

Using Improvisation as a Creative Teaching Tool to Enhance Arabic Listening and Speaking Skills

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Workshop objectives

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By the end of this session, participants will be able to

- 1. understand what improvisation is and how it can be used as a teaching tool in the foreign language classroom.**
- 2. Understand how teachers can to use a number of improvisation activities to enhance language skills especially listening and speaking.**

Introduction

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Improvisational techniques derived from the experiences in improvisational theatre can be adapted for the language classroom to leverage the characteristics of the Net Generation, their multiple intelligences and learning styles, and the variety of collaborative learning activities already in place in a learner-centered environment.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3TsyT_EDBc

Definition of improvisation

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- Improvisation was defined as a self-directed intuition (Crosan & Sorrenti, 1997). They "... make the most of what you have, get the most out of what you can do" (Keefe, 2002, p. 6).
- When improvisation is used in teaching, students can provide different responses throughout the class cycle, and the instructor does not assess any particular response but instead facilitates improvisation among students, aiming to guide them towards discovering their own knowledge (Sawyer, 2003).

What is improvisation used for?

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Improvisation is used to:

- build trust,
- foster teamwork and better brainstorming,
- improve communication and presentation skills, promote creative problem solving,
- respond quickly and decisively to unanticipated challenges,
- think on their feet and recognize opportunities as they arise,
- increase learners' comfort level with change and willingness to take risks, and
- manage change and promote a supportive, improvisational corporate culture.

Principles of Improvisation

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- **There are seven principles of improvisation:**
 - 1. Trust.** In order for a group to be successful and productive, the members of the group, referred to as “players,” must be able to trust one another.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7byAumYKUw>

Principles of Improvisation (Cont'd)

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2. Acceptance. This is the “Golden Rule” of improvisation (Gesell, 1997). Players must be willing to accept a new idea in order to explore its possibilities—not just say “yes,” but have an attitude of “yes, and . . .,” meaning, “I accept the offer to improvise (using ideas, words, or movement) and must build on it.” (Koppett, 2001).

Principles of Improvisation (Cont'd)

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3. Attentive listening. Players must be aware of the partners with whom they are co-creating in order to increase their understanding of each other and to be able to communicate effectively.

Principles of Improvisation (Cont'd)

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4. Spontaneity. Players co-create in the moment, without the opportunity to revise. Each player is motivated by a positive purpose and desire to delight. Spontaneity allows players to initiate words and actions, building trust with the other players (Keefe, 2002).

Principles of Improvisation (Cont'd)

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5. Storytelling. Players develop the ability to create a collaborative narrative that connects their dialogue through a story. This process often results in memorable content.

Principles of Improvisation (Cont'd)

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6. Nonverbal communication. Players use facial expressions and body language to help communicate attitude, character, and trustworthiness.

Principles of Improvisation (Cont'd)

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7. Warm-ups. Warm-ups are structures that provide an opportunity to develop trust and safe environments, where the players can feel free to explore through “contentless” games and structures. It is similar to bantering with students to develop rapport.

Why Use Improvisation in the Classroom?

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There are four major instructional reasons for using improvisation in the classroom:

- (1) It is consistent with the characteristics of the current generation of students, also known as the Net Generation (Carlson, 2005; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2006a; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Tapscott, 1999, 2009) (aka Millennials [Howe & Strauss, 2000])
- (2) it taps into students' multiple and emotional intelligences, particularly verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal;
- (3) it fosters collaborative learning by helping to build trust, respect, and team spirit as well as listening, verbal and nonverbal communication, ad-libbing, role-playing, risk-taking, and storytelling skills; and
- (4) it promotes deep learning through the active engagement with new ideas, concepts, or problems; linking the activities or tasks to prior learning; applying the content to real-life applications; and evaluating the logic and evidence presented.

Why is improvisation consistent with the characteristics of the current generation of students?

- **They learn by inductive discovery—that is, by doing rather than being told what to do.** (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2006b; Tapscott, 1999). They are what Jenkins (2006) calls a participatory culture; they are not spectators;
- **They are intuitive visual communicators.** (Frand, 2000; Manuel, 2002);
- **They crave social face-to face interaction.** (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Manuel, 2002; Ramaley & Zia, 2006; Windham, 2005);
- **They are emotionally open.** (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2006b);
- **They respond quickly and expect rapid responses in return.** (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Prensky, 2006; Roberts, 2006); and
- **They shift attention rapidly from one task to another.**

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