

# Enhancing Quality of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Teaching History to the Students Majoring English through Role Playing

Liza Sharmin\*

*Associate Professor, Department of English, Daffodil International University, Dhaka- 1207, Bangladesh*

*Email: liza.eng@diu.edu.bd*

## Abstract

Learners' sound and sustainable achievement of knowledge, skills and attitudes at the end of a course or program is the ultimate success of the teachers. Learning proceeds from simple to complex and the total process is a cumulative. There must be consistency between previous and current level of learning. The extract of learning should come up to real life of the learners. Quality education essentially ensures achieving knowledge as well as treasuring those for achieving further innovative ideas, critical thinking and problem solving skills as well. Keeping this passion in mind, the current study focuses on a project of teaching history effectively through drama based role playing to forty eight learners majoring English of Daffodil International University Bangladesh. History is the root of literature domain. Without proper background knowledge it is difficult to comprehend literature of particular period. Learning through lecture and memorization typically covers remembering and understanding levels whereas adopting the techniques of role playing can develop skills like handling unpredictable situation, brainstorm to innovate, critical thinking, problem solving etc. The current paper exhibits the significance to learn meaningfully without monotony and with a better understanding.

**Keywords:** Role playing; critical thinking; problem solving; levels of learning.

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\* Corresponding author.

## **1. Introduction**

Teaching is, indeed, an amazing art the teachers need to be proficient in this art. Learners, teachers, materials, classroom facilities all are the ingredients of teaching process. The teachers need to blend all materials harmoniously towards its goal of effective teaching. Engaging the learners into their classroom or real-life situation is a challenging task. If the teachers can arouse curiosity and engage them, learning materials will no longer be confined within the covers of the books rather it will come up to the life of the learners and enlightens, thus we can achieve the outcomes of teaching. Quality education is synonymous to achieve knowledge, skills and attitudes in such a way that instead of forgetting prior learning, the learners are supposed to treasure the aspects and earn more advanced knowledge so that they can apply or utilize those in real life scenario. History and Literature are both arts which reflect who we are, how we think and both can change how we see life. Both are harmoniously related and influence each other a lot. Those who study history become more enriched and knowledgeable. They have powerful insight and diversified perspective to interpret literature and gradually real life characters and facts. History conceives and upholds valuable repositories of traditional practices and cultural heritage of a community, society and nation. From the ancestor's journey to present generation, all philosophic movements, political ups and downs, development of critical thoughts, religious controversies, and literary contributions are recorded in History. On the other hand, literature is the reflection of real life. It includes reality and imagination, laughter and sorrow, struggle and peace, possibilities and depression etc. It starts from history and fly up to the sky of imagination. As a technique, role play is effective for the learners to realize some refined and intrigue aspects of literature. To engage the learners during teaching a subject like history, role play is highly related to achieve targeted outcomes. The responsibilities to role playing at the end of the semester make the students sincere and conscious to gain basic and comprehensive ideas. They become innovative in their planning to perform. They can time to time review thoughts to learn how to harmonize achieved understanding into action through performance. In the whole procedure, they need to analyze problems, develop critical thinking, learn to balance those with real situation and ultimately to solve the problem. Thus through role playing, learners cannot be only made equipped with hard skills only but also with soft skills like sound communication skill, great interpersonal skill and innovative problem-solving power. Thus along with achieving knowledge, ideas and information, the learners become ornamented to be complete citizen, to be enriched enough to encounter the challenges of upcoming global era.

## **2. Why Role Playing**

In learning process, we proceed from simple to complex and the total procedure is a cumulative journey. Lectures, tutorials and quizzes are the traditional practices to conduct History course at tertiary level. Lectures are prepared for disseminating basic theoretical concepts regarding a topic, relevant historical contents along with creating questions and debate among students. At the second level, tutorials emphasizes on in-depth discussion of a specific period of history and particular event or incident for generating broad horizon in learners knowledge and skills. Quizzes are designed to assess how much have the learner achieved after attending lecture and tutorial classes. The above mentioned techniques are very helpful to develop some valuable skills

among the learners. These practices help developing good comprehensive power. Memorization process can be easier for getting prepared for examination. Even though, from making learning progressive, teachers of tertiary level are brainstorming to explore various strategies to make learning effective and sustainable. Role playing, as a simulation exercise technique, help developing capability to gain critical knowledge and analyze any piece of literature. Certain highlights can be pointed below:

