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**Harnessing the Transformative Power of Applied Theatre to Foster  
Speaking Skills Among Tertiary-Level Students: A Pathway to Achieving  
SDG 4 for Viksit Bharat@2047**

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**Abstract:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly reshaped education, challenging traditional classroom practices and compelling educators to innovate. With the shift to online learning during lockdowns, many students have struggled to transition back to conventional in-person education. This scenario underscores the urgent need for dynamic and inclusive pedagogies that bridge these gaps and foster active student engagement. Applied Theatre emerges as a transformative approach, extending learning beyond the confines of traditional classrooms. By employing role-play, improvisation, and collaborative techniques, it creates vibrant, participatory learning spaces that resonate with students.



This study explores the impact of Applied Theatre on enhancing English-speaking proficiency among tertiary-level students in Bangalore. The findings reveal that this method significantly improves fluency, expression, creativity, and confidence, effectively addressing post-pandemic educational challenges. Applied Theatre also fosters inclusivity and collaboration, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting equitable, quality education for all. As a vehicle for sustainable social change, Applied Theatre provides an innovative pathway to reimagine education for a Viksit Bharat@2047, bridging gaps between traditional and modern pedagogical paradigms and preparing students for a globalized world.

**Keywords:** Applied theatre, changing dynamics, Viksit Bharat, pedagogy, post-pandemic, tertiary level education, SDG 4.

Theme: Pedagogical challenges to teaching-learning.

## Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic has redefined educational landscapes, urging educators to rethink traditional pedagogies and embrace innovative approaches. The disruptions caused by lockdowns and the widespread adoption of online education have significantly altered students' perceptions of formal classroom teaching, often leaving them disengaged and unprepared for conventional learning environments. This shift emphasizes the critical need for pedagogical strategies that not only bridge the gap between online and in-person education but also foster social and emotional growth.

Applied Theatre emerges as a transformative tool to address these challenges, creating dynamic and inclusive learning experiences. Rooted in participatory techniques like role-play and improvisation, Applied Theatre provides a platform for students to explore identity, develop critical thinking, and enhance communication and collaboration skills. Unlike traditional methods, it allows for learning that transcends the boundaries of the classroom, making education accessible, engaging, and relevant.



This study explores the integration of Applied Theatre to improve English-speaking proficiency and self-confidence among tertiary-level students, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). By transforming classrooms into vibrant, interactive spaces, Applied Theatre not only enhances linguistic competence but also fosters an inclusive and supportive environment. The findings underscore its potential to bridge post-pandemic learning gaps and contribute to India's vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 by promoting equitable, quality education and sustainable social change.

## **Review of Literature:**

The comprehensive examination of the literature explores the practical applications of theatre and drama in educational and language learning, highlighting their potential advantages in enhancing literacy, enriching language acquisition, and catalyzing societal transformation, especially in post-pandemic environments.

Thakur's research delves into the historical evolution of theatre in development communication, highlighting its significant role in shaping communication strategies in both international and Indian contexts (Basu Thakur, 2013). Gabriella's study shows that Applied drama and theater methodologies are integrating into education for specific purposes, fostering a dynamic relationship between the two fields (Gabriella, 2014).

Piazzoli's research project explored the use of process drama strategies in advanced-level language learning. Conducted in a university in Brisbane, Australia, the study incorporated six process drama workshops into an Italian language course. (Piazzoli, 2018). Geza Mate Novak's highlights that Applied theatre, with its historical roots in educational theatre, has evolved into a powerful tool for promoting social integration in the 21st century, improving communication skills and engaging participants (Novak, 2019). Erika Piazzoli's research reveals that process drama techniques effectively reduce language anxiety and promote spontaneous and authentic communication in advanced language learning (Piazzoli, 2018).

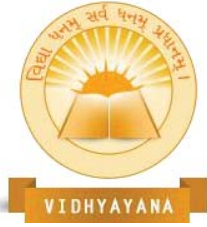


The year-long quasi-experimental study conducted by Lee and Liu's research on EFL pedagogy revealed that drama-based training significantly improved presentation performance, especially when presented to real-life audiences. (Lee & Liu, 2022). Bora's study observed that Drama games and drama-based teaching methods significantly improve English language skills, fostering spontaneity and authenticity in learners' language use (Bora, 2021).

