

Creativity Speaks Better: Foster English Speaking Skills using Creative Drama in “M-News” Articles

Lakshmi, K¹ Nageswari, R^{2*}

1.Social sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India-632014

2. School of Social sciences and Languages , VIT University, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India-632014

Abstract

Speaking efficiency has been always tested and studied in the Indian context but there are limited experimental studies on fostering those using m-learning methods. In this experiment, 30 participants of an Indian private University displayed a constructive change in their speaking skills using the suggested method. The study was conducted in two groups, with the control group using the newspaper article of “The Hindu” and the experimental group using the m-news application of “The Hindu” assisted by the creative drama. The results illustrated a significant improvement in the English speaking competency of rural learners through creative drama using m-news applications, with special reference to “The Hindu” official mobile application.

Keywords: ELA, Speaking skill, m-learning, m-news application, creative drama,

1. Introduction

In the context of English language acquisition in India, a question was always being raised among the instructors about why the tertiary level students who reside in the rural background are deficient in the speaking competency. This study proposes the enhancement of speaking competency of the tertiary level learners of rural background, using m-news articles strengthened by creative drama. The lack of confidence, the limited opportunities and ignorance of the connection between the textual language and everyday language are the main issues faced by the rural learners. A new method in language learning using m- news collaborated with creative drama has been introduced by the researchers in this study to overcome the various issues dealt. M-learning has been the recent trend in language learning with the availability of smartphones and e-book readers like Amazon.com’s Kindle (Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013) which opened a new and interesting world of learning. Consequently, the study for developing the speaking skill of the learners of rural background was carried out using “The Hindu”, android mobile news application reinforced with creative drama. The creative drama as a secondary tool helped the learners to relate the context to their daily life for a better understanding of the English language.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Speaking skill as a key factor in communication

The study focuses on the speaking skills as of all the four macro English skills, speaking seems to be the most important skill required for communication (Zaremba, 2006). It is quite evident that effective communication by means of speaking usually creates a number of benefits for both speakers and business organizations (Boonkit, 2010). For example, efficient speaking skills result in attainment during ceremonial speaking activities, job interviews, job training activities, and many other business purposes (Osborn, Osborn, & Osborn, 2008). It has been also found that an overall enhancement of speaking skills is contributed by all the aspects of speaking, viz., vocabulary, fluency grammatical accuracy and pronunciation (Iwashita, Brown, et.al, 2008). Concisely, it is relevant to possess English speaking competency to situate oneself in the competitive world where English has turned to be a globally accepted language (Crystal, 1997 & Graddol, 1997).

2.2 Mobile news articles and creative drama as teaching tools

Newspapers have been an inevitable part of quotidian life since the advent of printing press in the seventeenth century. They were the sole means for decades to deliver the news of happenings across the world till the dawn of the electronic media in 1950s. The recent past witnessed a new face of newspaper as a teaching tool from a role that of news carriers. It is considered to be the economical teaching aid by many educationists. “In this context newspaper articles are among the most suitable materials to be used in speaking activities as they include daily spoken and vivid language while conveying news across the cultures and countries”(Akdemir, Barin and Demiroz,2012, p.2968) . Consequently, a new era of learning commenced with the news articles through mobile devices. As m- learning advanced to the field of ELT, the approach and techniques to learn English became more interesting. M-learning, however, becomes more popular for its technologies that can provide the complete tools and services for accessing any video and audio materials that are available on the public domain (Abachi & Muhammad, 2014). Hence, ELT is likely to be highly susceptible to the use of the mobile news articles.

Correspondingly, creative drama has been an anticipated teaching aid in ELT par with news articles. In the field of language teaching and learning, drama is one of the teaching techniques that can be implemented in

second language classroom. Even though drama is not a new methodological approach for language teaching and learning, the belief that it might be an effective tool for language teaching and learning cannot be denied (Nordine, Sharif, et al., 2012). The use of creative drama, a method which makes individuals more effective in the learning process, enables learning through doing and experiencing which assures an effective teaching and learning tool. Furthermore, present theory in second language acquisition supports the hypothesis that drama activities can improve communicative competence and thus aid language learning in general (Savignon, 1983). Thus, the studies emphasize on the effectiveness of both the news articles and creative drama, but however, points out a new approach of collaborative method of using m-news and creative drama to the tertiary level learners of rural India for enriching their English speaking competency.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants for the empirical study were 30 learners selected from the “Support the Advancement of Rural Students” (STARS) unit functioning actively at VIT University in India. The 30 STAR students chosen were from the entry level of Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) of different branches. They resided in the rural areas of the South Indian state, Tamilnadu. Though most of them could follow English as a language, they had very less exposure to English language either in their social background or in their educational background. They were neither exposed to the daily life situations of English language nor aware of English learning applications in a mobile learning environment. The study was thus more relevant to the selected sample to increase their exposure to English language learning and strengthen their English speaking ability.

