication activities using semi-formal interviews in the convenient order. All the questions and responses of the interviews were recorded with the help of a voice recorder (transcend mp3 voice recorder) and they were analysed to find information on the students who are not participating in the communication activities (not speaking with teachers/co-students in English, not involving in conversations in English, not actively participating in group or pair activities in English etc).

Students' interviews

The researcher observed the classroom participation of the learners in the language classrooms. After getting the permission and consent of teachers in the colleges concerned, the researcher interacted with a few students in every class. The minimum interactions were conducted with four students (two girls and two boys) from first year and second year students randomly in each class and data was recorded. Through informal interactions the researcher enquired individually why they did not participate actively in the class.

Data on participation of learners

Discussion:

Based on the participation of the learners in each of the sixteen classes was divided into three categories: Active participants, partial participants and non-participants. From each class, all the students were placed as per their participation. The below table shows the summary of the participants in classroom participation.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Classroom participatory Observation –Data				
2	S. No.	Active Participants	Partial participants	Non- Participants	Total class
3	1	6	12	14	32
4	2	5	13	11	29
5	3	7	14	6	27
6	4	6	15	5	26
7	5	5	15	7	27
8	6	6	12	9	27
9	7	7	11	10	28
10	8	5	12	10	27
11	9	6	13	11	30
12	10	4	12	11	27
13	11	6	9	12	27
14	12	5	9	12	26
15	13	4	8	10	22
16	14	5	10	12	27
17	15	7	9	11	27
18	16	5	8	11	24
19	Total	89	182	162	433
20	Percentage mean	20.55%	42.03%	37.41	
21		5.5625	11.375	10.125	27.0625
22					

Table1: Participation of learners in classroom activities

From the above table 1, data from sixteen classes show that the active participants of the class were only 20.55% i.e. 89 students. These students, actively participated in the given classroom activities. These students grab the opportunities to communicate in the classroom. The other major groups of the participants were moderate participants. These students participated only with the initiative of the teacher. They also did not show much interest but participated with encouragement of the teacher. The presence of such students on average was 42.03. i.e. 182 students. The third group of students were non-participant students. They were most of the time hesitate to participate in classroom activities. These students showed reluctance in participating in classroom activities. Such students were 37.41% i.e. 162 students.

Teachers' oral interviews reiterate the facts discovered from the direct participatory observation. From the teachers' oral interviews, it was learnt that most of the classrooms having approximately 30 students in the classroom. In some colleges, clubbing of two classes for English class was very common hence the classroom became overcrowded. In all colleges, teachers were provided textbooks, blackboard and chalk in the classroom. Apart from this, they hardly had any other facilities, except one college in which a language lab and a library were provided. This shows availability of less resource in UG- Colleges. A question on which skills do the teachers at UG colleges usually teach, almost all the teachers responded saying that they teach Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills and grammar. When a question asked on the methodology of teaching that which methodology they usually teach, teachers replied that they had been using different methodologies like direct methodology to the communicative language teaching methodology. But a few teachers revealed that they had been using only 'explanation method'-explaining the content of the lesson, because of overcrowded classes and less resources. For the question whether they use drama in the classroom, the responses were both 'yes' and 'no' but the data shows that so far they have not used it. But the teachers were positive to use drama in the classroom. When a question tried to find out which language skills did the learners want most, many of the teachers were of the opinion that they wanted four basic skills and they agree that the need of speaking skills also one of the very important requirements. It was also clarified that a huge number of students were reluctant to participate actively in English classes. Among the four language skills, students often felt threatened when they were asked to speak out in English. Teachers also observed that the other three skills- listening, reading and writing were less threatening situations when compared with speaking situations.

So, teachers also felt that speaking was very slow process and was learnt after mastering all the other three skills.

Overall Finding from the experimental group before intervention

According to teachers, the active participation of the learners in the classroom was very less. Only a few students 6 (approximately 20 percent) actively participated; another 14 students i.e. 46 percent of students moderately participated but 10 students i.e. 34 percent of students were very passive in the classroom. These students actively listened to the teachers but they did not actively participate in any of language activities.