- a. The goal of this initiative is to equip the learners with collaborative and cooperative skills for taking learning lower level to higher level so that very strong analytical power and creative thinking can make their learning of literature meaningful and significant.
- b. Among other activates, significant one is to flip the basic pattern from teachers-centered to learners-centered. The learners are to be the initiators of their learning, not only the passive listeners to receive from the teacher. Participatory techniques in teaching enhances learners' psychological, intellectual, emotional growth. Learners' direct engagement make them more responsible which is impossible to expect from a lecture-based class. As they perform, their group discussion, collaborative approaches and team building spirit are developed.
- c. Role playing enhances intensive understanding of a concept. So the technique enables the learners to achieve profound insight necessary not only for the course they are studying but also to have a diversified views to analyze literature of that historical period.
- d. The practice of role playing increases adaptation capabilities among the learners. For successful performance, they need to understand the past events or happenings with its context. They need to review these with their knowledge, experience, perceptions. They can customize the events or incident within a presentable unit planning.
- e. A total authority is given to the group of learners for planning and materializing. The learners feel the ownership and a sense of responsibility develops. The total procedure up to formal presentation helps them to increase mutual understanding and harmonious relationship among them. Team-spirit builds up and leadership comes out.

### 3. Purpose of the Study

The learners studying literature may be bewildered seeing Tithonus' misery, restlessness and pessimistic view towards life. But when they come to know about the complex context of Victorian period predisposed by the theory of Darwin as well as by the influence of massive industrializations, they may interpret some of the motives. Furthermore, from the information about the death of Arthur Hallam, a bosom friend of Alfred Lord Tennyson and its bitter experience upon Tennyson's psychology, the learners can get the explanation of where the suffocation of Tithonus' life comes from. Thus, history, undoubtedly, influences the understanding of literature. When the real life became more lofty and painful, romantic poets took shelter of imagination in their poetry. Proper understanding of literature remains incomplete until one can accommodate a sound background knowledge. On the other hand, literature can give us ideas about the historical period like when and upon which ground was it written or composed. *Beowulf* is the first ever record of literature of Anglo-Saxon period. Reading *Beowulf*, the readers can have an impression about contemporary practice, norms, customs, believes of Anglo-Saxon period. The current research has experimented and explored the technique to enhance learning history in

an interesting way through role playing for achieving content-related knowledge with a wider perspective of historiographical images. The planning attempts to help learner to achieve sound and sustainable background information so that their journey towards exploring the complex world of literature becomes enriched, meaningful and worthy. Thus to make the endeavor purposeful, pedagogical approach like role playing has been adopted to consider it as one of the effective measures to achieve educational outcomes. As long as the approach can be used to patronize the practice of creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and team spirit along with traditional approach of knowledge hunting, it is worthy to adopt by the teachers for teaching such areas of study. The present paper shares the feedback of the learners after lively participation stating how they have equipped themselves with skills essential for both professional and real life scenario.

#### **4. Importance of the Study**

To bring learning of history into real life, the learners were planned to engage in role playing activities. Here the learners were given the authority to choose a character or an event from their history or literature of that historical event to take the role of the character. This pattern of intensive engagement of role playing submerges the learners into history as well as in literature. As the learners own the characters, they get a flavor of the real characters they are playing the role and feel an emotional bonding with the characters and the story of the event. As they create imaginary sequences from the historical background, and plan to materialize, their level of comprehension upturns. In role playing process, the learners struggle to adapt others' experiences. To materialize the event real like they nurture the story, make a plot, design a platform, cast characters, solve the time gap, make similar sequences of past and then perform. These practices make the creative and responsible. They can promote perspective and compassion among themselves. History is all about the story of the war, winners, leaders, bravery, conspiracy, plotting etc. of past. Through these practices, learners can really have the essence of the time, passion, life pattern, power practices, suppression, victory etc. and all the impressions remain permanent in them which is impossible to achieve through mere reading and memorizing. One surprising outcome of role playing is to bring out and promote the shy and hesitant learners to play sound performance. Learners who were not very active in lecture class and group study circle excel during role playing. In one side, role playing gives the learners a profound understanding, the other side, it creates a happy and joyous atmosphere which is very congenial for learning. After all, for making the learners communicatively competent, for entralling them with flavor of leadership and for entitling them as problem solvers, role play is unique technique of teaching history.