The review of literature underscores the significant potential of Applied Theatre's significant potential in enhancing speaking skills in educational and language learning contexts. Theatre offers valuable pedagogical methodologies, enriching literacy, accelerating language acquisition, and catalyzing societal transformation. In the post-pandemic educational landscape, interactive, activity-oriented learning experiences are essential. Empirical studies are needed to assess its impact.

## Research Questions:

1. How does the incorporation of Applied Theatre activities impact the speaking skills, including fluency, expression, and creativity, of tertiary-level students in a post-pandemic educational setting?
2. To what extent does the use of Applied Theatre as a pedagogical tool influence the overall engagement and confidence levels of students within and beyond the traditional classroom environment?
3. What are the current possibilities and future prospects of utilizing Applied Theatre as a pedagogical tool for enhancing speaking skills in tertiary education?
4. In what ways can educators adapt and customize Applied Theatre practices align with the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 to foster quality education, social equity, and linguistic proficiency?



## **Research Design:**

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively investigate the impact of applied theatre on speaking skills among tertiary-level students. Qualitatively, participants engage in role-playing based on character descriptions, fostering open-ended dialogues. Debriefing sessions are conducted to explore participants' experiences and challenges. This qualitative aspect provides rich, in-depth insights. Quantitatively, basic demographic data is collected, and a feedback questionnaire with Likert scale responses assesses elements of the applied theatre activity. This mixed-methods strategy ensures a holistic understanding, combining qualitative depth with quantitative data for a thorough analysis.

The researcher conducted a study with B. Tech. 1st semester students of Electronics and Communication Engineering of REVA university on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 2023 to empirically examine the role of applied theatre in fostering speaking skills among tertiary-level students. There were thirty-three participants aging between seventeen to Nineteen years of age. The Activity which was named as "Character Café" was designed and conducted outdoors out of the classroom for two hours between 9:20- 11:30 with a short break of 10 minutes.

## **Activity Description:**

**Objective:** The activity was used as an intervention to enhance speaking skills, including fluency, expression, and creativity, through role-play and improvisation.

## **Materials used:**

Index cards with character descriptions (one per student)

A seating arrangement resembling a café setting (tables and chairs)



## ***Character Assignment:***

Before the activity, index cards were prepared with character descriptions. Each card had the details about a character, including their name, age, occupation, personality traits, and a specific challenge or situation they are facing. There were a variety of character types to choose from.

## ***Character Selection:***

The index cards were distributed randomly to students. Each student receive a character description but keeps it confidential.

## ***Role-Play:***

The students were Instructed to take on the persona of the character on their index card. They should think about how their character would behave, speak, and react in a café setting.

## ***Café Conversations:***

The students were asked to move around the "café" and engage in conversations as their characters. They can order food, interact with other characters, or even eavesdrop on other tables. Encourage them to use their creativity to build a story around their characters.

## ***Impromptu Dialogues:***

Periodically, students were called for impromptu dialogues. For example, ask two characters to engage in a conversation about a specific topic, like discussing a problem or making a decision. This encourages spontaneous speaking and creativity.

## ***Character Switch:***

After some time, the characters were switched with another classmate. This allowed them to experience speaking from a different character's perspective.



## ***Debrief:***

After the activity, the students were gathered for a debriefing. Discussed their experiences, what they learned, and any challenges they faced while speaking as different characters. A feedback form with a questionnaire was filled in by the students.

## ***Character descriptions used in the index cards for the "Character Café" activity:***

➤ Character: Sarah

Age: 28

Occupation: Journalist

Personality: Outgoing, inquisitive, and a bit of a risk-taker.

Challenge: She's on a mission to uncover a big scoop for her newspaper.

➤ Character: David

Age: 45

Occupation: Software engineer

Personality: Introverted, highly analytical, and a bit of a perfectionist.

Challenge: He's trying to find a way to solve a complex coding problem.

➤ Character: Emily

Age: 19

Occupation: College student

Personality: Energetic, artistic, and a dreamer.

Challenge: She's working on her application for an art scholarship.



➤ Character: James

Age: 60

Occupation: Retired teacher

Personality: Wise, patient, and a good listener.

Challenge: He's advising a troubled young person on life choices.

