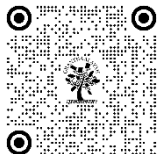


ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS THROUGH THERU-K-KOOTHU (STREET PLAY) – AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Communication skills are the ability of a person that helps him to perform effectively in the workplace. These skills include active listening, speaking, observing, and empathizing which improve an employee's relationship and performance on the job. Particularly in the teaching profession, communication skills are a prerequisite for teachers. The teachers who have good communication skills perform meritoriously in their institution. Also, the organizations are expecting teacher candidates with good communication skills for recruitment. It is the need of the hour to improve the communication skills of the trainee teachers. Therefore, the researchers intended to find out the effectiveness of theru-k-koothu (street play) to enhance the communication skills, specifically the public speaking skills of prospective teachers. An experimental research method was adopted for the study and 32 prospective teachers were selected as samples. The results of the study indicated that the maximum number of prospective teachers have a moderate level of public speaking skills. Also, it is found that the Theru-k-Koothu (street play) training program is more effective in developing the public speaking skills of prospective teachers. The findings of the study provide insights for the educationists and policymakers to integrate communication skills efficiently in the teacher education program to make quality and proficient teachers.

Keywords: Public Speaking Skills, Teacher Education Programme, Prospective Teachers, Theru-K-Koothu

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a two-way process that involves delivering and receiving information. If a person who has possess communication skills can easily convey his ideas and thoughts to others and will get success in his career. Similarly, communication skill is essential for a teacher to interact and share knowledge with their students. Also, communication skills are highly demanded in the teaching field. Every educational institution is seeking competent and productive teachers for their institutions. If a prospective teacher wants to be hired by the schools after graduation, he should possess all those communication skills needed in the teaching

profession and make them impression during the interview. As prospective teachers, they should be embedded with communication skills for their profession. Many studies have reported that novice or beginner teachers lack in their communication skills [Rongraung et al. \(2014\)](#), [Ariratana et al. \(2015\)](#), [Ngang et al. \(2015\)](#). The institutions of teacher education have the role to address these issues and prepare them for employability [Teo et al. \(2021\)](#), [Espinoza et al. \(2020\)](#).

An artist performs a form of art such as dance, music, and drama in front of the audience as live is called performing arts. The performing arts consist of magic, mime, puppet show, circus art, dance, music, and theatre play performed for the viewers. Mostly theatre, dance, and music are considered performing arts. Theru-k-koothu (Street Play) is one of forms of traditional theatre arts, especially it is a form of folk drama in Tamil Nadu state, India. It is performed in various forms such as prose, verse, music, dance, and dramatization of stories from epics, myths, and legends. The Tamil term 'theru' means street. The term 'koothu' means performativity narration of stories of myths and epics in the Tamil language.

The performing arts particularly theru-k-koothu (street play) play a vital role to enhance communication skills among learners. More number of research studies evidenced that communication skills are improved through play or drama. For instance, a study explored that the drama techniques such as role-play, group collaboration, decision making, and problem-solving are more effective while improving communication skills [Eckersley \(2016\)](#). The drama or play is used as a teaching and learning tool to engage the learners in communication skill development [Simpande \(2016\)](#), [Kalidas \(2014\)](#).

Further, the researchers found there is no study to enhance the communication skills of the prospective teachers through theru-k-koothu (street play). Therefore, they aimed to design theru-k-koothu (street play) training to develop communication skills among prospective teachers. The study is based on training experience in an environment where the prospective teachers pursuing a B. Ed degree in the institution of teacher education. The target group of participants is advanced learners studying in KSR College of Education, Namakkal district, Tamil Nadu, India.

This experiment study revolves around a theru-k-koothu (street play) that the researchers selected as a theme to build up the communication skills of prospective teachers. The title of the story is "Pandavas travel to heaven". The story is based on an Indian epic namely Mahabharata. Its emphasis on the value and ethics of human life such as respect for others, dislike of others' property, following justice and ethics without fail, etc.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study aimed to find out the enhancement of communication skills among prospective teachers through theru-k-koothu (Street Play). Skills are not gained through reading books or watching videos or involving in the discussion. Skills can acquire or enhance by training or experience. Therefore, the researchers have adapted Kolb's experiential learning theory for the present study. Experiential learning theory provides a holistic interactive perspective on learning which combines experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour. According to [Kolb \(1984\)](#), "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". He postulated the following characteristics of learning from the learning models of Kurt Lewis, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget: learning is best conceived as a process than in terms of behavioural outcomes;

Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience; the process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world; learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world and it involves transactions between the person and an environment. He proposed a four-stage cycle model from their inspiring works of them. It is illustrated in the [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1

