

The Use of Role Play in Enhancing Students Language Skill from the Teacher's Experiences Conducting Role Play

Asmah Azam and Nur Ainil Sulaiman
University Kebangsaan Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/22494> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/22494

Published Online: 24 September 2024

Abstract

Speaking skills is very important to everyone because nowadays, it is very crucial and important for everyone to speak in English. Other than that English is the majority of students' first language these days, speaking it in class or outside of it is commonplace. This study explores teaching experiences teacher's that conduct role play in the ESL classroom in terms of benefits during English Speaking lessons. Qualitative research design was employed in this study where 3 ESL teachers were involved in the data collection. In this study, the ESL educators were asked to share their own experience in conducting role play to their pupils. Additionally, their views on how these strategies could be applied in conducting role play in class. It is suggested that teachers should help the pupils in speaking English through role play. Finally, the implications of these findings for the benefits and the challenges of role play were discussed. Based on the findings of this study, it shows that role play is able to enhance the engagement, ability to express themselves, creative thinking and self confidence. The challenges that show from this study through role are anxiety, low - self esteem, scared of making mistakes and lack of vocabulary.

Keywords: Role Play, Speaking Skills, Rural Area, ESL Classroom, Benefits

Introduction

One of the four skills required for proficient language use is speaking, especially for those whose first language is not English. In order to improve outcomes with both native English speakers and other members of the worldwide community, English speaking talents must be taught with other skills. This is because communication on a global scale, especially online, requires them (Kamompan, 2010). Gaining the capacity to speak a language is one of the hardest parts of learning it (Leong and Ahmadi, 2017). Even after years of study, language learners still struggle to speak when it's appropriate in everyday situations. There are multiple explanations for this. Students must first recognise the value of speaking abilities and work to improve them in order to succeed in this competitive environment (Parupalli, 2019).

The Malaysian Ministry of Education announced the Dual Language Programme (DLP) in 2016 as an initiative to improve students' comprehension of science and math disciplines in the English language. The programme aims to increase students' exposure to the language, which will help them become more fluent in it (Nur, 2021; and Nurliyana, 2022). A deeper

comprehension of the language would be possible with the shift away from studying science and maths, according to New Straits Times (2022).

Every Malaysian child has the right to equitable access to a top-notch education that would allow them to realize their full potential, according to the 2013 Blueprint for Education. Creating educational systems that provide the greatest education to all students—regardless of their location, gender, or financial status—becomes a goal. The Ministry wants to close all accomplishment inequalities between urban and rural areas, gender, and socioeconomic status by 2020. Apart from that, the aim of the Education Blueprint is to raise Malaysia's educational standards to match those of other countries and equip Malaysian children for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education purportedly undertook an aggressive reform by updating the national curriculum to meet the demands of education in the twenty-first century. In conclusion, the idea of education presented by PAK21 for the twenty-first century strongly suggests that we give up on conventional methods of instruction and learning in favour of ones that place a greater emphasis on student-centered activities like active learning. Maslawati, Pamela, and Melor (2016) state that ESL teachers are beginning to shift from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered one that places a strong emphasis on activity-based teaching and learning.

Several educational theories state that students' speaking abilities can be enhanced by communication exercises such as role-playing, jigsaw puzzles, information gaps, games, and problem-solving (Thanyalak, 2012). According to Solliyah, Sofian, and Luwandi (2015), role play is crucial in the teaching of speaking because it lets students be creative and temporarily put themselves in another person's shoes. Students might pretend to be teachers, nurses, police officers, or members of other professions. Students will then have the chance to talk and hone their confidence. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify the benefits of using role play during English speaking lessons in rural areas.

Literature Review

Definition of Role Play

Chesler and Fox (1966), claim that role-playing, in which pupils act out the ideas, emotions, and actions of those around them, satisfies these demands. Through controlled interactions with individuals, role-playing is a strategy that enables pupils to study real-world situations and exercise various approaches in a safe environment. (Maryland, 2022). Furthermore, as per Carleton College (2023), role playing is a pedagogical strategy that facilitates prompt application of knowledge by casting pupils in the position of decision makers tasked with selecting a course of action, policy, or other outcome.

In subjects including social science, history, the health sciences, and physical education, role-playing is a popular active learning technique (Lynn and Tiffani, 2023). According to James (2006), role playing is an extremely powerful teaching tool that can help students visualise abstract situations, force them to pay attention to details they might otherwise miss, help them see the gaps between concepts and reality, offer instant variety in the classroom, give teachers incredibly useful data, and encourage learning by bringing conceptual discussions to life. Harvard University claims that role-playing is an academic

technique that has been used in a variety of settings and subjects to aid pupils in learning lessons or in comprehending "complex or ambiguous concepts." In a case-based scenario, pupils role-play specific roles, often roles they have never played before.

