
The Impact of Role-Play in Fostering Speaking among the EFL Learners

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to ascertain if role-play helps in fostering speaking among GFP students in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. Three groups of students belonging to different levels were selected for this study. The students were given topics based on the themes of their text books. The students were asked to work in pairs or threes, choose a situation of their liking and prepare a dialogue. The students were given a day for preparation. On the assigned date, the role-play was conducted and the students acted out the roles they had prepared. After the completion of the activity, the students were given a feedback form. The analysis of students' feedback showed that students not only enjoyed the activity, but also benefitted from preparing and playing the role. The students opined that the activity helped them to learn new vocabulary and gain confidence in speaking.

Keywords: Speaking, Role-play, Interaction, EFL learners

Background

Speaking is one of the most important skills that a student need to master. As one of the productive skills along with writing, speaking helps in communication of ideas and leads to interaction among people in the society by the use of language. Speaking as a productive skill consists of production of systematic verbal utterances so as to convey the meaning of what's being said (Bailey cited in Nunan, 2003). By learning to speak in English, students learn to express language communicatively and meaningfully, which then leads to meaningful interaction.

Research has shown that a majority of EFL learners face difficulties in mastering this receptive skill of language learning. There are many reasons as to why the students feel inhibited in speaking in the class. One of the most common reasons is that a student's ability to speak

English is equated to his/her learning of language. Students are always conscious that they will make mistakes or they will become the focus of negative attention in class or they are simply shy to speak. In addition to these difficulties, Nguyen (2017) believes that the lack of up-to-date information, uninteresting tasks, lack of self-assurance, fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation are reasons that hinder students from progress of their speaking skills. Moreover, the lack of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension skills are major barriers for students to practice speaking (Yuliana, Kristiawan, and Suhratie, 2014).

In this context, it is imperative that a teacher chooses right activities and teaches them in the right way, where it is flexible enough to adapt and change as per the needs of the class. If this is done, then speaking activities in class can really become fun and the class will be a dynamic place where students learn in a secure and comfortable environment. One of the easiest ways this can be done is to introduce role-play in daily classroom activities. It is one of the techniques that is considered to be highly effective in developing speaking skill.

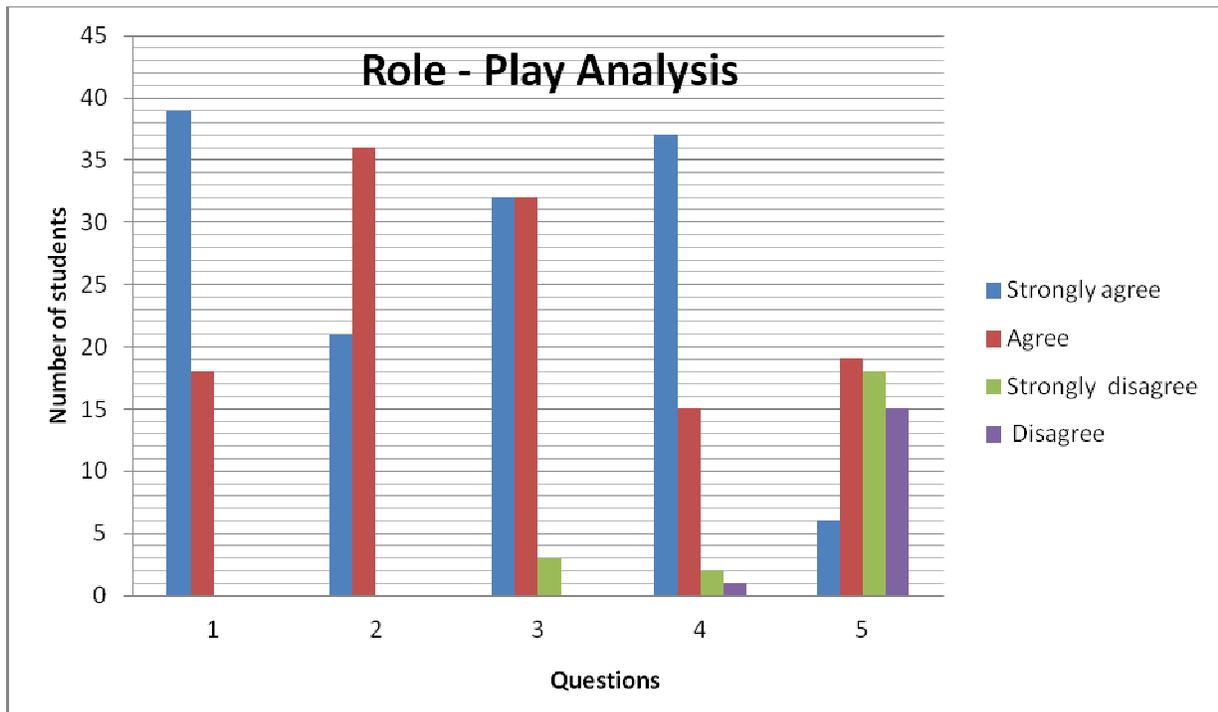
Role-play is defined as a “technique that allows students to explore realistic situations by interacting with other people in a managed way in order to develop experience and trial different strategies in a supported environment” Clover, 2014. It is also defined as “any speaking activity when you either put yourself into somebody else's shoes, or when you stay in your own shoes, but put yourself into an imaginary situation” Nguyen, 2017.