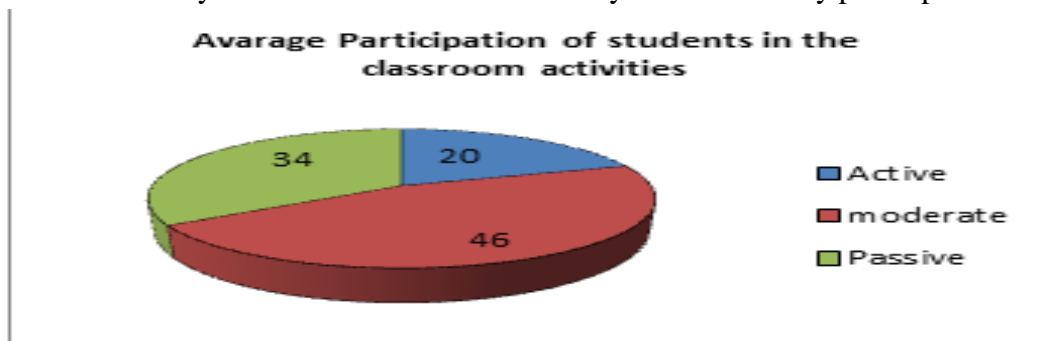


Chart1: Average participation of students in the classroom

Intervention classes: The intervention classes were offered to the learners using drama techniques for a semester. The no of classes successfully completed were 32. For each week two classes were taken in the semester. The achievement of the learners was recorded in researcher dairy and observation score sheet.

Conceptual framework of drama techniques:

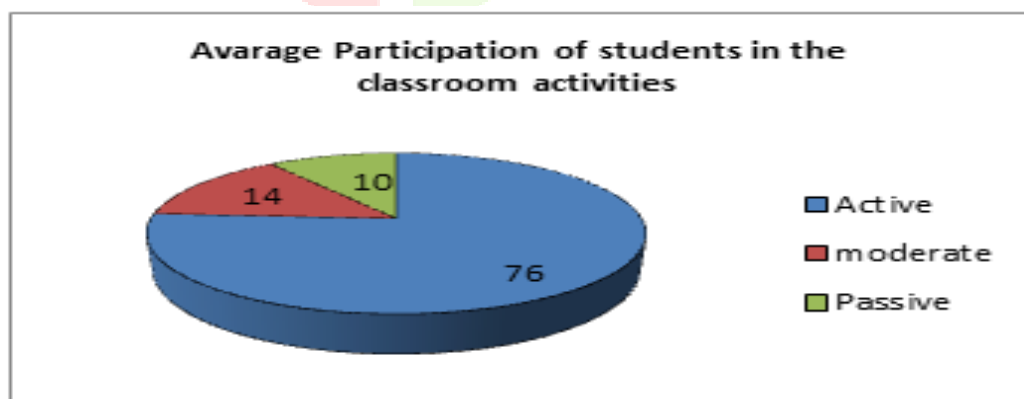


CHART 2: Overall findings from the experimental group after intervention

After the intervention classes the data from classroom observation and teacher interactions reveal that there is a huge change in the roles and responsibilities of the students in the classroom participation. It showed a significant i.e. 76 percent of active participants, 14 percent of moderate participants and 10 percent in the passive participation in the experimental group classroom. The passive participants also involved in the activities but did not show much interest. That is the reason there they were considered as passive participants.

The change in the classroom is attributed to the use of drama techniques. Because, drama techniques inherently demands every learner to execute his/her role whatever the techniques was used in the classroom. Drama techniques brought change in the attitude of the leaners and helps the classroom situation to a better engagement of the both the learners and teachers in taking their roles and executing it through the performance in the classroom. All the students become busy with their responsibilities. Therefore, every student participated in the drama activities whatever the roles they got. It gradually generates student participation in rehearsing and performing in the classroom.

Conclusion:

According to William Littelwood (1992) in order enhance participate or involve, the following things kept in mind which teaching. The classroom atmosphere must be conductive to communication and learning. Techniques should be relevant to learner's interests and needs. It is also well-known that people learn better from their peer-groups, as the classes are having mixed level of proficiency in the class. Drama techniques provide a scope to learn horizontally-from learner to learner apart from the teacher-student learning. So, it is also the teachers' or syllabus makers' responsibility to include activities likes drama activities or team work where you need the cooperation and participation of every member in the given activities. These kinds of activities will help in high participation of the learners.

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