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## Using Role Play for Developing Speaking Skill in English among Engineering Students of Centurion University, Odisha

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### Abstract

This study aims to develop the speaking skill using the role play technique among the engineering students who are not able to speak English confidently. This study tries to answer the research question: to what extent role-play is effective in developing the speaking skill in English of the engineering students? Language Learning is not just learning about languages, but to use the language correctly with confidence in daily life. Language learning based on tasks as a fundamental component in the classroom, provides better contexts for activating learner's learning processes and promoting second language learning. Role play is a technique in which students are presented with an artificial environment and they are exposed with different kinds of

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cases and problems they need to solve, persuade the same in form of roles. This study focuses on Role-play as a teaching technique which serves as a multi-skill developing activity where the students not only develop fluency in communication but also broaden the horizon of understanding other's behavior resulting into empathy, team work, interpersonal skills and problem solving attitude.

**Key words:** Role Play, Confidence level, Speaking Skill, language learning activity

## **Introduction**

In recent years Odisha has become a hub of technical educational institutions. The focus in these institutions is the development of technical skills. However, it has also been observed that mere technical expertise does not ensure employability. Good communication skills are required to succeed in the profession. Hence, an attempt is being made to impart communication skills to technical students. The participation of students in English language classroom, however, is not very encouraging. There are various reasons for this, like low confidence level, stage fear, improper exposure to the target language, low enthusiasm level, and less practice of language skills etc. Moreover, most of the English language classrooms in this state are teacher-centered and the participation of the students in the classroom is very low. Reading text books and listening to lectures do not make learning meaningful. To overcome these difficulties, teachers can introduce various activity-based language learning like, Role plays, group discussions, simulations, language games and dramas etc. in the language classrooms. This study will examine the effectiveness of using one of the language learning activities like Role play as a tool to promote language development. There are many types of instructional techniques. The focus of this study is to understand to what extent role-plays help in promoting language development.

## **Role Play as a language learning activity**

Role play is a very useful technique in learning communication skills, because it gives the learner an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. Role play provides students an amicable atmosphere to learn the speaking skills in which the participants play different imaginary roles without any tense and shyness. It also

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provides the opportunities for all the learners equally to speak and practice the target language. Many researchers have come up with many different definitions of the role play across the world.

According to Stephen D Hattings based on his observation in the conversation class, role play would seem to be ideal activity in which students could use their creativity and it aims to stimulate a conversation situation in which students might find themselves and give them an opportunity to practice and develop their communication skill.

Stern (1983) suggested "role playing helps the individual to become more flexible" and "develop a sense of mastery in many situations". She suggested "through role play, L2 learners can experience many kinds of situations in which they will use the language; and as they develop a sense of mastery in them, they should be able to apply the language more easily to new situations." Role play is really a worthwhile learning experience for both the students and the teacher.

Larsen-Freeman (2000), points out that role plays are very important in Communicative Approach because they give students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles.

Ladousse (2004) indicated that "role play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation."

Blatner (2009) says that role playing, a derivative of a 'sociodrama', is a method for exploring the issues involved in complex social situations. It may be used for the training of professionals or in a classroom for the understanding of literature, history, and even science.

## **Methodology**

The study was conducted in four sessions of English Communication Lab. Each session was of 3 hours duration totaling 12 hours spread over a period of 4 weeks. 30 students were divided in 6-7 groups. A common problem situation or case was assigned to each group in each

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session. Cue Cards were given to each member of the group to play the assigned role. The researcher gave 30 minutes time to prepare the topic. The common cue card holders discussed about their assigned role among themselves. The group was given 12-15 minutes to perform the play. The technique of structured observation was employed by the researcher to know the development of the learners in these four weeks.

The rationale for conducting the classroom observation was to get an impression of the English speaking classes. The student's behavior, interaction patterns in the classroom, enthusiasm level and the learner's participation in performing the role plays and their difficulties and progress in speaking are observed. The researcher guided the students regarding many evaluation components, such as the pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, intonation, context and the body language etc before the original performances of the students.