3.2 Method

The data of the study was collected using quantitative and qualitative methods. A questionnaire was used in the study to figure out the target learners. The questionnaire was designed to assess their understandability of English language in any given academic or everyday context and of a given piece of news article. The sample required for the study was assessed using Likert- scale. The results of the survey indicated that 99 percent of the 100 respondents could understand English language. 95 percent of them lacked confidence to speak, though they are capable of constructing and comprehending effective sentences. Most of them found difficulty in using vocabulary while speaking, when a few of them were hesitant to speak. Hence, they were ready to attempt a new approach to acquire English speaking skills that could help them to potentiate themselves. Sixty respondents of the questionnaire were randomly selected for the study. The mobile application of “The Hindu” was installed in the smartphones of the learners of experimental group, which consisted of 30 participants. The application helped them to read the selected articles during class hours everywhere they moved around. The mobile nature of m-news application enabled the learners to have continual reading anywhere anytime which resulted in a better understanding of the content.

Moreover, the creative drama used in the second phase supplemented the students with situations in their daily life to connect with the news articles. The learners worked in small groups of 5 during the second phase. Several studies were done to suggest that smaller groups are efficient regarding the maximum participation and interchange of ideas (Cooper and Robinson, 1998). The main elements considered while evaluating the speaking skill of learners were their ability to comprehend the content of the article, the vocabulary, sentence construction, accuracy in grammar and pronunciation. The criteria for evaluation were tested in the pre-test, progress test as well as the post test.

3.3 Procedure

The study was divided into two phases. A pre-test was conducted in the first phase in which a news article, “Cheers to Wisdom” from “The Hindu” mobile news application, was given two days prior to the test. The main criteria tested in the oral test were content comprehension, vocabulary, sentence structure, accuracy in grammar and pronunciation. The criteria set were inspired by the Common European framework to evaluate the upper intermediate level learners. The students were resulted with limited vocabulary and less sentence construction rules. Their less confidence and the negative attitude towards the subject matter led to poor oral presentation. Though many of them understood the content, comprehending the article was found to be difficult due to lack of other four elements of evaluation. Sessions on news articles assisted by the researchers were conducted for 10 hours. A progress test was conducted marking the progress from the pre-test after the 10 hour training. The test result, so much ever, showed improvement in using a few vocabulary and sentence structures but the inhibitive nature to use English remained as an obstacle for a better output.

In addition, the experimental group was assigned another five hours class for creative drama on the m-news articles facilitated by the researchers. Simultaneously, the control group was guided to undertake the classes using newspaper articles in traditional method. The students in the experimental group were further divided into small groups for performing creative dramas on any general news article they read across in last few

hours of classes. A post test was conducted at the end of the five hours of experiment.

A highly noticeable progress was seen in the post-test of the last phase. The vocabulary usage of four or five new words and phrases in a comprehension in the pre- test of the second phase is upgraded to a number of more than ten after the study conducted using creative drama. Moreover, the confidence and attitude were boosted up resulting in a considerably high level of presentation. The control group, at the same time, found it difficult to show progress to the level of experimental group in the provided time.

The data analysis was carried out using the paired sample t-test following the post test in the second phase. Table1 demonstrates the reliability of the data collected during the experiment. It demonstrates the result of the reliability test done on the pre-test and post test results of the experimental group.

The result of the reliability test shows that the 10 variables tested presents a value of 0.932 which is greater than the assumed value of 0.8. This value evidently shows the credibility of the experiment.

4.Findings

This section commences with the pre-test and post test results of the experimental group followed by its graphical representation. The section also deals with the pre-test and post test results of the control group which underwent only one phase of study and continued with the same method throughout the study.

4.1 Test results of the experimental group

The experimental group had undergone two phases of the study with the common pre-test for the experimental and control groups. The five criteria as referred in the previous sections were analysed to sketch the difference between the speaking performances of learners in the very beginning of the study and at the end of the experiment. The data were analysed using paired sample t-test.