➤ Character: Maria

Age: 35

Occupation: Chef

Personality: Passionate, creative, and a food lover.

Challenge: She's preparing for a big cooking competition.

➤ Character: Alex

Age: 22

Occupation: Salesperson

Personality: Outgoing, persuasive, and goal-oriented.

Challenge: He's trying to close a major deal for his company.

➤ Character: Sophie

Age: 50

Occupation: Psychologist

Personality: Empathetic, understanding, and a good problem solver.

Challenge: She's counseling someone dealing with anxiety.





➤ Character: Max

Age: 32

Occupation: Environmental activist

Personality: Passionate, determined, and an advocate for change.

Challenge: He's organizing a protest to raise awareness about climate change.

### Discussion:

As part of a Study, students engaged enthusiastically in an Applied Theatre activity, exploring its potential and benefits as a pedagogical tool for a special purpose. The activity, conducted outdoors, aimed to emphasize that Applied Theatre isn't confined to classrooms. This approach seeks to demonstrate that learning environments can extend beyond traditional settings, aligning with the broader possibilities of utilizing Applied Theatre in education.

No. of Participants	Age of Participants	Course of the Participants	Place
Male 27	17 to 19	BTech first Sem Electronics and Communication Engineering	REVA University, Bangalore (India)
Female 6			
Total 33			

Figure -1

Among the 33 students-participants who were studying BTech first Sem Electronics and Communication Engineering at REVA University, Bangalore (India), there were 27 boys and 6 girls between the age 17 to 19 years of age. After engaging them with the Applied Theatre activity, a feedback form with a questionnaire was circulated to mark their responses.



## Awareness and Experience with Applied Theatre:

The questionnaire data reveals that a significant portion of participants (13 out of 33) had no prior familiarity with Applied Theatre. This highlights the necessity to introduce and promote the concept, particularly within educational settings. Regarding experience, 12 participants engaged in Applied Theatre activities, reporting positive outcomes. Benefits included enhanced communication skills, confidence, and vocabulary. Notably, many students found Applied Theatre effective in overcoming stage fear, a critical factor in improving speaking skills. These findings suggest that incorporating Applied Theatre in education can be advantageous, particularly for addressing challenges like stage fear and enhancing speaking skills.

## Impact on Speaking Skills:

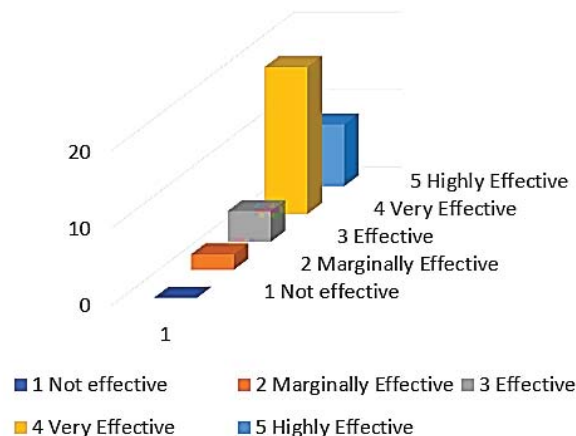
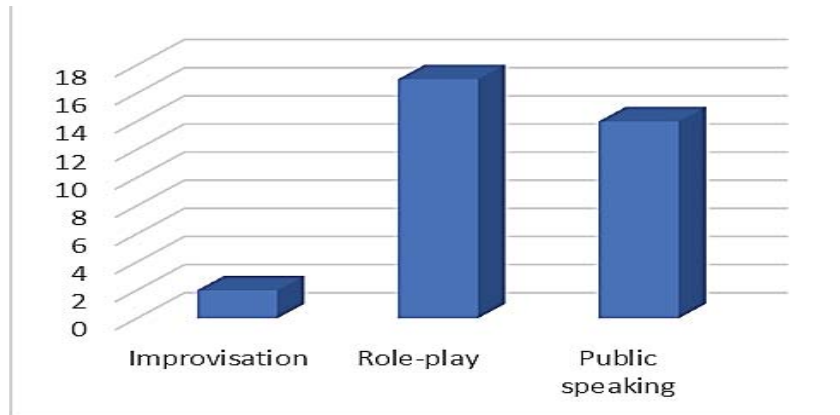