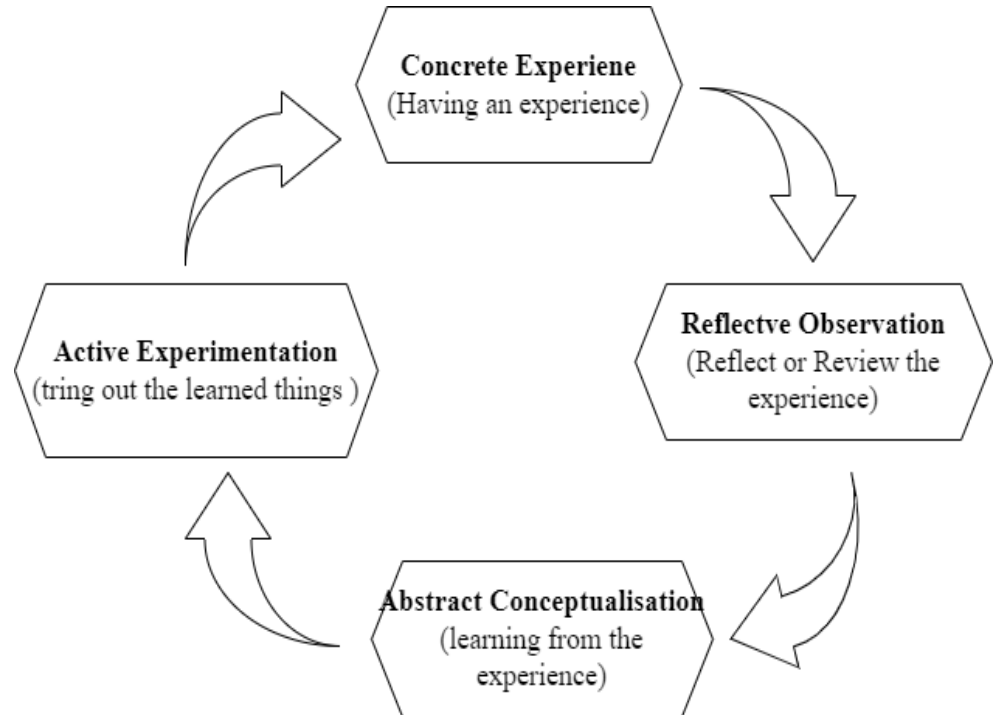


Figure 1 Kolb's experiential learning four stage cycle model

Source (Adapted from the work of [McLeod \(2017\)](#))

He believed that effective learning could occur when a person is involved in these four integral stages. At first, the person has the experience while doing a task in the concrete experience stage. In the next stage, he reflects on or reviews his experience gained from the previous stage. Based on reflection, he realized or compares new experiences with his previous experience or knowledge and forms the abstract concepts. In the last stage, the person tries to implement the things that he has learned. Likewise, the investigators believed that when using experiential learning theory in the present study, the prospective teachers are involved in theru-k-koothu (street play) training to get concrete experience. In the second stage, they will step back from the task and make discuss and review their experience. It is a wonderful opportunity for them to verbalize their emotions and opinions with their peer group. In the abstract conceptualization stage, the prospective teachers make a generalisation or abstract concepts by comparing their street play experience with knowledge from performing arts-related books, thoughts of peers, and childhood memories about street play. In the stage of active experimentation stage, the prospective teachers will take an effort to do what they have learned.

3. RATIONALE FOR SELECTING THE VARIABLES

The present study focused on communication skills as one of the major soft skills to enhance among prospective teachers. Several studies indicated that communication skill is the most important and significant soft skill needed for the teaching profession among the various soft skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving Ngang et al. (2015), Ngang and Chan (2015), Ngang et al. (2015). In addition, Anna (2016) has highlighted 12 sub-skills for communication skills. They are presented in Figure 2

