

Role-Playing Technique in Teaching Arabic Communication: A Case Study at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin in Malaysia

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of role-playing technique in teaching Arabic speaking skills at University of Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Terengganu, in order to enhance speaking ability, promote self-motivation and enrich vocabularies among students. The study employed quantitative method and used questionnaires as instrument of data collection. There were 30 selected respondents that consisted of all students from first semester of diploma in Arabic Language and Literature (N = 30) who were obliged to take the subject of Al-Muhadathah 1 for the whole one semester. Data were analyzed by using the software of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 7.5. Cronbach's Alpha was used as a tool to assess the reliability of scales and it was tested on all items of the questionnaire and the test resulted 0.86 indicates high reliability. The finding shows that all the respondents gave opinions that learning experience through role-play technique has been able to improve their ability to speak in Arabic language, and they felt more confident to speak in Arabic and also were able to enrich their vocabularies at the end of the course.

Keywords: Role-Play, Communication Skills, Arabic Speaking Skills, Learning Arabic As A Second Language.

Introduction

Learning language as a second language or foreign language generally has purpose for communication. Malaysian Ministry of Education also emphasizes this when highlighting subjects of Arabic communication at the primary and secondary schools. However, in order to ensure that teaching and learning of languages could be implemented effectively and will achieve the outlined objectives, several pre-conditions should be taken into account in which it includes the application of language, interactive learning methods that will create a conducive environment as well as a mechanism to promote motivation to develop intended communication skills. Hence, this study proposes a technique that involves all those aspects and it is so-called as Role-play.

Role-playing is a language activity that involves simulating behavior of a person who is given a particular role in a particular situation. It provides an opportunity and space to students for simulating themselves in the realities of life situations and practice what they have studied in the foreign language intensively in order to improve their communicative competence. Livingstone (1983) defines the role-playing as an interactive teaching style that involves classroom activities to provide a space to students for applying the language that they have learned at their fullest potential seems that they are outside the classroom. It also involves an imagination that they are either their own selves or others in a certain circumstance (Ments, 1999). Meanwhile Al-Mutawa & Kailani (1989) view role-playing as a technique that gives students some opportunities to practice new structures in the context of applying communication in a natural way.

Many studies have been conducted by scholars regarding the application of role-playing technique in the process of teaching and learning (Joyce and Weil (2007) and Krish (2001) identify the advantages of applying this technique from the aspect of increasing the level of communication skills among students. This is done by enhancing their interaction in the classroom and the motivating them to learn. This view is supported by Azani et.al (2012). For them, this is because the students need to ignore their shyness that becomes the main factor contributing to the communication difficulties. The students will also be actively involved in the learning process that requires them to listen, compose and recall the dialogue script, make discussion and thus present their respective roles. Acting activities have been proven also could develop psycholinguistic capacity of students namely attitude, personality and motivation toward the language taught.

In fact, students are competent in the Arabic language verbally are those who apply active language learning strategies which include always using the Arabic language inside and outside the classroom, always involve in activities outside the classroom and do not feel ashamed to communicate using Arabic although the structure of language used being problematic (Sueraya, 2011). The implementation of this role-playing is considered as an effective method of teaching Arabic language. It could be concluded that this technique is able to give positive impact on communication competencies and the level of confidence in mastering a foreign language among students.

Statement of Problem

It is claimed that oral proficiency among Malay students majoring in Arabic is still unsatisfactory Sueraya et.al (2010). The most significant problems faced by the students can be categorized into three main aspects, namely in terms of mastery of vocabulary, grammatical errors and low level of motivation. Pertaining to mastery of vocabulary, Azman & Soon (2010a) identify that the lack of vocabulary becomes the main factor contributing to the inability of students to be competence in speaking Arabic and thus prevent the communication process. Ashinida (2012) claims that this leads to students are not able to speak well and failed to convey the message clearly. Consequently, the students feel frustrated, lack of confidence, inferiority and ashamed to be laughed by others if they do any mistakes in that language. Azani I et.al (2012) mention that among other problems associated with vocabulary are removing vocabulary which are

necessary in the sentence structure, using inappropriate vocabulary but inserting unnecessary vocabulary in that sentence structure.