#### **5. Objectives**

The traditional method of teaching History of English literature course is lecture basis and learners need to read it, understand the contents and memorize some of the significant dates and years. In real sense, it cannot help learners because memorization cannot sustain for longer period. For effective learning, the learners need to be able to:

- a. Clarify each of the periods individually
- b. Compare and contrast the advancement of literature of different periods

- c. Play the role of significant contemporary events, characters of literature of those periods so that they can learn with interest and conceive the ideas for long.

According to the plan, through lecture, interactive session, and group discussion, comprehending levels of study was completed. Then they were asked to compare and contrast each of the era from the other on the basis of the contribution to enrich the literature and culture. Then they were given authority to plan with an individual period, they selected their period and planned to uphold through some creative ideas of role playing. All of them seemed to be interested and serious as well to highlight the distinguished features, major/ representative characters from reality (Kings, queens and writers) and from literature (*Beowulf*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Doctor Faustus*). In their endeavor, they utilized both their intellectual and creative power. With very limited resource, they designed costumes to represent the characters. As they could engage themselves devotedly in playing roles, they are desired never to forget the events of history. In teaching courses on History of English literature, the students were taught semester wide from texts, reference books, YouTube lectures, documentaries and movies in classroom and Google classroom so that at the end of the semester they can play the roles in their designed drama on the basis of specific historical events of particular period. They designed their own stage, costumes to create new representation from History. In this way, the typical practice of memorizing the significant years and information and describing those into the exam scripts has become lively innovative and performance based. Thus, let us brainstorm to facilitate learners to enhance their level of learning because while assessing the learners' achievement, the teachers actually assess their own success or failure.

## 6. Level of Learning

Bloom's Taxonomy has given us the insight to rank of the levels of learning. It categorizes three domains in the world of learning such as Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor domains, of which the most widely used is the cognitive domain. As the teacher are to take the learners towards the higher order, various levels of domains from the aforesaid course are listed as:

**Knowledge:** This primary but basic level conveys knowledge that requires to be remembered or recalled:

- 450-1066 AD is known as Anglo Saxon period in the history of English literature.
- The Anglo Norman invaded England through the Battle of Hasting.

**Comprehension:** This level is another primary but basic level which delivers knowledge that needs to be absorbed for total interpreting or understanding:

- Epic heroes are not similar to the ordinary heroes, their deeds are more heroic and related to the ups and downs of a nation.
- Anglo Norman period is not a dark period as people learned a lot during this time.

**Application:** Implementation of achieved knowledge is prime concern in this level in various circumstances:

- Formulate the objectives of learning History of English literature.

- Apply the Puritan mindset through role playing.

**Analysis:** After analyzing (comparing, contrasting or differentiating) a situation, the level is concerned to reach at a decision:

- Compare and contrast the contribution of literature between Anglo Saxon and Anglo Norman period.
- Sketch your level of understanding of literature before studying History and after studying History.

**Synthesis:** In this upper level of learning, the learner know how to create innovative realms from known facts or information or objects:

- Design an alternative conclusion for the Drama.
- Reform the conclusion of the historical event as per your opinion.

**Evaluation:** This upper most level focus on how to make own judgments:

- Comment on the political thought during Elizabethan period.
- Estimate the impact of Renaissance on European lifestyle.

Hence, Blooms Taxonomy can be a source for designing teaching strategies which will ultimately be effective for learners lifelong. And, it is not impossible to introduce diversified level in teaching a subject like history.

