

The relationship between teaching conversation through role play and speaking

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Abstract

Role-plays provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate how to use English in real life situations and make them focus more on communication than on grammar. Oral presentations like conversations are a great way for students to practice their English skills. Therefore, this paper makes an attempt to investigate whether teaching conversation through role play affects the students' speaking development. The participants were included 50 Iranian junior high students in Iran. The findings showed that participants who received the treatment demonstrated 21% improvement in speaking skill. Thus, the findings suggested that teaching conversation through role play is supposed to be an effective technique in promoting students' speaking ability.

Key terms: role-play, conversation, speaking development, teaching, communicative needs

1. INTRODUCTION

Role-plays provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate how to use English in real life situations and make them focus more on communication than on grammar. Engaging the students in role-play teaching encourages them to take an active role in the process of learning (Enyedi & Medgyes, 1998). Also, it creates realistic learning environment in which the students can learn the materials better (Van Ments, 1989). As a matter of fact, role plays can be an effective tool for creating an active communication among people in an educational manner. They are ways for people to be empowered to express themselves in a safe and supportive setting (Bluebird, 2001). Role-playing may also refer to role training where people rehearse situations in preparation for a future performance and to improve their abilities within a role (Andrew Rilstone, 1994).

There are numerous definitions about role-play. Morris (1989) states that role-play is any speaking activity when you either put yourself into somebody else's shoes, or when you stay in your own shoes but put yourself into an imaginary situation! The definition used for this study is from Aronson and Carlsmith who "described the role playing study as 'an experiment in which the subject is asked to behave as if he [or she] were a particular person in a particular situation' (1968, p. 26).

According to Brown (2001), "role-play minimally involves (a) giving a role to one or more members of a group and (b) assigning an objective or purpose that participants must

accomplish." Brown suggested that role-play can be conducted with a single person, in pairs or in groups, with each person assigned a role to accomplish an objective. (p. 183)

Stern (1983) suggested "role playing helps the individual to become more flexible" and "develop a sense of mastery in many situations." (p. 213). Also, she claimed that through role play, L2 learners can experience many kinds of situations in which they will use the language; and as they develop a sense of mastery in them, they should be able to apply the language more easily to new situations. (p.213)

Oral presentations like conversations are a great way for students to practice their English skills. The extra pressure of knowing they're going to be in front of the classroom provides students with some great extrinsic motivation for staying on task and learning the materials better. This study is started by going through presentation basics with the group, then assigning an oral presentation every week.

In this paper, it is decided to express the effect(s) of teaching dialogue by using role play technique. Also, the activities that involve the students in the learning process will be discussed. Thus, various effective activities will be used for teaching English real conversations to EFL students in order to not only teach the techniques effectively but also apply them practically.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to help students improve their speaking and overall communicative skills, some exercises are designed and conducted that include several role play activities for the students to practice and use English in a more meaningful way as a practical language. "Role-playing exercises come in many forms and educators should not be reluctant to experiment with their style and structure" (McDaniel, 2000). He also claims that there are four basic elements that are essential for the success of any role-playing activity. The first element is that the activity should build on knowledge the students already possess about a particular historical context. A teacher cannot expect students to role-play about something they have no prior knowledge. The second element is to design the roles to maximize students' involvement and conflict. This conflicting perspective would be considered an essential part of the students involving in the teaching process. The third element is to set up a specific situation. Do not let the students go without giving them a focal point for debate. The last element is the instructor's limited involvement and willingness to be flexible. The instructor needs to guide the students along, but not overbear the conversation and let the students take their own path to understanding (McDaniel, 2000, pp, 357-360). By following these four basic elements, the entire educators can have a successful role-playing activity during their teaching process.

Role-playing activities introduce "real-world" situations to the students (Oberle, 2004). Van Ments (1983) identified three general advantages to role-playing activities: first, they are positive and safe in dealing with attitudes and feelings; second, they provide a safe venue for expressing personal and sometimes unpopular attitudes and opinions; and third, "role-playing" is highly motivating as the majority of students enjoy these types of activities and become more inspired learners.

Ladousse (2004) indicated that "role play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation." (p.7) In addition, he pointed out that role play encourages peer learning and sharing the responsibility for learning between teacher and student. He suggested role play to be "perhaps the most flexible technique in the range" of communicative techniques, and with suitable and effective role-play exercises, teachers can meet an infinite variety of communicative needs. (Ladousse, 2004, p. 7)

Regarding the significance of these communicative needs that were discussed earlier made the researchers think of this issue as a critical and challenging topic. Considering the issue of the learners' development through teaching conversation by role play technique was such a new topic to discuss. The task of the teacher of foreign languages is to enable the students to progress gradually from teacher/course book controlled utterances to complete linguistic autonomy. So, the present study attempts to explore the use of role play technique as a teaching strategy in ESL students in Iranian junior highs.