### Evaluation Criteria

All the teams were evaluated by the researcher. The criteria for evaluation were as follows:

1. Grammatical accuracy
2. Choice of vocabulary
3. Fluency in communication
4. Pronunciation
5. Confidence level
6. Body language
7. Team work
8. Attitude to the task
9. Use of language functions
10. Creativity

Based on these criteria, the guideline for the grading system was:

| Grades | Characteristics of the learners                                                                                                                                |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| O      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student can communicate confidently and fluently with no grammatical errors in the role play activity.</li> </ul> |

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He/she can communicate with proper use of language functions.</li> <li>• He/she can communicate with good choice of vocabulary.</li> <li>• He/she can speak with good pronunciation.</li> <li>• He/ she has an excellent body language.</li> <li>• He /she is an excellent team player</li> <li>• He/she is enthusiastic to participate in the role play.</li> <li>• He/she is creative in dialogue delivery.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>A</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student can communicate confidently and fluently with less grammatical errors in the role play activity.</li> <li>• He/she can communicate with reasonable use of language functions.</li> <li>• He/she can communicate with very simple vocabulary.</li> <li>• He/she speaks well though cannot differentiate the problem sounds for example: she/see, zoo/jug/pleasure etc.</li> <li>• His /her body language is good.</li> <li>• He /she is a good team player</li> <li>• He/she enjoys participating in the role play</li> <li>• He/she is creative in dialogue delivery.</li> </ul> |
| <b>B</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student communicates with less confidence with less grammatical errors</li> <li>• He/she is average in fluency.</li> <li>• He/she can communicate with very less use of language function.</li> <li>• He/she struggles with correct choice of vocabulary.</li> <li>• He/she is having mother tongue influence in his/her pronunciation</li> <li>• He/ she has reasonably good body language.</li> <li>• He /she is a good team player</li> <li>• He/she less enthusiastic to participate in the role play.</li> <li>• He/she is less creative in dialogue delivery.</li> </ul>           |
| <b>C</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student is nervous and not fluent.</li> <li>• He/she has grammatical errors while delivering the dialogue.</li> <li>• He/she can communicate but with average use of language function.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He/she lacks correct choice of vocabulary.</li> <li>• He/she is poor in pronunciation</li> <li>• He/ she is average in body language.</li> <li>• He /she is an introvert.</li> <li>• He/she less active to participate in the role play.</li> <li>• He/she is not creative</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>D</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student is nervous while communicating.</li> <li>• He/ she fumbles while speaking.</li> <li>• He/she commits grammatical errors while communicating.</li> <li>• He/she cannot communicate with proper use of language function.</li> <li>• He/she does not have correct choice of vocabulary.</li> <li>• He/she has mother tongue influence in speech.</li> <li>• He/ she lacks proper body language.</li> <li>• He /she keeps himself or herself aloof from the team.</li> <li>• He/she is not enthusiastic to participate in the role play.</li> </ul> |

| <b>Grade</b> | <b>Description</b> | <b>Grade point</b> |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>O</b>     | Excellent          | 9                  |
| <b>A</b>     | Very Good          | 8                  |
| <b>B</b>     | Good               | 7                  |
| <b>C</b>     | Average            | 6                  |
| <b>D</b>     | Poor               | 5                  |

## **Description of Sessions**

### **1<sup>st</sup> session**

In the first session, the Researcher announced the Role -Play activity to the students. Majority of the students had not performed in the role play before. Students from regional medium schools showed less enthusiasm to participate in the activity. But the students from

