A Role-Playing Exercise in an English Language Classroom for Distance Learners

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Annotation: Language instruction has shifted in recent years from teaching the language itself to teaching the learning process. The growth of the language learners' communicative skills is just as important as their language proficiency. The teacher must design an engaging, dynamic, and lively scenario to teach the target language to the students in order to help them improve their communicative skills.

Therefore, extended activities such as role plays, simulations, and problem solving are essential for helping students enhance their communication skills. The students must go beyond a text to complete these assignments. They demand that students comprehend a material thoroughly and be able to integrate their personal experiences and outside knowledge into the exercises. Depending on the language proficiency of the learners, different levels of extended activities can be completed. In these kinds of activities, the teacher's role frequently depends on the students and their language proficiency. However, as students also need to contribute in order to be motivated to acquire the material, the teacher cannot be held entirely accountable for the language learning of the class.

Ensuring that the English Language proficiency courses offered by National University of Malaysia to remote learners closely resemble the on-campus courses in terms of syllabus and assessments is one of the prerequisites for these courses. The foundation of English for Social Sciences is a study guide that encircles the book Global Views by M.E. Sokolik, making the course accessible to distant learners. The goal of the course is to give them integrated English language abilities so they can meet language demands in the workplace and in the classroom.

One of the activities in this course, role play, was chosen to provide an environment in which students may actively interact in the language, increasing the significance of language learning. The several learning styles—listening, remembering, debating, writing, and presenting—are introduced to the students concurrently. The Kuching, Sarawak Center's remote learners served as the sample for this investigation. There were fifteen working people in the session. All but two of the students were primary school teachers. The teachers thought poorly of their own spoken skills. English language instruction is not provided in schools, and neither is it practiced at home or in work. They so find it challenging to communicate in English.

Twice a semester, instructors of remote learners from various districts gather at their tutorial center. Six contact hours make up each meeting. These students differ significantly from those in the mainstream. Their infrequent meetings, compared to the latter, seem to impede communication.

Task-based activities and other individual work might hinder or decrease communication among students. Such issues might not arise for full-time students in regular classes who have an abundance of contact hours for teacher-student communication. With an integrated strategy that enables the practice of language skills, content, and interpersonal skills and techniques, role play in this distance

learning course allows the objectives of the course to be met in the allotted time. The author used newspaper articles about the Japanese encephalitis outbreak that were gathered over time because this was a tertiary level class. This particular subject was picked on purpose since, at the time, it was the talk of the Malaysian newspapers and electronic media. It covered the opinions of farmers, health professionals, consumers' rights, and the sentiments of the impacted locals. The author selected this topic to provide the students a chance to practice in a real-world setting. It was also suitable for role-playing since it featured a variety of characters, letting the students act out those parts. Because the topic addressed social issues, it was a good choice. In addition, the students were required to record their feelings, observations, ideas, and views of a specific learning experience connected to the role play in a diary, journal, or log book. These entries may offer learners the chance to engage in introspection and self-reflection. The instructor held a session to get input from the students regarding their involvement at the conclusion of the task. This is crucial for any activity-based learning program since it serves to emphasize the goal and objective of the task. In addition, students gain self-awareness and self-assurance in their capacity and study techniques.

Role plays, whether more or less structured, are crucial to the communicative method, according to Larsen-Freeman (1986), since they allow students to practice speaking in a variety of social roles and circumstances.

A role play offers a great deal of flexibility and room for creativity and variation in educational activities. Ladousse (1987) claims that role play employs a variety of communicative strategies to improve language fluency, foster classroom interaction, and boost motivation. Peer learning is promoted here, and the teacher and student share accountability for the learning process. Role play facilitates interaction and helps students become more comfortable speaking in public. For the more timid students, role-playing offers a mask that liberates those who struggle with communication. It's also enjoyable, and most students would concur that happiness promotes greater learning. Short role descriptions were given along with an explanation of the activity. The length of the role play was worked out in negotiations. The teacher made notes of the students' comments at two separate points in order to get their input. When the teacher began guiding the class through the role play and method, their input was first noted. Following the presentation, a second recording of the students' responses was made. In addition to filming, informal interviews were done with the students to give them time to think back on their presentation.

Three categories were created from the learner feedback: the preparation stage, the presenting stage, and the learners' overall perception of the activity.

Even if they had not previously been interested in the topic when they saw it in the newspaper, the majority of students said that the exercise created an environment that encouraged them to read the reports thoroughly. To get ready for the role play, they were forced to look up the definitions of a few tricky terms in the article.

During the initial phases of the role play, the students felt uneasy and unsure. This resulted in brief silences at first. Before long, they started assisting each other in choosing the speaker. By the end, they had overcome their nervousness and were starting to prompt each other with suggestions. Even if they had not previously been interested in the topic when they saw it in the newspaper, the majority of students said that the exercise created an environment that encouraged them to read the reports thoroughly. To get ready for the role play, they were forced to look up the definitions of a few tricky terms in the article.

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