## **7. Methodology**

The journey of the whole semester was the reflection of a plan form teacher's point of view. It was segmented in the following steps:

### ***Step One: Collection of proper knowledge and Information***

Concept were made clear in lecture class, group discussions, question sessions and quiz sections. As the students need to cover huge syllabus, before starting, a plan was designed through questions to arouse curiosity of the learners step by step:

### ***Question series 1: Question to launch thinking and relate to topic***

1. A. Do you have a history?
1. B. Is your history important for you?
1. C. Does English Literature have a history?
1. D. Is it necessary to study the history of English literature as a student of English literature?

**Step Two:**

**Question series 2: Subsequent Questions for FACE TO FACE CLASS**

2. A. What is the first period of the history of English literature?
2. B. What is the first recorded literary piece of English literature?
2. C. How do you evaluate the literary contribution of Anglo Saxon Period?
2. D. How will you comment on the literature of Anglo Norman period?
2. E. What, do you think, is Renaissance in English literature?

**Step Three:**

**Question series 3: Question for Peer Counseling (Group Work)**

3. A. Which period, in term of treasuring enriched literature, has contributed a lot, (a) Anglo-Saxon or (b) Anglo Norman?
3. B. How will you highlight the strength (in term of improvement in social, political, economic, religious, language and literary sections) of your period (Anglo Saxon, Anglo Norman, Age of Chaucer, Renaissance) for developing England to lead the world simultaneously?

**Step Four:**

**Question series 4: Question for Reflecting on Learning in class**

4. A. How will you decide (with full authority) to choose roles, costumes for performing in "Role Playing Session" before formal audience?

**Step Five:**

**Question series 5: Questions for online Peer Counseling (with marks)**

5. A. Why is it history not herstory? Evaluation on "women contributions" at the end of the semester analyzing Anglo Saxon, Anglo Norman, Age of Chaucer and Renaissance (The question was given in 2nd or 3rd class though so that they can get the extract by assessing every period while studying)

**8. Literature Review on Role Playing**

Role-playing in teaching has its diversified impact upon the enhancement of the level of teaching. The teachers

and scholars have made the best use of role playing session to implement their learning level from remembering level to (understanding, analyzing applying evaluating creating) levels. As all know the maxim, I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand. Some of them have acknowledged the benefits of role-playing in teaching from different settings. Among all, authors in [1] incorporated role-playing imitations through the implementation of their program. Role playing was implemented to observe the traditional, ecological, economic, and social consequences of a group of learners' development by authors in [2]; Role-playing was used to help students to understand the complications of international relations by the author in [3]. The author in [4] has implemented role playing to develop interpersonal relationships among his students. Authors in [5] implemented role playing to solve telecommunications issues. Author in [6] engaged his students in role playing for teaching geography. Author in [7] documented his implementation of role playing to teach history. To advocate the benefits of the technique known as role playing, author in [8] argued saying, "integrating experiential learning activities in the classroom increases interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content". Author in [9] considered role playing as a way out to overcome monotony of history class. When the teacher plans for applying students become more active to perform the specific topic. The students in this regard become more creative and problem solvers. Author [10] has rightly consented in favor of the statement that the students' creativity and problem solving ability will be worthy if the students can engage themselves to comprehend the meaning and apply those in professional settings.

### 9. Differences between Lecture-based Teaching of History and Role Play based Reaching of History

On the basis of the parameters like mood, status of learning, roles of learners, objectives of course designing, approach, state of the classes, target of the learners, there are differences between lecture based teaching of History and role playing based teaching of History. From the experience of teaching History through role playing, the following scenario can be shown:

**Table 1**

Parameters	Classes with Role Playing Arrangement	Classes without Role Playing Arrangement
Mood	Versatile activities oriented, lively	Less activities based, monotonous
Status of learners	Learners are sportive	Typically silent
Role of learners	Learners are active	Learners are passive listeners
Objectives of course designing	Designed to enhance learners understanding and further implementations.	Based on understanding and memorization.
Approach	Approach to conceive the context along with information	Initiative to deliver knowledge from lectures
State of the Classes	Adventurous and enjoyable	Boring and stressful to remember so many dates, events and chronology.
Target of the learners	Learners learn to understand and perform afterwards	Learners learn to remember information for examination