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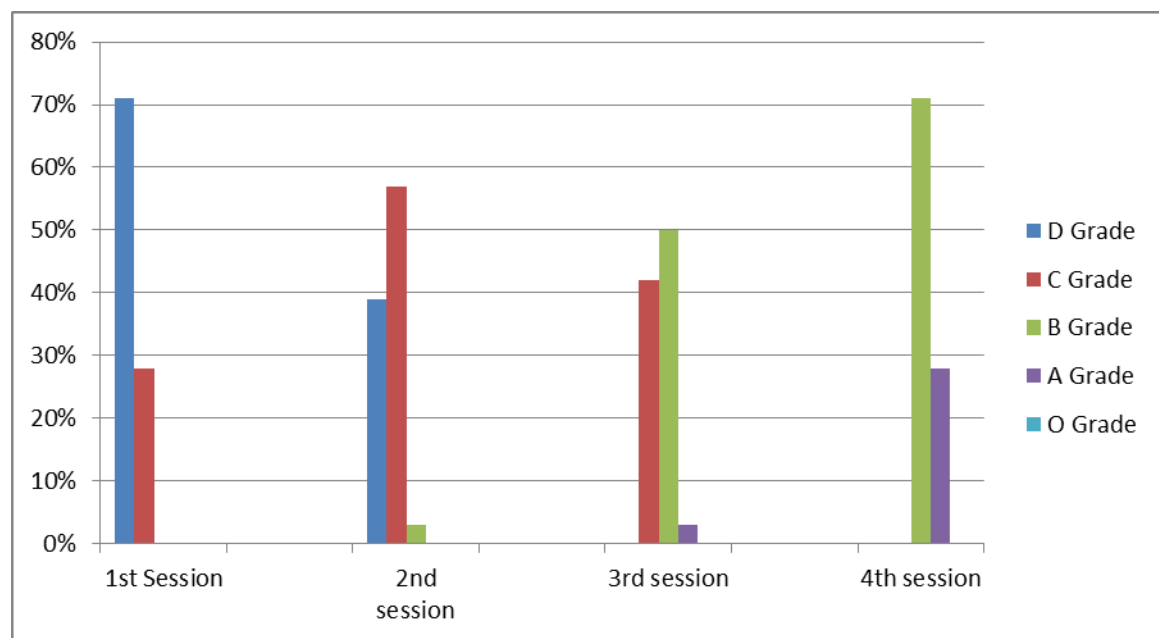
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English medium schools whose number was less in the class showed interest to participate in the activity. After announcing the activity the researcher discussed the evaluation criteria among the students, so that they could be more cautious about their performance in the activity. The students were divided into 07 groups consisting of 3-4 members each. Then the situation for the role-play was announced and different cue cards were given to each member of the 07 groups. Members with common cue cards or roles discussed among themselves for 20 minutes.

Then, group-wise the students performed their assigned role. The situations for the role plays were based on certain social problems which the participants had to solve while participating in the activity.

This was the first role play activity the researcher had observed minutely and evaluated as per the evaluation criteria. The observation is graphically represented in the following table:



**Figure 1**

From the figure 1 it was observed that in the first session most of the students have secured 'D' Grade in their performance. About 72 % of students achieved 'D' grade. The students were nervous in this session. There was no 'O' or 'A' grade achieved by the students. Only 28 % of students got 'C' grade in their performance in the activity.

## 2nd Session

In this session, though the enthusiasm of the students to participate in the role-play activity was low, but after a motivating session by the researcher the students showed interest to participate in the activity. Like the first role play activity, the students were divided into groups and given cue cards for their roles on different problem solving situation. This time the researcher expected some improvement in the performance of the students. The researcher observed the students' performance carefully on the basis of those 10 evaluation criteria. While observing the researcher found that the students confidence level has increased in the second role play activity. The observation is graphically represented in figure 1.

In this session about 39% of students achieved 'D' grade in their performance and 57% of students got 'C' grade. Thus in the second session the development in the performance of the students was found. Though the performance is not remarkable but it is better than the previous session. About 4% of students have got 'B' grade. No student achieved 'A' or 'O' grade.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Session

In the second session, a new situation was announced to the students. The same method of the first and second session was applied in this session. In this session new cue cards were given to the students and new groups were formed. The researcher observed the development carefully. From the above figure it is observed that a remarkable change in the performance of the students. No student has got 'D' grade in the activity. Though no student achieved 'O' grade, there was growth in students' performance with 50% of students achieving 'B' grade. About 44% and 6% of students achieved 'C' grade and 'A' grade respectively. Thus the students' performance has improved in this session (figure 1).