English Second Language

Worldwide, English is a language that is frequently spoken. Whether they are native speakers or not, almost 1,121 billion people use English worldwide (World Population Review 2019). It serves as a conduit for experts from different industries. English is widely used in communication, education, and business. It is recognised as an official language and is used to write government documents. The learning curves for learning a first language and a second language differ. Several theories and concepts have been created and tested to assist teachers in communicating their second language proficiency.

In order to assist pupils in learning a second language, speakers of English as a second language must possess expertise in psycholinguistics, psychology, and education, as English is the language that is spoken the most frequently. These children are taught the four fundamental language skills: talking, listening, reading, and writing. In ESL programmes, writing is the most difficult skill to learn and impart (Jusun and Md. Yunus, 2018). Since each skill serves a specific purpose, all ESL pupils ought to be proficient in them. It encompasses more than what is taught in a classroom. English is the language that is spoken the most, so being proficient in it is essential for people who use it as a second language.

Rural Areas

As Durston (2001), points out, little theoretical progress was made in the study of rural teenagers in the last ten years of the twentieth century, but a number of factors allowed for a significant change in the environment that advanced structural research in the context of public policy development. As a result, during the previous five years, governments and international organizations involved in rural development have concentrated their attention on the problems, opportunities, and difficulties faced by young people living in rural areas.

The education gap between urban and rural areas is typically more pronounced in developing and expanding nations when there is a significant disparity in the socioeconomic growth of rural and urban areas (Amini & Nivorozhkin, 2015). Due to a lack of resources, many rural schools have difficulty hiring and retaining talented teachers (Donachie, 2017). There are major problems with educational inequality and access to technology in rural schools since it is hard to locate enough competent instructors and money (Hillier, 2018).

Methodology

A research design is defined by Bostly (2019), as research is a methodical and meticulous approach to problem-solving and knowledge acquisition and it is a systematic process of expanding human knowledge. This study was conducted to explore the benefits on integrating role play during ESL Speaking Classroom. This study employed a qualitative method as the data collection medium used was an online semi - structured interview. Three English teachers from Sekolah Kebangsaan Bandar T6, Kluang, Malaysia were the total number of participants. The teachers have four to nineteen years of expertise instructing students in English. Purposive sampling was therefore the method of sampling that was employed to choose the target respondents who had prior experience running role plays in the classroom. A small group of professionals created and evaluated the semi-structured interview instruments to

ensure their validity. The interview was videotaped, transcribed, and themes-coded. The themes were supported by evidence and addressed the primary goal of the investigation.

Findings and Discussion

Learners Engagement

Putting on a role play in the classroom can be the most entertaining way to assist pupils in improving their English language skills. The interviewee had demonstrated it by using it with their students multiple times, always with great success. Students are excited about it since it allows them to express their own thoughts and collaborate with their classmates. They will next follow along with the lesson plan that their teachers have given them. This was revealed by three (3) of the participants who employed this technique.

... I love using role play as one of the methods in my teaching. My pupils love it too (P1,INT)

...this role play activity is more relax and informal so pupils can be themselves and they be active during this activity (P2,INT)

...They get excited to try and focus on the story told by their friends. They are actually learning the language indirectly in a fun way. (P3, INT)

Since role play is not a casual classroom activity, having a teacher facilitate it will make pupils feel more at ease and engaged. Role play is engaging for pupils in English classes because of this. They might be sincere and release all the stress they've been bearing all day from their coursework. Muhammad (2020), has demonstrated that role-playing is a low-cost and enjoyable method of knowledge transmission for educators and pupils, which increases academic achievement levels. With everything they need to role play, students will be able to pick up new skills or knowledge faster and more effectively.

Expression of Feelings

It can be difficult for some students to communicate their emotions in acceptable ways. Role-playing activities can help students who struggle to communicate their feelings in class by helping them identify and articulate a range of emotions. By taking on different roles, pupils can experience a range of emotions and get practice controlling their communication skills. Pupils naturally learn and develop via role play. Role-playing activities provide students the opportunity to see themselves from a whole new perspective. Emotional communication is valued in all types of relationships and is an essential part of emotional intelligence. Pupils can talk about their feelings in an emotional communication role-play. Even though they are often more pleasant, they can only be used by two pupils or operate best in groups of four to eight pupils each. Pupils are being taught how to express a range of feelings, including happiness and sadness. They are then able to communicate by expressing their emotions verbally. Pupils will be better equipped to express their own emotions by learning how to see things from another person's perspective. Set up a reversal role-play in which you play the little child who struggles to express her feelings because they can then speak and express their feelings or thoughts. Three (3) of the participants who used this strategy disclosed this.