Figure 2

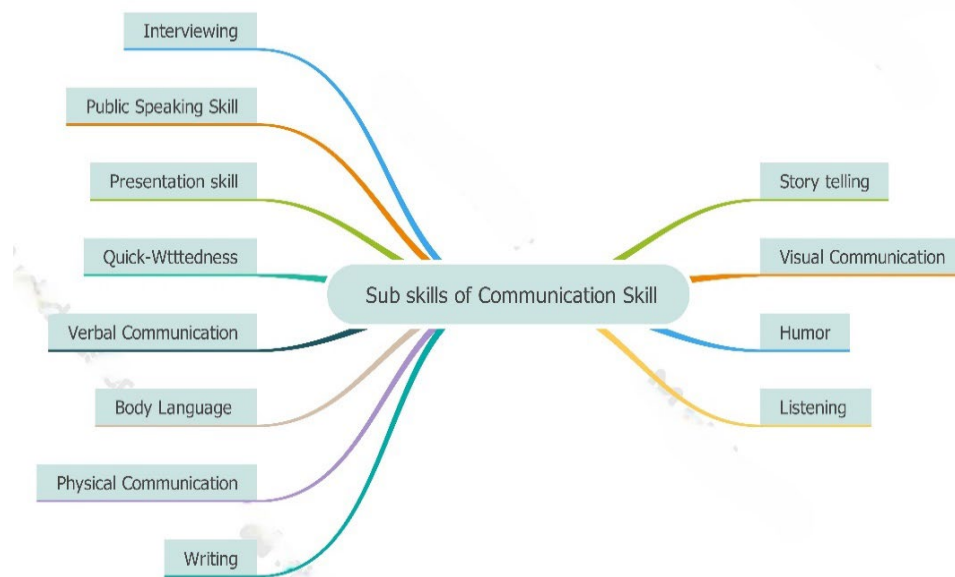


Figure 2 Sub skills for Communication skill

Then, these 12 sub-skills are translated into the Tamil language with the help of experts and formulated into an expert opinion inventory tool. Further, this tool was given to 120 Theru-k-Koothu (street play) artists in Tamilnadu who possess more than ten years of experience in the field of Theru-k-Koothu (street play) and asked to give their opinion and response to select highest valuable skills which can be enhanced through Theru-k-Koothu (street play). The expert artists’ response scores and rank order indicated that public speaking skill has gained the highest score. Therefore, the investigators have decided to select this skill as a variable.

Moreover, at the beginning of the construction of the street play (Theru-k-Koothu) training program, the researchers carefully read the stories among epics in the Tamil language and conferred with experts in a street play. The investigators have decided to select an epic street play story entitled “Pandavas travel to the heaven” based on the opinion received from the experts for the enhancement of communication skills among prospective teachers. Initially, the researchers wrote the script for each scene in the street play. All the prospective teachers were allotted to a specific character. The investigators gave training to the prospective teachers to enact the story with the help of experts.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To find out the levels of first year prospective teachers in public speaking skill.
- 2) To analyse the effectiveness of Theru-k-Koothu (Street Play) on enhancement of public speaking skill among first year prospective teachers.

5. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have adopted the experimental research method and chose one group pre-test and post-test experimental design for the present study. In addition, the investigators adopted a convenience sampling technique in the selection of the sample, and 32 prospective teachers studying in the first-year B. Ed program were selected as samples. The investigators have developed a public speaking skill evaluation tool to collect the data through the observation method.

The researchers carefully examined the different aspects of public speaking skills. Further, the investigator referred to the books, research articles, and journals available and discussed with scholars, educationalists, and street play artists, who are experts in tool construction. The initial draft containing 15 key terms was given to experts. After scrutiny of the key terms by experts, 11 were selected. It is presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Table 1 Key terms in Public Speaking Skill	
S. No	Item
1.	Oral introduction
2.	Content of speech
3.	Summary of speech
4.	Costume
5.	Performance of the speaker
6.	Audience attention
7.	Interaction
8.	Creativity of the speaker
9.	Interaction with audience
10.	Sources used
11.	Topic focus

After a preliminary study, the final tool consists of 7 items with a five-point scale which helps to assess the public speaking skill of the prospective teacher. Each item provides an alternative and is assigned a weightage from 4 to 0. The range of scores is from 0 to 28 with a high score indicating good public speaking skills. During training, all the participants memorized the dialogs and took rehearsal to perform. The experts provide training to speak and sing with exact pronunciation and body language. After completion of training, the participants are allowed to perform, and it was recorded by the researcher. The recordings were given to experts for observation. The researchers have given the public speaking skill evaluation tool to the observer and asked them to make some judgments about the public speaking skill being observed, and to enter responses into a five-point rating scale.