The problem of language structure or grammar is frequently encountered by AL students, even though it is basic in speaking skills. There are several mistakes done by students while speaking Arabic, that is the use of the idhafah (Possessions) term, imperative sentences, verbs, subjects and predicates, proper and common nouns as well as morphological errors. (Azman & Pa, 2012). This problem may also happens unconsciously among speakers because they are less concerned about the use of Arabic words or sentences (Nadwah & Nadhilah, 2014)

Sueraya et.al (2010) identifies two major prerequisite in ensuring students to be able to master the communication skills properly which are internal and external. The internal prerequisite refers to the willingness of students to speak AL consistently, have passion to speak, high self-confidence, courage, mental readiness, discipline and have the language prerequisite such as knowledge about vocabulary, wide reading, proficient in grammar used for speaking. While the external precondition refers to a factor that support the process of communication skills among AL students like environment and ample opportunity to practice to train them in speaking Arabic. In addition, the difficulties faced by students in oral skills is due to the obstacles in creating an authentic environments and communicating with native-speaker (Mat et.al, 2010). As a consequence, the students become less motivated to speak using Arabic language not like English.

Sueraya et.al (2010) once again reveals the main problem faced by students who are learning Arabic is resulted from the practice of traditional teaching methods. This causes them to be able to read, write and listen to Arabic well but quite weak in communication skills. This problem statement is also supported by earlier studies conducted by Tirmizi (1997), Ismail (1999), Anida (2003), Amilruddin (2003) Khalid (2004), Zawawi et.al (2005), Sitiikbal (2006) and Mat Taib Pa (2006). In another study, Ahmad Fikri (1995) mentions that in teaching communication, teachers have found out that students are facing problems in various aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, morphology and sentence. The most problematic aspect is the vocabulary and grammar, however, there is no more specific study about this problem especially for students of higher education institutions, particularly in the field of Arabic. Therefore, this study is significant to be carried out in order to investigate the problems in teaching Arabic communication in the aspect of vocabulary and grammar.

Based on the above mentioned research problem, the study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the use role-playing technique in teaching Arabic communication

Methodology

This research is a quantitative study in which data were collected through the instrument of questionnaires which are distributed before and after the activity. At the first meeting session, the students were given a set of questionnaire that covers 4 items namely their background, interests, perceptions towards Arabic language and existing weaknesses. Then, they were given a briefing on how the courses will be conducted throughout the semester. It is noted that the speak skill is a form of verbal interaction that involves the process of meaning, ideas, feelings, information and messages that have been addressed to whom and for what purpose (Brown,

1987). Subsequently, they were assigned a specific topic for every week and they were asked to play their respective roles according to what they have understood based on a given topic.

They were given sufficient time to prepare the text, memorize the dialogue script and practice their play. A well preparation is vital, so that errors can be reduced when performing their tasks. This is because Arabic language is a foreign language that is learned in its non-real context (not learning Arabic in Arab countries), thus, it is not fair if the students were asked to perform their tasks spontaneously (Mehnert, 1998). They were required to perform the play in topics given in every fortnight in front of the class. The teacher recorded their presentation for the purpose of doing corrections and were discussed in the next coming class throughout the semester. Upon the completion of their assignments, they were given another set of questionnaire in order to investigate their responses toward such kind of learning process.

30 students had been selected randomly to involve in this study. They were 9 male and 21 female students. Their selection was based on the reason that they were learning speaking skill in an Arabic Language course namely *Al-Muhadathah I*. This course is compulsory for each student in the faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies, University Sultan Zainal Abidin during their first semester of study. Generally, they have a good basic knowledge of Arabic language because they learnt the language more than 5 years. They also showed high interest in learning Arabic language. However, in term of speaking skill, they were less capable to speak Arabic well and lack of confidence to speak the language.

Results and Findings

The data gathered was analyzed with the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 7.5. "Reliability Alpha-Scale Analysis" Test was performed on all items of the questionnaire and the result was 0.86 which indicates high reliability. The study found that using role-play during the teaching and learning of Arabic language can enhance speaking skill among the students. The technique helps them to increase their vocabulary and they felt more confident to speak Arabic language.

Table 1: The distribution of respondents by gender

		Number of Respondents (NR)	Percentage of Respondents TR*
Sex	Male	9	30.0
	Female	21	70.0
	Total	30	100.0

Table 1 showed the distribution of respondents by gender, which shows 70% of female respondents involved in the study. In contrast, there were 30% of male respondents participated in the study.

Table 2: Distribution of the previous school of respondents

Categories of Schools	Number of Respondents (Nr)	Percentage of Respondents TR*
Arabic Religious Secondary School	4	13.3
Religious Secondary School	12	40.0
National Religious Secondary School	9	30.0
National Secondary School	3	10.0
Private Religious School	2	6.7
Total	30	100.0

Table 2 indicated that there were 5 categories of schools that had been attended by the respondents. 13.3% of them attended Arabic Religious Secondary School, 40% of them were from Religious Secondary School, 10% of them attended National Secondary School and only 6.7% of them were from Private Religious School.

