Using Animated Tales to Develop Oral Communication Skills in English

Bansode Amit Namdev[1], Deepak Kumar[2]

[1]*Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences*

Nalanda College of Engineering, Chandi, Nalanda

[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences*

Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology, Bhopal

Abstract

This paper examines the use of animated tales to develop the oral communication skills of secondary school learners. In the present era, animation has preoccupied most of the young learners' minds, and as a result of that, most of the time they are seen watching animated programs and movies. It is a well-known fact that children find animation very interesting. In the present research study, it was assumed that animation could be very useful to develop the oral communication skills of the children. The study was carried out at 'Rajasthan Marwadi School' in the Latur district of Maharashtra.Sixty students were chosen through random sampling. They were divided into two groups: the controlled group and the experimental group.

Tasks and activities were used as a research tool to analyse the impact of animated tales on the development of learners' oral communication skills. Other research tools used in the study were classroom observation checklist, tests, and semi-structured interviews. The data was collected through administering various tasks and exercises and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. T-test was used for quantitative analysis of the data. The quantified data showed that students from the experimental group showed forty percent (40%) improvement in their oral communication skills. The classroom observation and the transcription of the recorded interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The findings of the research indicated that the use of animated tales improved the oral communication skills of the learners. Moreover, such animated tales rendered language learning interesting and motivating.

Introduction

Animation, one of the important genres, is fascinating most people from society. Today, we can see the animation is tightening its grip in many sectors, for example, education, entertainment, business, etc. Kids are always seen holding television remote control in their hands and not letting elders watch anything except animated cartoons and movies. Whenever a new animated movie is released, children force their parents to go to the movie hall and watch it with them. Animation is getting popular day by day. It can be seen in the International Movies Database (*www.imdb.com*) that many animated movies have got eight rating points out of ten.Many countries in the West have already started using animated cartoons, stories, movies, serials, etc to teach language. But in the Indian classrooms, the use of animation to teach English is rarely seen. Hence, there is a need for using animated tales in the ESL classrooms to make the teaching-learning process more interesting. The present research is an experimental study which aims to analyse the impact of animated tales on developing oral communication skills of school children.

Significance of the study

The study attempts to prove that audio-visual teaching materials, particularly animated tales increase the motivation, interest, and participation of learners. Moreover, it intends to be useful to practicing teachers and other stakeholders involved in English Language Education. It also suggests that materialsproducers may introduce animated tales as supplementary materials to English language teaching. It intends to demonstrate how readily available teaching materials can be tapped to teach English language skills and language components.

Reasons for using stories to teach English language.

According to Taylor (2000), there are several reasons for using stories to teach English to children. Some of the major reasons are the followings:

1.   Easy to comprehend
The stories follow a simple language structure having a smaller number of the compound and complex sentences, so it becomes very easy for children to understand stories.

2. **It follows a timeline:**
Stories follow a logical order of writing which includes beginning, middle, and end. The order of the story sequence won't be changed like, stream of consciousness technique. So, it becomes cognitively less challenging for children to comprehend stories.

3.   **Concrete vocabulary**: concrete vocabulary includes those words which can be felt through our senses, like, see, touch, taste, smell, and hear. Such words are easy to comprehend and can be remembered for a long period.

4. **Culturally specific**: stories are culture-specific which means they represent their culture. Different cultures have different stories to offer. However, their underline principles are the same, honesty, truth, bravery, greed, and moral teachings, etc.

5. **Motivating and interesting**: All the above-mentioned qualities make stories very motivating and interesting. So, using stories to teach English to school children is very useful.

Reasons for using Animation to teach English Language

Animation is useful to project those ideas which are very difficult to be video recorded by human beings. It makes abstract and complex ideas comprehensible with ease. (Saxena 2007). When it comes to language teaching, grammar, and vocabulary can be taught through animation. For example, teaching prepositions: above, over, below, beneath, etc., can be explained through animation. In teaching vocabulary, especially, teaching phrasal verbs is a difficult task. It could be very easy to teach phrasal verbs through animation.Devi (2005). The study shows that if animation is used at the beginner level to teach new concepts for the first time, the teaching-learning process becomes less tedious. Animated Cartoons can also be used in large classrooms.

There are many studies on using stories to develop language proficiency. However, very few studies have incorporated animated movies to teach the English language. There are many important features of animated tales that can benefit the teaching and learning process. The important features of animated tales are given below.

1.   **Popular among children**: Animation is very popular among children. They are often seen watching cartoon channels and cartoon movies. Some children already know animated tales. According to Tailor (2000), if learners already know the content of the lesson, they can concentrate more on language. This way, animated tales are very useful for school children to learn the language.

2.   **Motivating:** Children are very much fascinated by stories. If stories are presented in the form of animation, the motivation level of the students will be at its peak. These animated tales are very simple to understand. The language used in the stories is very lucid. The vocabulary is concrete. All these factors make animated tales very motivating.

3.   **Removes affective filters:** Once the level of motivation goes up, the affective filters fall apart.Henter (2014).Since the kids like animation very much, their motivation of learning remains at its peak. They don't remain shy, dumb, and unenthusiastic in the classroom, and they express their views confidently.