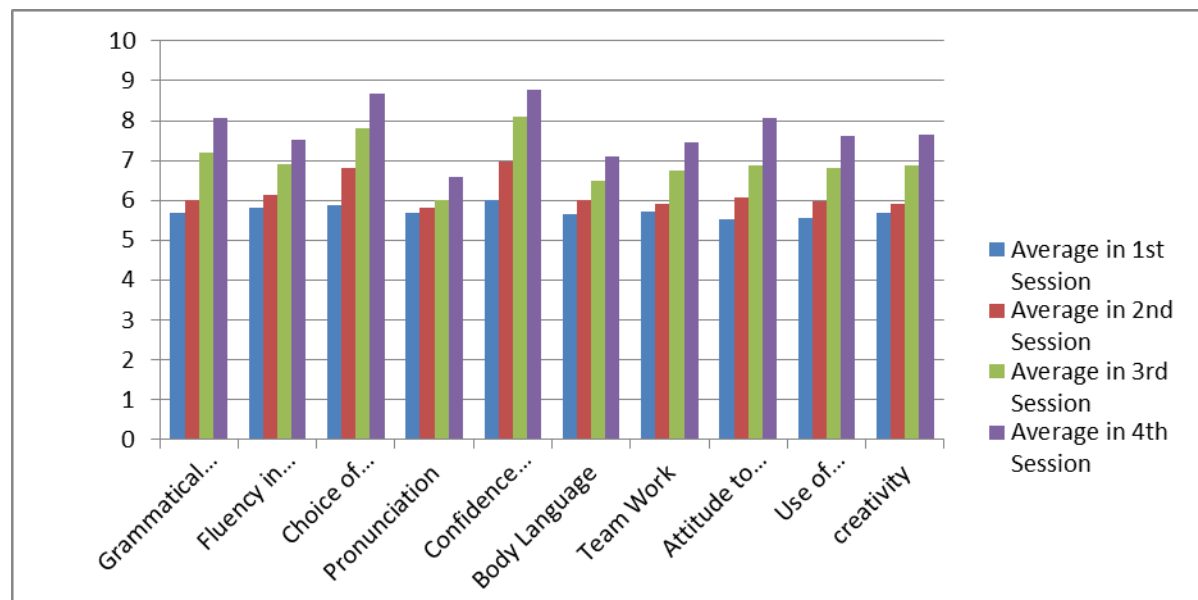
## 4<sup>th</sup> Session

In the last session, we found that no student has got 'C' or 'D' grade. About 72% of students scored 'B' grade in their performance. The number of students scoring 'A' grade has also been improved from the previous session from 4% to 28%(figure 1).



## Session-wise Improvement

The students got four sessions to participate in role play activities. After observing their participation in the activity the researcher marked the improvement in the performance of the students.



**Figure 2**

It was observed that after participating in 4 Role- Play activities, the confidence level of the students has increased the most. In the 4<sup>th</sup> role play activity all the criteria have developed. However, the improvement in pronunciation of the students is less affected by this 4 weeks long role play activity. In the last Role play activity the grammatical accuracy, choice of vocabulary, confidence level and the attitude to the task has reached to 80%-90%.The fluency in communication, body language, team work, use of language function and creativity increased up to 70%-80%.The overall performance of students has increased from the 1<sup>st</sup> session to the 4<sup>th</sup> session. This is clearly mentioned in table no.1.

| Sl No. | Evaluation Criteria      | Performance in First session (in %) | Performance in the last session (in %) |
|--------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1      | Grammatical Accuracy     | 57%                                 | 82%                                    |
| 2      | Fluency in Communication | 58%                                 | 78%                                    |

|    |                          |     |     |
|----|--------------------------|-----|-----|
| 3  | Choice of Vocabulary     | 57% | 87% |
| 4  | Pronunciation            | 57% | 66% |
| 5  | Confidence level         | 60% | 89% |
| 6  | Body Language            | 57% | 71% |
| 7  | Team Work                | 57% | 74% |
| 8  | Attitude to the task     | 55% | 81% |
| 9  | Use of Language Function | 57% | 77% |
| 10 | Creativity               | 57% | 78% |

**Table 1**

### **Findings**

This study has been an attempt in providing opportunities and practice in the speaking skill in meaningful and problem solving contexts for the engineering students. This study found that there is a significant improvement in students' speaking skill after participating in four sessions of role play activity. The students, who were observed as the poor performers in the activity have improved in delivering the dialogues confidently. It was felt that if this kind of practice is provided to these students for a long time, certainly they would reach to the expected level in the speaking skill of English language. However, this intervention proved to be effective technique for the students in developing their own speaking skill.

### **Suggestions**

The findings of the study provide some suggestions for the language teachers. The teachers of English at engineering colleges should encourage the students towards learning speaking skill and explain its usefulness. They should use the effective techniques for developing their speaking skill. Role play is one of the most effective techniques that is cost free and easy to conduct in regular classroom. Teachers should make arrangements in the classroom for the role play performances.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the project, the researcher concludes that the students' performance in communication has improved by implementing role-play as a teaching technique in the classroom. The scores on the basis of 10 evaluative components have increased from the first

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role play to the last role play activity. This result has answered the research problem that the use of role play as a teaching technique in a language classroom is quite effective. The use of role play makes the speaking and learning activity more enjoyable and interesting. It builds a positive attitude among the students to participate in a student-centred class. This activity has improved the confidence to speak English language in real life situations.

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