## **10. Feedback from the Teachers**

Here are some reflections from the teacher after conducting the course as feedback:

- a. Role play is highly rewarding because each students has to select a character from History to play the role of particular character. This approach helps students to be wonderfully appreciated by the teacher, classmates and audience.
- b. Debate session inspired them to be more enthusiastic to collect materials for defeating the opponent through powerful argumentations.
- c. A group of students become the representatives of a particular era, viz. the Anglo-Saxon, the Anglo-Norman, the Age of Chaucer and the Renaissance and they will compare and contrast the glory of their period with others.
- d. Role playing helps students to prepare realistic situation by interacting with different people to develop experience and to practice different strategies in a sound environment. The student who performed the role of Beowulf, study enough about the characteristic features, his origin, his goal of life, his journey to Hrodgar's land, his reception, his battle with Grendel and his mother along with knowledge he gained from lecture, video lecture, movie and self-study. Later, he exposed everything to visualize after meditating the character, its surroundings, estimating his temperament and attitudes. As he adopted from history and played the role before the audience, he will never forget it in his whole life.
- e. Some students showed arguments to uphold the magnificent contribution of the period they represented. While a group of students appertaining the success and glory of the Anglo Saxon period, they were comparing and contrasting with the Anglo Norman contribution in England.

## **11. Feedback from the Students**

Through Google Classroom, the students were asked to give their feedbacks. Out of the total opinions, repeated ones were eliminated. The opinions are inscribed here:

- a. By role playing we have experienced the feelings of the people of that time. And that is how we have understood the whole situation of that time very clearly.
- b. I have come to know how people communicate with one another.
- c. I came to know how the royal people lived.
- d. By role playing I have understand the history of Anglo-Saxon and all other periods more deeply.
- e. I got a clear idea about the origin of English literature.
- f. I could know about the life style and culture of people during those periods.
- g. I got to know the overall development and activities of people during those periods.
- h. I accommodated ideas about the struggle and war activities of the ancient periods.
- i. I conceived information regarding the overall understanding of Anglo Saxon period ( As we have played roles of a play on the Anglo Saxon period: The war of Hastings)
- j. Through the role playing I got a chance to learn something practically.
- k. I could get inside the character and I understood what had happened in the history of ancient time.

- l. Learning through role playing was more joyous and more effective.
- m. By role playing I have given something interesting to my audience and I think they learned something from my/our performance.
- n. Along with my part of role playing, there were other groups to play their roles/characters and I learned so many things from their performance too.
- o. I could accommodate the courage to do something in front of everyone.
- p. This drama helps me to know about the background writer and his writings.
- q. It is very useful because everybody learned so many things during the role playing.
- r. The role playing was helpful because we see every character in our real life. That was so amazing.
- s. It was so beneficial to experience than the practical reading.
- t. The approach was highly creative one.
- u. It helped me to be familiar with the events and characters by enjoying the story by drama performance. It helped me to visualize the history.
- v. Role playing improved my presentation and public speaking skills.
- w. The role play gave me the taste of stage drama and also brought the realization about the specific time of English history.
- x. After experience of these kinds of activity I learned about other cultures and developed my language skills.
- y. Role playing awakened my imagination. It helped me to improve my imagination power.
- z. Role playing gave me a strong mentality to cope with difficult situations and experiences. It increased my acting power.
- aa. I have become more open-minded, more flexible and empathetic by playing various kinds of role. It gave me the opportunity to understand different points of view simply by acting.
- bb. Role play was a stage of practical learning and this kind of group role-play taught us about the power of unity. Actually my experience of role playing was so much memorable that I could never forget and this will help me in my practical life.
- cc. When I was playing the role of any character at first I needed to analysis the story. That was how we knew the basic information of the story.
- dd. Knowing the character elaborately helped us to estimate the story when we were in exam hall.
- ee. If we only read the character we could forget. But acting on this will help us to remember.
- ff. It gave us new experience as we learned about British culture at that time.
- gg. Playing role helped us to keep things memorable all the time as we entered in the character totally when we were acting.
- hh. I can understand the lesson properly while practicing the role for several times. The characteristics of the lesson is seemed to me very clearly what was not clear before role playing.
- ii. I was able to teach others about the lesson with various forms of acting.
- jj. My interest of the lesson has increased after playing the role.
- kk. By role playing we can execute whatever we learn from the book.
- ll. Role playing helps us to learn how to do work in group.
- mm. Because of role playing we can learn our lesson practically.