Table 3: The experience of learning Arabic language

Years in Learning Arabic	Number of respondents (NR)	Percentage of respondents TR*
1-5 Years	15	50.0
6-10 Years	3	10.0
11-15 Years	9	30.0
15 Years And Above	3	10.0
Total	30	100.0

Table 3 showed the learning experience in Arabic language, the respondents had been categorized into 4 categories; a) 1-5 years (50% of respondents) , b) 6-10 years (10% of respondents), c) 11-15 years (30% of respondents), and d) 15 years and above (10% of respondents). This shows that most of the respondents had a long experience in learning Arabic language.

Table 4 highlighted the first part of the research that is related to the respondents' interest in learning Arabic language. It is about 12 items had been developed to examine

respondents' interest towards the language and the findings of the survey recorded an overall mean of 3.88. The mean showed most of the respondents have a high level of interest while learning Arabic language. The mean of the first item also indicated that majority of the respondents enjoyed the learning of Arabic language and they have a good perception towards the language.

Table 4: The distribution of students' interest in learning Arabic

No	Item	Scale (%)					Min
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	I enjoy learning AL	3.3%	6.7%	26.7%	36.7%	63.3%	4.50
2	I think learning AL is difficult and inconvenient	30.0%	36.7%	26.7%	0%	6.7%	2.16
3	I would like to speak in AL	10.0%	0%	3.3%	23.3%	63.3%	4.30
4	I would like to read the Arabic text properly	10.0%	0%	3.3%	10.0%	76.7%	4.56
5	I would like to listen to the Arabic speech with a good understanding	3.3%	3.3%	0%	20.0%	73.3%	4.70
6	I want to improve my weaknesses in AL	3.3%	3.3%	0%	6.7%	86.7%	4.70
7	I must abide to the rules and regulations of the university.	16.7%	26.7%	23.3%	26.7%	6.7%	2.80
8	AL subjects are boring	53.3%	23.3%	3.3%	13.3%	6.7%	1.96
9	I am always waiting for the AL subjects.	3.3%	6.7%	26.7%	46.7%	16.7%	3.66
10	I was thrilled to speak in AL	6.7%	3.3%	0%	20.0%	70.0%	4.43
11	I would like to recite the Quran with a deeper understanding	6.7%	3.3%	0%	20.0%	70.0%	4.56
12	I think AL should be learned for a brighter career opportunities	6.7%	0%	0%	43.3%	50.0%	4.30
Min							3.88

Most of the respondents expressed their desire to speak Arabic and understand Arabic text properly. Furthermore, they really want to improve their weaknesses in Arabic. Based on the findings of the study, 50% of the respondents were agreed that mastering Arabic language can ensure better career opportunities for them. It was also found that one of their main purposes to learn Arabic language is to understand the Quran better. It was clearly understood when 70% of respondents chose 'strongly agree' for the related item.

However, there were also a few students who perceived negatively towards Arabic language. This can be found in the second item when they were asked whether learning Arabic is difficult and inconvenient, 6.7% of the respondents chose strongly agree. Similarly, when asked whether learning Arabic language course is boring, 6.7% of them also strongly agreed. The mean value of this item is 2.16. Although it is lower, but the message conveyed cannot be

neglected because some efforts need to be taken to tackle the problem.

Table 5 is regarding the second part of the research survey that emphasized students' perception towards Arabic language. Most of them perceived positively towards the language, and they enjoyed their learning in the Arabic language course. This can be seen in the second item when 53.3% of them agreed that learning Arabic is fun and fascinating.

The respondents also have good expectations in learning Arabic language. They were clear about their purpose in learning the language. This can be found in the sixth item when 20% of the students chose 'strongly agree' and 23.3% of them chose 'agree'. 50% of them chose the medium scale which indicates that they did not have a high expectation to master the speaking skill when they learn Arabic language.

