

5.10 Students' perceptions and attitudes to drama in English language learning at the Faculty of Medicine, Ragama

Viragee Uthpala Athukorala, E.A. Nimna Janethri Edirisinghe, Sujatha Salgado
Language Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The greatest challenge that majority of medical students face is the medium switch from their mother tongue to English. The purpose of this research is to explore perceptions and attitudes of the first year students towards drama as an English language learning tool. The dramas were used to assist them overcome their fear of language switch by establishing self-confidence while creating an interest in the use of English language.

METHODOLOGY

The participants in the research were randomly selected MBBS and SLT (Speech and Language Therapy) students. They were from diversified backgrounds with varying levels of English knowledge at entry level. The research was carried out in the form of questionnaires and interviews that took place before and after classroom practical sessions and also after stage performances at the end of the Intensive Courses of English in the year 2009.

RESULTS

Over 96% of students perceived situational dialogues/skits/playlets/dramas as a highly useful method since it made learning an interesting task and helped improve fluency, vocabulary and confidence. They claimed that it was an opportunity to develop their personality, to relieve stress and was also a platform to demonstrate their creativity and talents. Further, over 90% of students appreciated peer learning while the weaker students especially claimed that peer learning and group work reduced their anxiety and inhibitions towards the use of English language.

CONCLUSION

The research highlighted the use of drama activities in English language learning as a highly positive measure. The most important factor therefore is to explore the ways and means to help the students to sustain their newly created self confidence and interest throughout their stay in the university.