4.   **Improves contextual comprehension:** The animated form of the tales makes concepts or content clear, so students can comprehend them better. It is said that if any knowledge is linked with the visuals, it will be better comprehended. (Cross 2011). Many things in literature cannot be presented audio-visually without the help of an animation, for example, mythical creatures, abstract human qualities, supernatural forces, etc. The animation can represent those abstract qualities. This quality of animated tales helps students improve their contextual comprehension.

5.   **Scope for imagination:** Animation is generally used when people fail to present reality by humans. In such a case, unanimated things are being presented animated. Animation lets students wander in the realm of imagination. They search for different alternatives. This process promotes creativity among children since imagination is considered the first step of creativity.

Research methodology

Sample and research design

Sixty students were selected for the study by random sampling which was done according to the roll numbers of the students given by the school. Further, they were divided into two groups: the controlled group and the experimental group.

The study is divided into three stages:

Pre-intervention   Intervention   Post-intervention
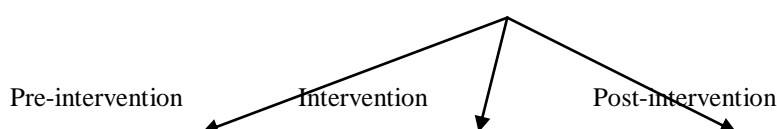
Data collection and data analysis procedure

Pre-intervention test:

The controlled group and the experimental group were given a pre-test to measure their level of proficiency in listening and speaking. The test was the same for both groups, but it was given separately to each group. In the pre-test, a tale titled the *Mice and the Elephants* was given to them. The researcher narrated the story without using animation. Students were asked to work on tasks designed on it. The tasks included blanks-filling, comprehension questions, multiple-choice questions, vocabulary awareness, and situations that demand speaking.

Intervention:

It was a twelve days program that excluded pre-test and post-test hours. Classes for the controlled group were held in the morning and for the experimental group in the evening after school. 80 minutes were allotted by the school for the courseevery day.

Method used for the controlled group:

Two periods of teaching which amounted to eighty minutes were imparted to the controlled group (thirty students) every day. This class used to begin before the school because the school authority did not want to disturb their routined classes.

The first ten minutes were given for storytelling. During this period, the researcher narrated a story with proper word stress and intonation. It was ensured that the voice was audible to every student in the classroom. Task sheets were given before the narration to lessen the burden. It helped students fill in the blanks while listening to

the story. They had to work on comprehension and vocabulary tasks individually. Speaking tasks were performed in groups. For a few days, four students were placed in one group. Later, students worked in pairs on speaking tasks. First, thirty minutes were given to them to finish all the listening tasks. The remaining thirty minutes were given for the speaking session. In the speaking task, every group was asked to write their responses on the speaking tasks and then narrate what they had written in the speaking tasks. Whenever they struggled with vocabulary or any sentence construction, they were provided necessary inputs. Some students were very weak in speaking English. They had ideas in their minds, but they could not express them in English. They were allowed to use their mother tongue to express their ideas, and their group partners were asked to help them out in putting the ideas in proper sentences in English. This technique worked very well. Slowly these students started speaking English though they made many mistakes while speaking in English. Their efforts werenoticeable and commendable.

Method used for the experimental group:

The experimental group was taught at the end of the school hours. Everyday, thirty students were taught for eighty minutes. There was a twenty-one-inch big screen monitor which made the work easy. Due to electric failure, sometimes the computer could not work. However, the teacher researcher continued the session by using his laptop.

The first ten minutes were given for the screening of animated tales. Here, students would watch the animation carefully. Tasks and activity sheets were given before the screening to reduce any kind of anxiety or burden.

The students filled in the blanks while watching and listening to the story. They worked on comprehension and vocabulary tasks individually. Students worked in groups for speaking tasks.

Post-intervention test:

Students were not aware of the post-test. The class happened as usual. Had they known about the post-test, they would have behaved differently and become conscious. That could have affected their performance in the test. The story 'The Tortoise and the Geese' was taken for the post-test. For the controlled group, the researcher narrated the story. Students had already been given the worksheets. Ten minutes were given for the storytelling session. Thirty minutes were given to the students to solve comprehension and vocabulary tasks. The remaining thirty minutes were given for the speaking skills. Students were supposed to present their ideas orally in the classroom after working in groups.

The same story was used for the experimental group as well. But instead of narrating the story, the researcher used an animated version of the story. All the tasks and the procedure of the teaching were the same as those used for the controlled group as mentioned above.

Materials used for the intervention:

Materials play a vital role in teaching language. The textbook of the eighth grade does not include any list of supplementary materials or supplementary readers. While selecting any material, the teacher should think of the needs of the learners, their socio-cultural background, language used in the materials, the difficulty level of the materials, and motivation.

The researcher used animated *Panchatantra* tales and *English Talking Book* animation for teaching listening and speaking skills. These animations are also available on the website *www.youtube.com*. The selected animated tales are designed by Rajshree Production, especially for kids.