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

At the beginning of the experimentation, the investigators conducted the pre-test to analyse the level of public speaking skills among prospective teachers. The pre-test scores obtained by the prospective teachers for public speaking skills and their subcategories were analysed. The mean and standard deviation of the whole sample are presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation of Public Speaking Skill with its subcategories			
S. No	Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	Public Speaking Skill (Whole sample)	8.84	4.11
2.	Oral introduction	1.34	0.93
3.	Content of speech	1.62	0.66
4.	Summary of speech	0.50	0.67
5.	Performance of the speaker	1.44	0.71
6.	Audience attention	1.62	0.87
7.	Creativity of the speaker	0.97	0.86
8.	Topic focus	1.34	0.78

It is clear from [Table 2](#) that the mean and standard deviation values of the whole sample are 8.84 and 4.11. It indicates that the public speaking skill of first-year prospective teachers is below average (score range 0-28). The sub-categories of public speaking skills namely oral introduction, the content of speech, summary of the speech, performance of the speaker, audience attention, creativity of the speaker, and topic focus have obtained the mean values are 1.34, 1.62, 0.50, 1.44, 1.62, 0.97 and 1.34 respectively. Among the sub-categories of public speaking skills, the content of speech and audience attention of prospective teachers have obtained the maximum mean value (1.62), while the summary of speech and creativity of the speaker have secured the lowest mean values (0.50 and 0.97). It indicates that the first-year prospective teachers have a low summary of speech and creativity of the speaker skill than the other subcategories of public speaking skill.

The various levels of public speaking skills of first-year prospective teachers were categorized by using the normal probability curve and it is presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3

Table 3 Various levels of public speaking skill of prospective teachers (whole sample)				
S. No	Score range	N	Percentage	Level
1.	Above 13	6	19%	Good
2.	6-12	17	53%	Moderate
3.	Below 5	9	28%	Poor

It is clear from [Table 3](#) that among the total 32 prospective teachers 6 (19 percent) have obtained a good level of public speaking skills, 17 (53 percent) are a moderate level and 9 (28 percent) have obtained a poor level of public speaking skill. It is concluded that the maximum number of prospective teachers have a moderate level of public speaking skills.

Further, the prospective teachers were entered into the concrete experience stage through involving in theru-k-koothu (Street Play) training based on Kolb's

experiential learning theory. They reflected and reviewed the knowledge about the experience which they gained via training in group discussion. For instance, a participant stated that *"It was an amazing experience, I enjoyed and learned to act"*. Another participant told that *"I have learned a lot from the training that how to make relationships with others, how to deliver the dialog, and how to perform as a character"*. After that, the prospective teachers were treated to post-test. The post-test scores obtained by the prospective teachers for public speaking skills and its subcategories were analysed. The mean and standard deviation of the whole sample are presented in [Table 4](#).

Table 4

Table 4 Mean and standard deviation of Public Speaking Skill with its subcategories			
S. No	Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	Public Speaking Skill (Whole sample)	19.84	3.00
2.	Oral introduction	3.06	0.84
3.	Content of speech	3.69	0.53
4.	Summary of speech	1.88	0.70
5.	Performance of the speaker	3.00	0.56
6.	Audience attention	2.72	0.68
7.	Creativity of the speaker	2.34	0.78
8.	Topic focus	3.16	0.62

It is clear from [Table 4](#) that the mean and standard deviation values of the whole sample are 19.84 and 3.00. It indicates that the public speaking skill of first-year prospective teachers is above average (score range 0-28). The sub-categories of public speaking skills namely oral introduction, the content of speech, summary of the speech, performance of the speaker, audience attention, creativity of the speaker, and topic focus have obtained the mean values are 3.06, 3.69, 1.88, 3.00, 2.72, 2.34 and 3.16 respectively. Among the subcategories of public speaking skills, the content of the speech of prospective teachers has obtained the maximum mean value (3.69), while the summary of speech has secured the lowest mean value (1.88). It concluded that the first-year prospective teachers have a good content of speech skills than the other subcategories of public speaking skills.

The various levels of public speaking skills of first-year prospective teachers were categorized by using a normal probability curve and it is presented in [Table 5](#).

Table 5

Table 5 Various levels of public speaking skill of prospective teachers (whole sample)				
S. No	Score range	N	Percentage	Level
1.	Above 22	9	28%	Good
2.	17-21	18	56%	Moderate
3.	Below 16	5	16%	Poor

It is clear from [Table 5](#) that among the total 32 prospective teachers 9 (28 percent) have obtained a good level of public speaking skills, 18 (56 percent) are a moderate level and 5 (16 percent) have obtained a poor level of public speaking skill. It is concluded that the maximum number of prospective teachers have a moderate level of public speaking skills.

Furthermore, the mean values of pre-test and post-test scores of public speaking skills were tabulated to analyse the effectiveness of Theru-k-Koothu (Street Play) training program. It is presented in [Table 6](#) and [Figure 3](#).