Research Question:

This study aims to answer the following question:

"Does teaching conversation through role play have any effect on the students' speaking development in Iranian junior high students?"

According to the hypothesis, teaching conversation through role play affects positive on the students' speaking development in Iranian junior high students.

3. METHOD AND MATERIALS

3.1. The Design of the Study

This is an experimental research, in which the respondents were divided into two groups of 'experimental' and 'control'. For the experimental group, students were taught the dialogue by using role-play while, in the control group, students were taught the dialogue by using traditional method. After accomplishing the dialogue, a post-test was given to both groups in order to evaluate their progress.

3.2. The purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effect of using role play in Iranian ESL students at high school level to better communicate in second language. It was decided that the best method for this investigation is to adopt qualitative research design. Wallace (2008) identifies qualitative research as an investigative method for understanding a phenomenon that elicits human condition and social problem. In addition, the researcher is the main instrument of analyzing the data. Personally, the researcher is interested in this topic because he has been taught in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context where it was very difficult to gain access to a fluent communicative of English language.

3.3. *The Participants of the Study*

There would be two 25-student groups, naming groups A and B, participating in this study which all of them were chosen by making the best utilization of interview technique.

3.4. *The Location of the Study*

This study will be conducted in Iranian ORIAS (the organization of Islamic Azad University Schools named SAMA in Persian) and Private high schools. They are ranked among the best high schools according to The SCIENTIST magazine (translated as DANESHMAND in Persian) that are annually published in Iran.

3.5. *The Data Collection Method*

As Merriam (1988) explained, interview utilization is one of the major sources to obtain qualitative data from subjects. Hence, the method of conducting an interview is one of the most popular means to investigate and inquire data from one phenomenon. The interviews will be conducted individually with fifty students (twenty five males and twenty five females) who will be asked to participate in the study ranging in age from 14 to 16 in order to gain a deep understanding of the subjects' English background and the level of communicative fluency. Mostly, these students own similar English backgrounds; and, they were selected in this way in order to make the results of the study more reliable.

4. **The Procedure of the Study**

In group A, that is our control group, a conversation, included in appendix I, is taught to the learners by utilizing traditional method of conversation. In group B, which is the experimental group, the same material is released to the learners by utilizing role play technique of teaching conversation. This difference between the teaching methods of these two groups is considered as the treatment. After teaching the conversation, a same test, included in appendix II, would be administered among these two groups. This test includes both communicative and practical goals. Simple comparisons of the results show that group B had been succeeded more than group A that lacks treatment.

5. **Data Analysis and Findings**

In this study, the authors are concerned with whether teaching conversation through role play differs from teaching conversation in traditional method in terms of the students' speaking development. Having to say this, the researchers released a pre-test presenting the primary students speaking development scores.

Table 1: the results of pre- and post-test regarding treatment

No	Group	Pre-test	Action taken (treatment)	Post-test	Differences
1	Control	69%	Teaching dialogue in traditional method	70%	1 %
2	Experimental	68%	Teaching dialogue through role-play	89%	21%

As the table 1 presents, both groups A and B acted rather similarly on the pre-test which groups A and B scored 69 percent and 68 percent, respectively. The treatment was supposed to cause the

students' speaking to be developed. Afterwards, the participants participated in the post-test, as the table 1 manifested, the experimental group (B) obtained an astonishing results (21 %).

6. Conclusion

All skills are equally important more so speaking skill as you have to communicate with people in person at your job and in your normal life. There are many more wonderful activities and suggestions for speaking development. Regarding the importance of speaking skill, the authors made an attempt to provide an academic research to promote this for EFL learners. The researchers tried to provide a significant teaching and learning framework for speaking development. Due to the mentioned reasons, and also the finding of this research, we concluded that teaching conversation through role-play, as just one of the numerous helpful techniques, is of utmost importance in speaking development.

Study Limitations

This study is done in a context in which English is spoken as a foreign language. Seemingly, the authors do not believe whether the results of this paper could be generalized to other contexts or not. It must be noted that the study participants were the teenagers whom are considered English foreign language learners. Other groups of learners can be studied in the target situation as well. The teacher who teaches the conversation should be native or native-like. The conversation also must be a piece of an authentic text or context.

Study Recommendations for Further Researches

The authors do recommend the following items for potentials for the other researches:

- Since speaking development has been lately considered as one those important issues in the scope of *Language Skills and Theories*, the effect of other speaking techniques like rotation technique, back-ward build-up drills, etc. on the speaking development could be investigated as well.
- The development of speaking skills on the other skills and components, or a blend of both, is also a matter of more study and investigations.
- Slang languages, street languages and colloquial conversations may be introduces as a new context for those who are interested in such co-texts since the conversation mentioned in the appendix uses a simple language.

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