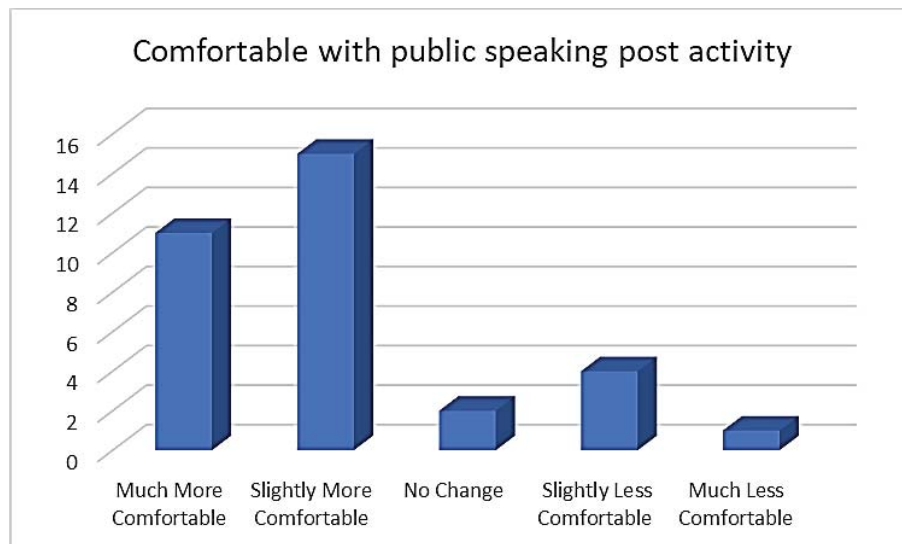
Figure -2

A notable portion of the participants (19 out of 33) perceived Applied Theatre as very effective in enhancing their speaking skills, as evidenced by their responses.



**Figure -3**

Factors contributing to this effectiveness included elements like role-play, improvisation, and public speaking.



**Figure -4**

Additionally, participants reported feeling more comfortable with public speaking after their exposure to Applied Theatre. These results emphasize the practical benefits of Applied Theatre in bolstering speaking skills, which can be a valuable asset in both academic and real-life communication scenarios.



## Perceived Benefits:

The responses regarding the perceived benefits of using Applied Theatre to enhance speaking skills centered on themes of communication, confidence, and vocabulary improvement. Students recognized that Applied Theatre fosters better communication and self-confidence. It was also acknowledged for its role in improving vocabulary, enabling individuals to find the right words and express themselves more effectively. These benefits align with the foundational aspects of language learning, which includes effective communication and increased self-assurance when speaking.

Many respondents identified improvements in skills beyond speaking, including increased confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. This suggests that Applied Theatre can have a broader positive impact on personal development and teamwork, which are critical skills for both education and future employment.

The main benefits of using Applied Theatre to enhance speaking skills, as perceived by the participants is summarized as follows:

- **Improved Communication:** Participants reported that engaging in Applied Theatre enhances their communication skills, making them more articulate and adept at expressing their thoughts and ideas clearly.
- **Confidence Building:** Applied Theatre significantly boosts confidence by eliminating stage fear, making individuals more comfortable and self-assured when speaking in public or engaging with others.
- **Enhanced Vocabulary:** Participants found that the activity helped them find the appropriate words to express themselves, contributing to better communication.
- **Better Public Speaking:** Applied Theatre benefits public speaking skills, helping individuals become more confident when addressing an audience.
- **Soft Skills Development:** It fosters the development of soft skills like interpersonal communication, self-confidence, and social interaction, which are valuable not only in education but also in professional settings.



- **Overcoming Stage Fear:** Participants reported that Applied Theatre helps them come out from stage fear, making them more comfortable with public speaking and performances.
- **Improved Speaking Behavior:** It contributes to enhancing speaking behavior, which is important for effective communication in various social scenarios.
- **Increased Knowledge and Information:** Applied Theatre not only improves speaking skills but also helps individuals gain more knowledge and information.
- **Enhanced Confidence and Vocabulary:** Applied Theatre has the potential to increase both confidence and vocabulary quality, which are crucial for effective communication.
- **Building Bonds:** It helps in building better bonds and relationships with others, emphasizing the role of effective communication in interpersonal connections.
- **Useful in Jobs and Social Settings:** Improved speaking skills through Applied Theatre are seen as beneficial in various aspects of life, including professional and social contexts.
- **Building Self-Confidence:** Participants noted that it enhances self-confidence, which is a vital skill for overall personal and professional growth.