...Yes, it is. Through role play, it can help pupils to express their feelings more and they are able to express their emotions the right way. (P1, INT)

...Yup. With this method, pupils will express their feelings much more easily and they are not afraid to make mistakes. (P2, INT)

...Yes. In order to effectively convey a story, pupils must learn how to use the correct emotion and intonation based on the story. (P3, INT)

Since pupils often hold things to themselves, which is detrimental to their mental health, they need to be able to express their emotions. Role play is a helpful instructional strategy that provides pupils with these experiences while also teaching them how to express themselves responsibly, as shown by Chesler and Fox (1966). It is very helpful to understand all of the emotions, and role playing, a teaching technique where pupils adopt the ideas, feelings, and behaviors of others, meets these demands. It can also help pupils become more skilled at dealing with people on a social level. Students' interpersonal skills are greatly enhanced via role plays, as they are provided multiple roles to play.

Creative Thinking

Students can express themselves and let their imaginations run wild through role play. Through pretend play, they can create their own universes, characters, and tales, which develops their storytelling skills and stimulates young imaginations. Students utilize it as a way to express themselves and create new worlds since they are creative thinkers and imaginative gamers by nature. Play helps them develop their problem-solving skills and emotional regulation. By applying their creativity, pupils can experience a variety of roles, scenarios, and circumstances through imaginative play. Pupils appreciate imaginative play in addition to other things. It is also essential to their development on an emotional and cognitive level. Through imaginative play, pupils can create their own ideas and stories, make up characters and roles, and use their imagination to work out problems and resolve conflicts. In this safe space, students can act out, experiment with, and practice a variety of events and situations, allowing them to investigate their surroundings and effectively communicate their emotions. They will instantly employ a lot of new vocabulary words and find it easier to remember from all those scenarios or activities they practice. Three (3) of the participants who used this strategy disclosed this.

...Yes. It can help the pupils to become more imaginative. (P1,INT)

...Yup. Through role play, pupils can get a chance to imagine any situation that happens in their daily lives. (P2, INT)

...Yes. Through role play they can imagine the situation happening in the scenes of the story. This will enable them to brainstorm better during discussion time. (P3, INT)

Encouraging pupils to use their imaginations can help them think more critically and come up with answers for a range of problems. This could lead them to think more sanely and maturely. James (2006), asserts that pupils can overcome mental indolence and obstacles that keep them from really realizing their ideas through the use of role-playing exercises. Throughout the English lessons, the pupils will all be interested and motivated even if they are not fluent

in the language. Their enthusiastic involvement and creative contributions throughout the role-playing session are the reason for this.

Improvement in Self - Confidence

Pupils can increase their self-confidence in speaking English during English sessions by engaging in role-playing. Students who communicate with one another develop their expressiveness and confidence. Pupils discuss their roles while they play by using speech patterns from the past, present, and future. They connect ideas or events to the parts they are doing. Through role playing, pupils can take an active part in learning. According to the study, role-playing helps students succeed academically and provides them with practical experience that they may utilize to grow in their careers.

It also increases learners' confidence in their communication abilities and their views of risk and crisis communication best practices. We believe that the key to the effectiveness of the role-play is the explicit practice of real-world communication tasks in a feedback-rich environment. Role playing helps pupils become more confident and enhance their speech. Three (3) of the participants who used this strategy disclosed this.

...Yes, it can help the pupils to build up their self - confidence (P1, NIT)

...Yup. It does help the pupils to gain their self - confidence a lot not only during class but outside of the class too. (P2, NIT)

...Yes. In role play, they get to brush their confidence by practicing the language with their friends in a fun setting. (P3, NIT)

Additionally, it improves learners' perceptions of risk and crisis communication best practices as well as their confidence in their communication skills. We think that the explicit practice of real-world communication tasks in a feedback-rich environment is the secret to the role-play's effectiveness. Through role playing, children can improve their communication and gain more confidence.