Table 5: students' response towards the teaching technique used

No	Item	Scale (%)					Min
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	AL class is a troublesome class	43.3%	23.3%	16.7%	10.0%	6.7%	2.13
2	AL class is the most enjoyable class	3.3%	3.3%	13.3%	53.3%	26.7%	3.96
3	AL class is a boring class	40.0%	23.3%	16.7%	13.3%	6.7%	2.23
4	This class make me feel more confident to speak in AL	0%	3.3%	26.7%	33.3%	36.7%	4.03
5	I can master AL with good proficiency	0%	3.3%	40.0%	36.7%	20.0%	3.73
6	I could speak AL fluently	0%	6.7%	50.0%	23.3%	20.0%	3.56
7	I will be more confident in speaking AL.	3.3%	6.7%	23.3%	40.0%	26.7%	3.80
8	I can carry on learning activities in AL	0%	3.3%	30.0%	40.0%	26.7%	3.90
9	I am expecting a fun learning of AL	3.3%	6.7%	3.3%	23.3%	63.3%	4.36
10	I can easily understand the Quran	0%	0%	13.3%	43.3%	43.3%	4.30
11	My confidence to speak AL increase	3.3%	3.3%	20.0%	50.0%	23.3%	3.86
12	I am no longer afraid to speak AL	0%	3.3%	40%	33.3%	23.3%	3.76
13	The lecturer does not fully give opportunities for me to speak Arabic	0%	0%	30.0%	50%	20%	3.90
14	I will get high marks in tests and examinations conducted AL	3.3%	3.3%	10.0%	43.3%	40.0%	4.13
15	I am grateful if I just passed my AL examination and test	13.3%	10.0%	26.7%	26.7%	23.3%	3.36
16	I can expand AL skills my career	0%	3.3%	3.3%	46.7%	53.3%	4.36
17	AL that will be taught not only use teacher centered approach	3.3%	6.7%	6.7%	63.3%	20.0%	3.90
18	I am able to improve my grammar	0%	0%	3.3%	56.7%	40.0%	4.36
19	AL learning will not be boring	63.3%	16.7%	6.7%	6.7%	6.7%	1.76
20	A lot of creative activities will be conducted in AL class later	3.3%	6.7%	6.7%	33.3%	50.0%	4.20
Min							3.54

In addition to the above, most of the respondents agreed that student centered approach should be used in the teaching and learning process of Arabic language. They also expected more creative activities will be conducted to enhance their learning in the classroom. This expectation can be referred to the item no. 20.

The final part of research had been shown in Table 6 that consists of 14 items related to the weaknesses and problems faced by students in learning Arabic. The overall mean obtained in this section is 3:02 at the low level and this indicates that the students do not have a lot of problems in learning Arabic and they also do not feel that they are too weak in AL.

Table 6: Disadvantages faced by students

No	Item	Scale (%)					Min
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	My vocabulary is very limited	3.3%	6.7%	20.0%	33.3%	36.7%	3.93
2	It is not important for me to speak in AL	36.7%	43.3%	3.3%	13.3%	3.3%	2.03
3	I was not given sufficient opportunity to speak in AL	16.7%	33.3%	33.3%	13.3%	3.3%	2.53
4	I feel shy to speak in AL	13.3%	10.0%	56.7%	10.0%	10.0%	2.93
5	I feel inferior to speak in AL	3.3%	20.0%	40.0%	26.7%	10.0%	3.20
6	I want to improve my weaknesses in AL.	13.3%	46.7%	26.7%	6.7%	6.7%	2.46
7	I am speechless whenever I want to speak Arabic	10.0%	23.3%	46.7%	13.3%	6.7%	2.83
8	I do not know when and where to start speaking in AL.	6.7%	10.0%	50.0%	20.0%	13.3%	3.23
9	I am not confident to speak in AL.	6.7%	13.3%	56.7%	16.7%	6.7%	3.03
10	I am weak in AL grammar	10%	10%	46.7%	16.7%	16.7%	3.20
11	The atmosphere is not supporting me to speak in AL	10.0%	16.7%	26.7%	30.0%	16.7%	3.26
12	Students' association does not really use AL.	3.3%	20.0%	23.3%	36.7%	16.7%	3.43
13	Most of the subjects taught here using other than AL	16.7%	20.0%	33.3%	23.3%	6.7%	2.83
14	AL is taught and used in AL class only	6.7%	23.3%	13.3%	36.7%	20.0%	3.40
Min							3.02

However, it should also be emphasized that the problems or weaknesses among students in learning the Arabic language such as the absence of an Arabic environment that can stimulate students to be proficient that is the 11th item is about 16.7% of the respondents who chose strongly agree with this statement, while 30% of them were agreed. In addition, 20% of them strongly agreed that AL is used in the classroom and it is supported by 30% agree.

Among other problems faced by the students is that they do not have the confidence to speak in AL, this may be due to their inability to master in grammar, they are not given sufficient opportunity to develop their potential in the Arabic language.

Conclusion

The study shows that role play technique helped to improve communication skills among AL students. In addition to these techniques, a lecturer can integrate it with other techniques to accommodate the limitations and weaknesses found in the technique. Selection techniques which are students centered and activities that provide space and opportunities for students to actively participate in the activities are intended to ensure that students are able to communicate well in a second language.

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