Role-play has become an integral part of language learning. According to Nunan, 2001, role-play is a part of communicative language learning as students get actively involved in making conversations which enable them to be more independent and creative. Brown in (Yuliana, Kristiawan, and Suhratie, 2014) agrees with that by stating that the role play activities enhance students’ creativity because they have to come up with their own language and ideas that should be suitable to the given situation. Incorporation of role-play brings variety to a regular classroom and provides immense opportunities to students for the production of language. Aliakbari and Jamalvandi in (Alabsi, 2016), claim that role play can make it easy for students to use the language in similar situations in the real life. Harmer in (Nguyen, 2017) agrees with them and he adds that role play tasks motivate students to express their opinions frankly without feeling shy

or unconfident. Furthermore, “role play becomes a solution for making the students the center and subject of learning not the object anymore” Tompkins in (Arham, 2016).

In this context, the role of a teacher becomes considerably important as someone who can stimulate and lead students to use the language in real situation. Nguyen, 2017 suggested a number of factors that make role play effective. He believes that preparing learners by making them think as if they are not students while playing the role, but “real participants” before starting is the main factor for success. Besides this, providing students with the suitable and key vocabulary, explaining the aim of the task and giving them the appropriate time for preparation are other factors that play a crucial rule in the effectiveness of the role play. Nguyen also believes that after the role play is conducted, there should be a follow up from the teacher.

Analysis



An analysis of the students’ feedback clearly indicates that student motivation was heightened during the role-play. In addition, students’ performance in speaking showed considerable improvement during the role-play compared to their speaking performance in regular classroom.

Most of the students were in agreement with the fact that role-play helps them to learn new vocabulary words that they would be exposed to in their real life and also that role-play gives them an opportunity to learn to behave in a similar situation outside of the classroom. Surprisingly, the number of students who preferred role-play to presentation was more than what was expected. This means that students would like opportunities to be challenged as preparing for enacting a role-play on an authentic real life situation is more demanding than making presentations. Nevertheless, there were some students who liked to do presentations than enacting out a real life situation which was almost equal to the number of students who felt shy to enact in a role-play.

The students' comments ranged between wanting more role play practices or other similar activities in the classroom to being exposed to creating authentic situations in the classroom based on real life situations. Some students suggested that they need more help during the role play with suitable vocabulary that is needed for the role as well as other realia needed to play the part. Some students also preferred choosing everyday situations in or out of college in role play and practicing within the same group. They also recommended that more time should be given to prepare for their roles and also to practice each role. In addition, they requested teachers to be more patient as they would obviously make mistakes in pronouncing some of the words incorrectly. On the whole, students found the activity engaging and creative.

Conclusion

Speaking has always been a challenge to EFL students. Many of them find it difficult to express themselves in different situations. Most of the time they lack the correct expressions as well as much needed confidence. The main aim of the present study was to explore the effects of using role play strategy on students' ability to carry on with the simple task of asking and responding in real life situations. The study was based on three different group levels of Foundation Program EN1, EN3 and EN4, each with a different topic. The topics were aligned with their text book themes, which provided the students with the appropriate vocabulary needed in the role play. The students were given a day to prepare and were told about the type of activity which would be practiced in the classroom. Armed with the right tools, vocabulary and preparation, students took

their roles in the classroom with their classmates, and the results were surprising if not overpowering.

Role play has always been fun at school, and might not be taken seriously at higher levels. However, the response and the diligence that the three groups showed was highly encouraging. Students went beyond their role, especially the EN4 group. The group was able to carry on the part farther than what they had prepared for. Time seemed to pass very fast for them and they felt they can still add to their part, actually that group took more than 20 minutes extra than the time set for the activity.

The three groups found the speaking activity fun and creative. As stated by A. Alabsi the role-play strategy is far more pleasant and engaging than the traditional method, which is conducive to highly motivated students and a more creative learning environment (Piaget, 1972; Vincent & Shepherd, 1998; Sasaki, 1998; Clemens, 1998; Huang and Shan, 2008; Liu & Ding, 2009; and Aliakbari and Jamalvandi, 2010).

Students might not have the privilege to prepare and have the correct set of vocabulary when speaking, in real life situations however, role play has proven to be one of the most effective practices so far. Studies have proven the effective results of role play in the classroom environment. It carries the students to a whole new learning experience full of excitement and joy which was clearly demonstrated in the role-play activity and the feedback that we got from our students.

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