Lack of Vocabulary

Words acquisition is the process of adding new words to one's language. Lack of vocabulary is the biggest obstacle that students face in school when taking English Speaking classes because vocabulary is necessary for all English communication abilities. Growing one's vocabulary is hampered by mistakes like relying solely on dictionaries and disregarding word context. Inconsistent use, not actively using recently learned words, and a failure to develop positive reading habits can also lead to a lack of vocabulary. Other than that, reading habits, childhood schooling, psychological issues, not being interested with the vocabulary you gain, and limited social ties are some elements that affect vocabulary learning. They must always be learning new words and incorporating them into their everyday lives. Building a vocabulary requires constant work; simply memorizing dictionary words without understanding their context is insufficient. Watching an English movie or an interview with subtitles can help students acquire many new words and form correct sentences from there. Having a huge vocabulary is useless if they don't know where and when to use each term. Two (2) participants brought this to light by pointing out the challenges that exist.

*...emmm, I think the main reason is their surroundings.
They use very minimal English in their daily lives. (P2, INT)*

...Yes absolutely. Lack of vocabulary is one of the huge factors why they are reluctant to speak English in class. (P3, INT)

One of the biggest issues that students deal with in speaking classes is that they don't speak English very often, which adds to their restricted vocabulary. According to Naginder (2013), there has been observation that a significant proportion of students in Malaysian educational institutions lack a fundamental vocabulary. While some students have not been exposed to English terminology since kindergarten, others have. Since some of the parents do not speak English well, they have not even made an effort to help their children. Students must continue to take notes and incorporate some of the vocabulary they have learnt into their everyday activities.

a) Scared of Making Mistakes

Learning a language might be intimidating. Being at fault is never pleasant, and feeling incapable is even more unpleasant. The same is true for students who experience anxiety when speaking or presenting in English during English classes. Every time they talk in English, they are uncomfortable because they think someone will make fun of them. Many students deeply want to avoid making mistakes in the classroom, yet they are afraid of doing so. Pronunciation and grammatical mistakes are among the most common mistakes made by students in the classroom, and they only become problematic when students ignore them and don't learn from them. It makes little difference if students are unable to pronounce them correctly. Moreover, it doesn't matter if they don't have perfect grammar. It is important for students to speak up and have an adventurous mindset if they genuinely want to improve their fluency in English. Sometimes students just cannot find the right word at the right time, sometimes they make numerous mistakes because they miss the irregular verb rules, and sometimes a term has a sound that isn't in their language but they can still pronounce it correctly. Students should adopt a different perspective regarding their fear of making grammatical or pronunciation errors. They should embrace their errors since, as we are all aware, mistakes happen to everyone. Remember that in order to improve their accuracy and fluency, they must make mistakes.

By highlighting the challenges that are there, two(2) individuals made this clear.

...they think their friends will laugh at them if they say something wrong or mispronounce words. (P1, INT)

...most pupils are shy and afraid to speak English as they know their pronunciation isn't correct as they did not practice the language at home / daily life. (P3, INT)

Students who are afraid to make mistakes in the classroom become extremely disruptive because they never put their newly acquired skills into practice. According to Oshani's (2020) research, there are a number of reasons why different students feel nervous when speaking in English. Justifications such as "not knowing enough grammar rules," "not being confident

enough in one's ability to speak English," and "not having enough opportunities to practice" with native speakers are, nevertheless, commonly offered.

a) Low Self - Esteem

Students' self-confidence also has a role in how well they perform when speaking English. Emotions and self-esteem are linked; self-esteem is the belief that one can successfully complete a task. Students can use their past experiences—both happy and unhappy ones—as a reference to determine their own value. Speaking in English can be very challenging for many students because of their lack of confidence. It takes communicating with other students to fully comprehend the subject matter and consistently raise one's level of language proficiency in a classroom setting. Students who, on the other hand, find it difficult to communicate in English and who fear social connection may exhibit a deterioration in both their learning and the vital social interaction. In order to become more proficient speakers, students should always make an effort to express themselves in English. It will be challenging for students to increase their knowledge if they are uncomfortable expressing themselves in the language they are studying. Two(2) people made this clear by drawing attention to the difficulties that exist.

...I think the challenge these pupils face is having low-esteem and confidence. (P1, INT)

...yup. They are not going to fool themselves standing in front or answering/asking/speaking activities that they don't know how to (P2, INT)

One of the problems that may be fixed is a lack of confidence. Students can overcome this by being given more chances to speak in class and by having their friends support them whenever they speak out. This will give them the courage to motivate others. This has been demonstrated by Zuraidah (2009), who notes that there has been a great deal of study conducted in Malaysia on the subject, and some educators believe that the reason why students don't actively participate in class discussions is because they are not enthusiastic about learning the target language. Students feel nervous if they have to deliver something or speak in front of the class in English. The students' innate lack of confidence will be fairly severe without them realizing it. They fear that they will be laughed at by their peers.