All the components for speaking ability illustrated the differences with a signified $p < 0.05$. The p value implies the difference between the variables of pre-test and post-test. The signified values of all variables were less than 0.05, indicating the yield of the “The Hindu” m-news mobile application assisted by the creative drama to improve the speaking competency of second language learners. The study thus justifies the significance of m-news assisted by creative drama to enhance the English speaking competency of tertiary level rural learners in the m-learning environment.

Figure 1 exemplifies comparatively the low performance of the learners in the pre-test. Majority of them failed to perform efficiently, such as in their ability to comprehend the content of the article, vocabulary, sentence structure, accuracy in grammar and pronunciation in the pre-tests. Subsequent to the study of two phases, a post test was conducted to evaluate the progress in the participants. The graph however shows a consistent improvement in the vocabulary usage of the learners. The maximum score, as portrayed in the graph, of the pre-test was 16 while that of the post-test was 23.5. The average marks in the post-test lies between 18 and 19 which was not even the maximum mark in the pre-test. The graph thus draws the effectiveness of the m-news application supported by creative drama.

4.2 Effect of traditional learning in control group

A group of thirty students were drawn to participate as the control group of the study. The participants in this group were provided with the same news article as that of experimental group. They were, in contrary, approached through traditional methods such as using newspaper article without being supported by creative drama and m-learning. However, this method was considered less effective as the control group consumed more time to read and understand the newspaper as their learning is confined to one place and a fixed timing of one hour. Moreover, they lacked continuity in their learning process as their exposure is limited.

The Figure2 demonstrates the effectiveness of the proposed mobile news application supported by the creative drama for potentiating the speaking ability of the learners. The maximum scores of the post-tests of control and experimental groups draw the effectiveness of the new method in fostering speaking skills. The maximum score in the post-test of the control group was 17.5 where as it was 22.5 in the experimental group. The graphical representation of the test results emphasizes the efficiency of mobile news application, “The Hindu”, to augment the learner’s speaking ability.

5.Discussion

The aforesaid findings may depict some necessary features of the experiment that was carried out to enhance the speaking skill of tertiary level learners of the experimental and control groups using varied approaches and ended with different outputs. The post-test results exposed the efficiency of the new method used to foster the speaking skills. The experimental group exhibited an evident variation in performance from that of the control group. Consequently, enhancing speaking skills using mobile applications, supported by creative drama, originated to be more effective from the test results. The mobile news application, “The Hindu”, used in the study was found to be more useful in exposing English language to the target learners than the newspaper

articles which confines learning to a particular place or time.

6. Conclusion

The study thus validates that the advocated approach using the “The Hindu” mobile news application in smartphones which is further facilitated by creative drama to enhance speaking competency is more confirmatory than the traditional methods of using newspaper articles. M-learning, being more popular currently, has a better reception among the young generation in their learning environment. The study figures out that the usage of m-news applications with the help of creative drama has been more efficient which was guaranteed through the analyses of paired sample t-test. The study can be however extended to larger groups and to all levels of learners, primary or secondary. The extension of this study may help the learners in enhancing a better speaking competency in the earlier levels of their academic life.

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Lakshmi K from VIT University, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India. She is pursuing Doctor of Philosophy degree from VT University, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India since 2013. Her area of interest is in English Language Teaching.

Dr. R Nageswari from VIT University, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India. She completed her Doctor of Philosophy degree from Karunya University, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India in 2012. Her area of specialization is in English Language Teaching.