The selected animated tales are very much culture-specific and apt for Indian ESL learners. They do not represent or criticize any religion. Most of the characters are animals which are metaphors of humankind. They represent human sentiments, intelligence, stupidity, and many abstract qualities and vices. Every animated story used in the study ends with a moral lesson that helps students to grow as clever, emotional, and rational human beings.

The language used in the animation has a neutral Indian accent. The deliveries of dialogues, sentences, phrases are intelligible. Stress and intonation are properly maintained. The delivery of animation which includes speed of the audio-visuals, clarity of the video, and plain audio is very believable. The length of the tales is moderate. It is neither lengthy nor too small.

Tasks and Activities

Task and activity worksheets were used during the interventions. Each worksheet carried thirty marks and had three sections: comprehension, vocabulary, and speaking. The comprehension section included four tasks of different types: fill in the blanks, true-false, short answer type, and multiple-choice questions. The purpose of these activities was to improve listening skills.

In the vocabulary section, students were instructed to find synonyms and antonyms for the expressions given in the listening text. The rationale of this activity was to activate students' passive vocabulary; motivate the students to use their prior knowledge of vocabulary, and teach them vocabulary in context.

In speaking activities, students were asked questions related to their day-to-day life. They were supposed to work in groups. The questions like 'narrate an incident, 'give your opinion', 'tell the moral of the story, etc were asked for improving speaking skills. They were also encouraged to use their mother tongue if they are unable to express their ideas in the target language.

Data Collection Tools

Observation:

Observation as a tool was used to understand students' difficulties in the course. Moreover, students' participation, their motivation, their responses were recorded on a personal diary.

Semi-structured interviews:

The interview is one of the important tools of data collection. It can be structured, semi-structured, and very informal. Semi-structured interviews were used for the students as well as the teacher. Interviews were taken at the end of the course to know the opinion of the students and teacher about the course and the use of animated tales in the classroom. Interview questions were different for students and teachers. These interviews were video-recorded and analysed objectively.

Tasks and Activities

In this study, tasks and activities were used as a tool to collect data and observe the improvement in the learners in their oral communication skills.

Data Analysis

Analysis of controlled group pre-test and experimental group pre-test

T-Test

Group Statistics

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Controlled	30	11.5333	4.81186	.87852
Experimental	30	12.9667	3.90829	.71355

The above given table indicate that the number of students for the controlled group pre-test and the experimental group pre-test was the same. Here, the mean, average mark of the students, is 11.53, which is a little lesser than the mean of the experimental group which is 12.96. The standard deviation (deviation between actual observations and mean/average marks of the squire) of the controlled group is 4.81, whereas the standard deviation of the experimental group is 3.90. It means that there was not much difference in the proficiency of both groups.

Comparison of controlled group post-test and experimental group post-test performance

T-Test

Group Statistics

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Controlled	30	11.4000	5.12331	.93538
Experimental	30	20.9333	8.63407	1.57636

It is obvious in the above given table that the mean of the controlled group's post-test is 11.40 and the mean of the experimental group is 20.93. It means that there is a difference of about nine marks between the two groups. Standard deviation difference is almost 4. It means there is a satisfactory improvement in the experimental group in comparison with the controlled group.

It can also be seen that the 't' value is less than .05 and the mean difference is by nine marks. It means that students of the experimental group have scored more than those of the controlled group.

Findings and discussions

After carefully analyzing the data, it became evident that the experimental group had shown 40% improvement in their listening and speaking skills. Students from the experimental group had performed well in comprehension skills because they could relate the spoken words with the visual form of animation. Animation helped them understand the tales better. On the other hand, students from the controlled group did not show as much improvement in comprehension as the students from the experimental group did. Moreover, lack of support through animation resulted in a lack of proper understanding of the theme, the characters, and the implied moral that the story intends to convey. This difference between the understanding and performance of the controlled group and that of the experimental group is indicative of the effectiveness of animation in language learning.

Additionally, animated tales had a positive impact on the understanding and acquisition of new vocabulary. As we know, there are different ways of learning vocabulary. Learners use various strategies to acquire new words and to consolidate already acquired vocabulary. In a class, learners are having different learning styles- visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, etc. That is why some learners look up words in dictionaries, some memorize words; others infer meanings of words with the help of linguistic and situational contexts. Yet others remember words through contexts; connect visual images of words to the written or spoken form of the words, etc.

Learning words through a dictionary and learning them by heart may not help learners to remember them for a long time. Learners may not be able to use them in appropriate contexts. However, inferring words and associating their visual representations or visual "signified" to the written or spoken forms of the words or the verbal "signifiers", to use Saussure's terminology, enable learners to remember words for a long period. The experiment demonstrated that animated tales helped the students understand and remember new words better. The visual images of words made them comprehend difficult vocabulary.

It was observed that the use of animated tales motivated the students to participate in group works. Students felt like sharing their views on different situations. They learned the skills of turn-taking, responding to questions, asking questions, debating, making decisions, and listening to others, and respecting their opinions. Such skills would enable them to communicate with more confidence in their day-to-day life.

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