a) Anxiety

Psychological processes are another component that contributes to the reason. It is clarified that another issue is a person's lack of confidence when speaking in English. Most English learners often encounter challenges while trying to communicate in English because they are insecure about their understanding of grammar and pronunciation. From there, students may have anxiety each time they are required to speak in English during English classes. Anxiety can also be brought on by speaking in front of classmates, making blunders, and a variety of other circumstances. Even though nervousness is a typical emotion, students who are afraid to speak during English sessions may be losing out on opportunities to practise their language skills since their fears keep them from doing so. Students also get nervous when they have to speak in front of the class or the public for a variety of reasons. Depending on the circumstance, the people in the audience, the topic at hand, or simply our general lack of confidence, they can be reluctant to speak up. Anxiety can manifest itself in a number of ways, including sweaty palms, shaking hands, pacing, wobbly voices, and more. Students will find it

difficult to communicate once they experience all of those symptoms, and neither their teacher nor anyone else will be able to give them much feedback on how they speak. Although it will take time and effort, it is possible to get over the anxiety of speaking in English. This was made evident by three(3) persons who called attention to the challenges that are present.

...yes, I think so and from there, they will automatically get anxious. (P1, INT)

...yup. They are afraid to be judged and to be laughed at if they make a mistake.(P2, INT)

...some of them, yes. Because they are afraid their friends might make fun of them.(P3, INT)

Students who suffer from anxiety in the classroom cause a lot of trouble for themselves because they fear that their classmates will laugh at them, make fun of them, or judge them if they say something wrong. Oshani's (2020) research demonstrates that various pupils experience anxiety when speaking in English for a variety of reasons. However, typical justifications include "not knowing enough grammar rules," "not being confident enough in one's ability to speak English," and "not having enough opportunities to practise" with native speakers.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine the benefits and the challenges of conducting role play in ESL Classroom during Speaking Lesson. The research has also shown that integrating role play into English instruction is a wise decision since it helps students develop a greater sense of motivation and self-assurance while simultaneously enhancing their other academic areas. The evidence from this study suggests that conducting role play during speaking lessons did help the pupils to build up their self confidence, improve their imagination, be more expressive and also brings excitement to the pupils during English lessons. They will not get easily bored and from there, they will participate more during English lessons. This new understanding should help to improve predictions of the impact of applying role play to primary school pupils in rural areas. The generalisability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, it only looks at three English teachers at SK Bandar T6, Kluang, Johor, Malaysia. Other than that, only a few sources in the literature evaluation also emphasize the benefits and the challenges for primary school pupils. This should be undertaken to explore how to solve it by suggesting that future investigations enlarge the sample size to delve further into the findings and focus more on the benefits. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice.

References

- Amini, C., & Nivorozhkin, E. (2015, September 1). *The urban–rural divide in educational outcomes: Evidence from Russia*. Learning & Technology Library (LearnTechLib). <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/195820/>
- Brown, L. G., & Chidume, T. (2023). Don't forget about role play: An enduring active teaching strategy. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, 18(1), 238–241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2022.09.002>
- Donachie, P. (2017, June 13). High teacher stress levels can impact student learning abilities, study shows. *K-12 Dive*. <https://www.k12dive.com/news/high-teacher-stress-levels-can-impact-student-learning-abilities-study-sho/444835/>
- Hillier, M. (2018). 'Bridging the digital divide with off-line e-learning', *Distance Education*, 39, pp. 110 - 121, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2017.1418627> *IJSSH-International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*. (n.d.). <https://www.ijssh.net/show-33-391-1.html>
- Leong, L.-M., & Ahmadi, S. M. (2016). An Analysis of Factors Influencing Learner's English Speaking Skill. *International Journal Research in English Education*, 2, 34-41.
- Purnamawati, S., Sofian, S., & Suhartono, L. (2015, September 7). *The Use of Role Play in Teaching Speaking*. Neliti. <https://www.neliti.com/publications/215801/the-use-of-role-play-in-teaching-spining>
- Rao, S. P. (2019). The Importance of Speaking Skills in English Classrooms. *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal*, 2, 6-18.
- Sivaraman, D. (2023). THE EFFECTS OF MIND MAPPING IN ESL WRITING FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL. *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371487348_THE_EFFECTS_OF_MIND_MAPPING_IN_ESL_WRITING_FOR_PRIMARY_SCHOOL
- The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 and its effects on English Language teaching in Malaysia. (n.d.). *ResearchGate*. <https://www.researchgate.net>