- nn. We are getting hugely benefited because we will never forget what we learn just because we done it practically.
- oo. It helps us to overcome from our nervousness, from our shyness as we played in front of our teachers and juniors.
- pp. By playing those roles I can relate myself inside the story.
- qq. I can easily feel the certain character and as well as the story too when i was played it in the stage.
- rr. Practical is always helpful, and it was very helpful to me by doing the role practically to understand the whole story.
- ss. As an experience it was quite impressive, and as an experiment it was quite brilliant source to learn hard thing in the easiest way.
- tt. Not only I got the chance to know my exact character but also I got the chance to understand other characters so I can summarize the story in anytime at anywhere learning from the role playing.
- uu. To play a role we need to read the whole story and then come to know the story. It helps me to know all the characters of the play.
- vv. It helps us to analyze the story better.
- ww. When I enter in a character it creates a psychological meet to the situation.
- xx. Role playing helps to improve my body language.
- yy. It makes me more confident by performing in front of audience.
- zz. Also uncover the complex personalities through role playing.
- aaa. It created an opportunity for group study and discussion.
- bbb. It created an interest among us to study English History.
- ccc. Performing drama in presence of audience increases our self-confidence to do something in front of everybody.
- ddd. I tried to think myself as a character I have played the role and also practiced on trial basis in front of mirror.
- eee. I practiced every day on those days. I made a study plan. Setting a routine, I fixed time and spent effectively.
- fff. I shared my plan with my family and friends so that instead of interrupting, they encouraged me.
- ggg. I practiced all the core skills of language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It helped me a lot to improve.
- hhh. I was not ashamed to make mistakes. I became confident gradually.

## **12. Limitations**

The whole teaching project was very laborious, time consuming and engaging. The teacher must plan the total activities at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, the students must be convinced to make the planning successful and effective.

## **13. Recommendations**

The technique of role playing, if implemented properly, is highly effective. The learners' level of understanding

increases, thus further study becomes easier and more interesting. The learners can review the essence of learning after long time. The following recommendations can be made from the experience:

- i. Role playing enhances quality learning. Respected course teachers can adopt techniques in their own way.
- ii. The teachers need to be connected very closely with students. Thus only classroom should not be the only platform rather connections through Moodle, Google Classroom, messenger group are encouraged.
- iii. Learners can display their own planning and performance. The authority given to them by the teachers can increased their self-esteem. They, by solving problems, can build teamwork and leadership.
- iv. To build harmonious relationship among students, between student-teacher and between student-contents, teaching should essentially be more engaging through role playing project.

#### **14. Conclusion**

Teachers, researchers policy makers, educators are restless in researching and identifying effective instructional strategies for improving the levels of students' learning. Traditional teaching of History course to the students majoring English at university are most often lecture based. Thus to bring variety in teaching strategy, role playing is unique. Role playing blend past and present for creating a promising future. It harmonizes knowledge with skills and attitudes. Thus, learning becomes effective, interesting and sustainable. Students will be equipped with creative thoughts, problem solving quality, event and time management ability, reasoning skills etc. to encounter with the classroom situation as well as the real world. The feedback from the students of this teaching project was participatory and enjoyable. It was remarkable for achieving broader perspective in learning and enhanced learning outcomes. The outcome of the study suggests the role playing is a wonderful contribution to the realm of teaching history to the students majoring English at tertiary level. But before adopting the strategy the teachers must have ideas about both the strengths and shortcomings of role playing. The practice promotes the learners-centered approach. Role playing is a powerful tool as it encourages learners to be responsible to perform and prove. When learners discover the techniques to reeect knowledge into skills through attitudes, purposes of sustainable learning is achieved.

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