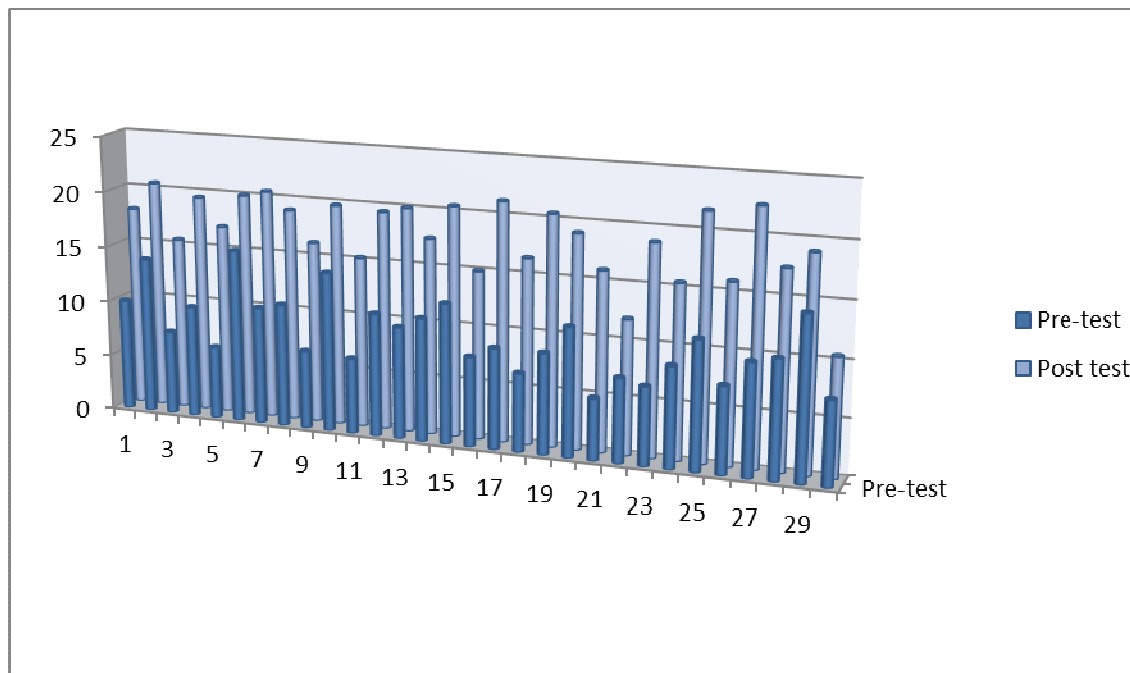


Figure1. Results of pre-test and post-test of experimental group

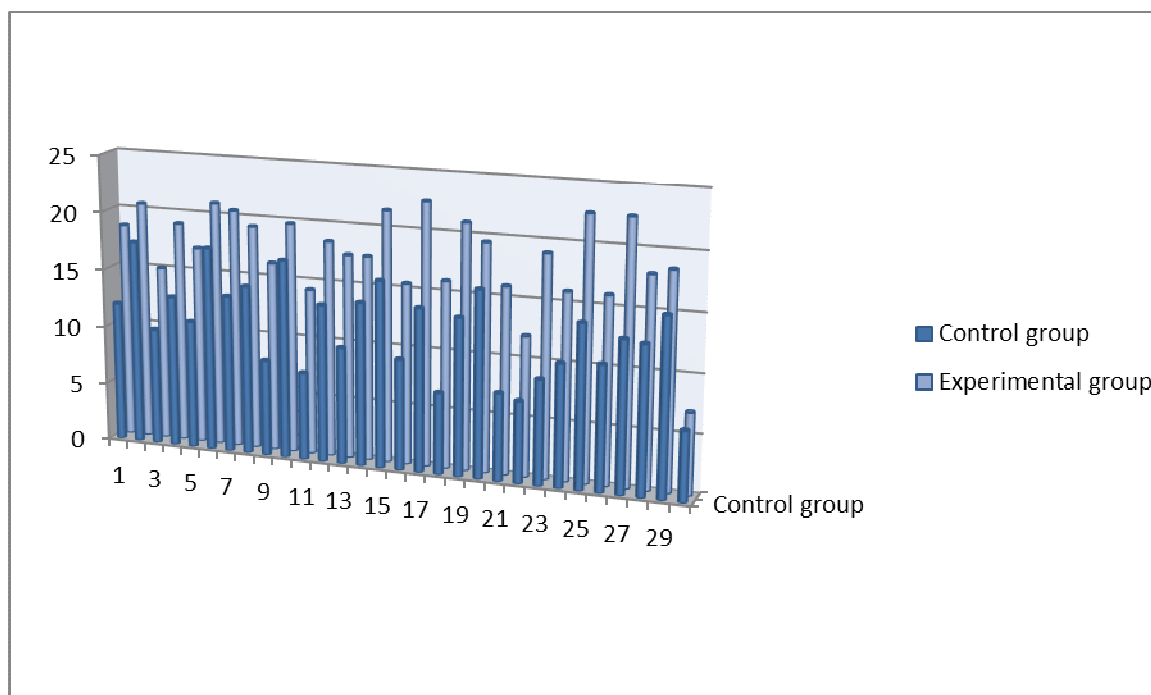


Figure 2. The post-test results of control and experimental groups

Table1. Reliability Statistics of collected data

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.932	10

Table2. The test results of variables in the experimental group

Variables	Paired Differences			Signified (2- tailed)
	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Comprehension	-1.558	.560	.102	.000
Vocabulary	-1.600	.706	.129	.00,10
Sentence Structure	-1.700	.664	.121	.000
Accuracy	-1.550	.514	.094	.000
Pronunciation	-1.658	.693	.127	.000

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