Table 6

Table 6 Mean values of pre-test and post-test on public speaking skill				
S. No	Variable	Pre-test mean value	Post-test mean value	Mean difference
1.	Public Speaking Skill (Whole sample)	8.84	19.84	11.00
2.	Oral introduction	1.34	3.06	1.72
3.	Content of speech	1.62	3.69	2.07
4.	Summary of speech	0.50	1.88	1.38
5.	Performance of the speaker	1.44	3.00	1.56
6.	Audience attention	1.62	2.72	1.10
7.	Creativity of the speaker	0.97	2.34	1.37
8.	Topic focus	1.34	3.16	1.82

Figure 3

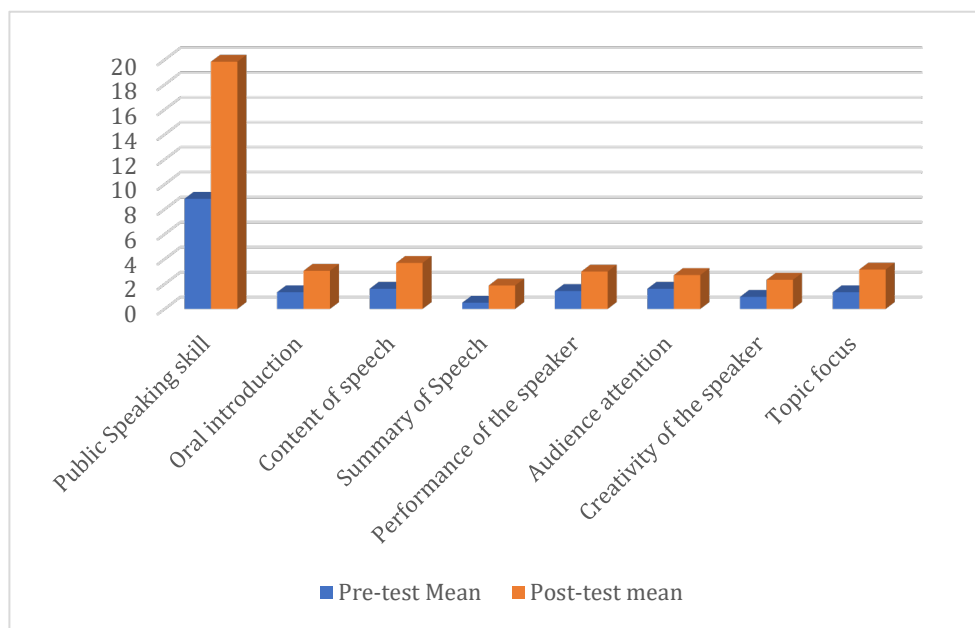


Figure 3 Mean differences of pre-test and post-test on public speaking skill

It is revealed from [Table 6](#) and [Figure 3](#) that the mean difference between pre-test and post-test scores of prospective teachers’ public speaking skills shows significantly improved. It is concluded that the Theru-k-Koothu (street play) training programme is more effective in developing the public speaking skill of prospective teachers. Also, it is inferred that the content of speech skills is more improved than the other subcategories of public speaking skills.

7. DISCUSSION

An attempt has been made to explore the effectiveness of theru-k-koothu (street play) to enhance the communication skills of prospective teachers. The results of the present study significantly evidenced that Theru-k-Koothu (street play) enhanced the communication skill, particularly the public speaking skill of prospective teachers.

In support of this finding, [Jacob et al. \(2019\)](#) have reported the effectiveness of play to develop communication skills. They have used forum theatre with involvement in role play to practice communication skills. Similar observations have also been made by [Maelah et al. \(2012\)](#) have concluded that the training programme developed oral communication skills.

In addition, the findings of the present study confirm the studies undertaken by [Kalidas \(2014\)](#), [Eckersley \(2016\)](#), [Simpande \(2016\)](#) and [Cojocariu and Butnaru \(2014\)](#) have reported that the use of drama led to improve the language proficiency and intercommunication of the participants.

8. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate enhancing communication skills through Theru-k-Koothu (Street play). The results of the study show that Theru-k-Koothu (street play) training programme significantly enhanced communication skills (public speaking skills) among first-year prospective teachers. The educationist and policymakers should consider the above findings to integrate communication skills effectively in the teacher education programme to form quality and proficient teachers. Further, based on the findings of the present study, further research may be conducted with other components of drama and arts such as mime, role play, actions songs with dance, drawing and painting. Also, it is recommended that the teacher education institutions should arrange awareness programmes to realize the importance of soft skills in the teaching profession so that they can able cognitively prepare themselves for the competitive world.

This study may be valuable to teacher educators because the findings will help to identify the most important communication skills along with innovative techniques to integrate these skills. Furthermore, the educators can plan and implement employability skills into their courses based on the results of the study. This research is significant because it reveals information regarding the importance of the quality of communication skills that teacher trainees are seen to possess as perceived by teacher educators. Also, it will add to the existing body of information on communication skills.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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