The reported benefits of Applied Theatre extend beyond improved speaking skills to include the enhancement of crucial soft skills such as interpersonal communication and self-confidence. These advantages underscore the effectiveness of Applied Theatre not only in educational settings but also in professional and social contexts. Students participating in Applied Theatre activities consistently noted notable improvements, particularly in confidence and the reduction of stage fear, demonstrating its significant impact on personal development.

Participants in Applied Theatre activities reported improvements in teamwork, highlighting its collaborative nature. The experience enhanced their problem-solving skills, showcasing the development of critical thinking and effective solution-finding. Notably, there was a consensus on increased self-confidence, with some expressing a significant reduction in the fear of lacking confidence. These observations collectively affirm that Applied Theatre brings about a positive transformation in participants, fostering enhanced self-esteem, improved collaboration skills,



and a heightened capacity to address challenges effectively. The benefits extend beyond language development, emphasizing the holistic value of Applied Theatre in shaping well-rounded individuals.

### **Challenges and Concerns:**

Students acknowledged the significance of improved language skills in addressing challenges related to English language proficiency and effective communication. Their recognition of difficulties in instructing society members on conversational techniques underscored the crucial role of communication skills in Applied Theatre. The challenges voiced by students encompassed issues such as stage fear, confidence, language competence, and effective communication techniques, emphasizing the pivotal role of Applied Theatre activities in addressing these focal points.

In response to challenges faced during Applied Theatre activities, students offered valuable recommendations to enhance its effectiveness. Practical measures, including the use of microphones for audibility and the inclusion of engaging discussion topics, were suggested. The proposal for microphones holds promise in overcoming challenges such as stage fear and ensuring clear communication. When implemented, these insightful recommendations have the potential to improve the learning environment within Applied Theatre, thereby enhancing students' speaking skills and bolstering their self-assurance.

These recommendations from the students collectively emphasize the importance of vocabulary enrichment and exercises within Applied Theatre activities. Additionally, they underscore the significance of creating a comfortable environment that encourages students to speak and interact confidently.

### **Future Interest and Recommendations:**

The survey revealed a pronounced interest among respondents in further exploring Applied Theatre techniques to enhance their speaking skills, suggesting its ongoing potential and integration within the curriculum. Their recommendations, such as incorporating story dramas, diverse discussion topics, and the use of microphones for better audibility, reflect a desire to



diversify activities and enhance the learning experience. The data underscores Applied Theatre's positive impact on speaking skills, confidence, and vocabulary enrichment. The findings offer valuable insights for educators and institutions considering the integration of Applied Theatre, affirming its promise as an engaging and effective approach for improving students' speaking skills and essential soft skills.

### **Applied Theatre and its influence:**

Applied theatre is a comprehensive term encompassing diverse theatrical practices aimed at instigating social change and disseminating knowledge on specific issues. A research conducted by Warstat notes its inclusivity, spanning various forms such as psychodrama, role-play, and stand-up comedy. The versatility of applied theatre stems from its contextual nature, allowing it to adapt to different styles rather than being confined to a specific theatrical approach (Warstat, 2017). The study indicates that Applied Theatre offers opportunities for innovative and inclusive learning experiences in a post-pandemic context. The potential application of technology, such as virtual classrooms through video conferencing or augmented reality, allows participants to engage in theatrical activities while adhering to social distancing measures. Additionally, Applied Theatre emerges as a valuable tool for addressing social issues like racism and sexism, providing a safe and engaging platform to foster empathy.

The Applied Theatre activity offers the advantage of flexibility, as it can be effortlessly conducted outdoors, eliminating the need for specific infrastructure or extensive preparation. This adaptability allows the activity to take place in open spaces, like grounds or lawns, providing a dynamic and accessible setting. According to Prentki, Applied Theatre contributes to breaking down barriers between practitioners and participants, fostering interactive dialogue and transforming everyone involved into active contributors to the theatrical experience (Prentki et al., 2015).

In India, theatre plays a crucial role in addressing a wide array of societal themes such as agriculture, literacy campaigns, social harmony, gender discrimination, and more. Thakur highlights that theatre is instrumental in resolving conflicts, promoting cultural identity, fostering community development, exercising social control, and raising awareness on issues





ranging from grassroots concerns to broader societal matters like HIV-AIDS prevention and environmental pollution (Basu Thakur, 2013). In the post-pandemic era, applied theatre has gained prominence for its social relevance and transformative potential in society. The book 'Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre' serves as a critical exploration of applied theatre's significant social contributions, offering insights into its relevance in the twenty-first century (Hughes & Nicholson, 2016).

### **Applied Theatre- its relevance in being part of teaching curriculum:**

The importance of applied theatre should be emphasized and integrated into the curriculum rather than being relegated to extracurricular activities. Kovács highlights the positive impact of drama techniques in teaching English for Specific Purposes and studying literature as authentic material, underscoring their potential benefits. However, there is a noted gap in academic inquiry into these practices (Gabriella, 2014).

Parents and students need to be informed about the significant potential of applied theatre in a child's personal development and its role in fostering positive social change. Emphasizing the transformative impact of education on developing a "critical consciousness," as advocated by philosopher and educator Paulo Freire, can encourage acceptance and active engagement in applied theatre activities (*In Theory*, 2021) and his critical pedagogy known as 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' has got a great impact which resulted in a theatre form known as 'The Theatre of the Oppressed' which contributed towards the theatre for development.

Rajit Kapur, in an interaction video on YouTube, emphasizes the vital role of teachers in promoting theatre activities. He acknowledges the influence of visionary teachers on students and the need for theatre activities to be integrated into the curriculum (Karadi Path, 2022). Piazzoli explores the use of process drama strategies in reducing language anxiety and enhancing spontaneous communication. However, more extensive research is required to understand the effectiveness of process drama strategies in improving language learning outcomes (Piazzoli, 2018). The entire interaction aptly emphasizes the kind of encouragement and support that students can receive from their visionary teachers in that they enhance students' verbal and interpersonal skills, fostering social responsibility and addressing societal





needs, providing encouragement and support to enhance students' overall development.

### **Scope for further research:**

The future research prospects in Applied Theatre are expansive and varied. Firstly, examining the enduring impacts of Applied Theatre on students' speaking skills, personal growth, and social consciousness can yield crucial insights. Comparative studies evaluating the efficacy of Applied Theatre against traditional teaching methods in diverse educational contexts offer opportunities for evidence-based enhancements. Research exploring the cultural adaptability of Applied Theatre across regions and student demographics promotes inclusive educational approaches. Integrating technology, particularly virtual and augmented reality, for enriched immersive experiences in Applied Theatre is a promising avenue. Furthermore, thorough investigations into Applied Theatre's capacity to address social issues and contribute to societal advocacy demand attention. Lastly, studying the formulation of educational policies that integrate Applied Theatre into mainstream curricula and assess its systemic influence is pivotal for its widespread adoption and impact on future generations.

### **Conclusion:**

The research highlights the transformative capacity of Applied Theatre, emphasizing its pivotal role in cultivating speaking skills among tertiary-level students. Through innovative pedagogical applications, such as the "Character Café" activity, Applied Theatre demonstrates substantial promise in enhancing linguistic proficiency, self-assurance, and creativity. Moreover, it facilitates the development of critical soft skills, including confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential for holistic personal and professional growth.

Beyond its educational scope, Applied Theatre emerges as a powerful tool for societal transformation, fostering awareness and dialogue on pressing social issues. Its adaptability to both indoor and outdoor settings makes it a versatile methodology, particularly relevant in the post-pandemic educational context. By integrating Applied Theatre into mainstream curricula, educators can align with the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, contributing to a future where inclusive and innovative education bridges gaps in linguistic and social equity.



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This approach not only enhances individual competencies but also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 by promoting equitable and quality education. The institutionalization of Applied Theatre as a foundational pedagogical strategy can shape well-rounded individuals, proficient in oratory and socially conscious, thus laying the groundwork for a thriving and empowered India.



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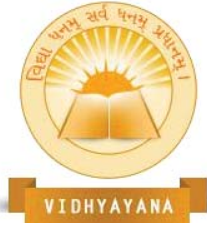
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