

The Effect of Role-Playing Techniques on the Speaking Skills of Students at University

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Abstract—Students must master the skill of speaking in order to be able to communicate effectively in a foreign language. The fear of making errors and a lack of motivation are just a few reasons for students' difficulty in speaking. Role-Playing is used to help students overcome speaking difficulties. This study aims to determine the efficacy of role-playing in teaching speaking to second-grade students at the University of Sumer's College of Basic Education and determine whether there is a significant difference in speaking achievement between students taught with and without role play. The data were collected in 2021 by applying the quasi-experimental method in which two groups were involved in pre-test and post-test. The research consisted of forty-six students from two classes. The study indicates that the student's speaking score is improving. As a result, role-playing benefits students by offering an opportunity to struggle with oral communication. The results showed a significant improvement in the speaking skill of the experimental group. The students taught through the role-play method performed better than those taught through the grammar-translation method. It can be concluded that role-play significantly affects students' speaking skills. These findings have positive implications for implementing role-playing techniques at the University of Sumer.

Index Terms—foreign language, speaking, role-playing, grammar-translation, University of Sumer

I. INTRODUCTION

In addition to their native language, obtained at birth, some people elect to study a second language. This is especially likely for those who belong to a linguistic minority or whose native tongue is not utilized in national or international communication. While Mandarin has many native speakers globally (China's vast population), English is the most common second language. There is now overwhelming evidence that English has become a global lingua franca, a common international language of trade and communications globally. Mandarin (China), Hindi (India), Russian (Eastern Europe and Central Asia), and Spanish (Latin America) all have a significant presence in various regions of the world, but with a limited influence and fewer second-language speakers than native speakers. If English has a rival, it is French, which is used more as a second language than a first language and is spoken in many countries. A hundred years ago or so, French was a dominating worldwide language, but its reach has dropped dramatically (Grenier & Zhang, 2021).

According to Rashid and Jafar (2015), the colonisers' language was utilised for extended periods in most Arab countries, and English was taught to Arab children. The British Mandate for Iraq highlighted the significance of English education in the country in 1921. Due to the fact that the language and culture of the coloniser are typically forced on the colonised, teaching English in Iraq became a high priority. Most of the obstacles to English instruction in Iraq relate to environmental concerns and the educational system.

In today's globalized world, communication is critical to success in practically every field. Language is a means of communication. It is conceivable that communication might be impossible without using a language. That is, communication with others involves language. Nowadays, English is often regarded as the world's language Franca. It is used to communicate with people from all around the globe. In this context, the necessity of speaking ability in English education becomes apparent. Speaking ability is the most critical to acquire while learning a second language (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021).

Iraq has the exact English language needs as the rest of the world. Each year, many foreign visitors come to Iraq for various reasons, including business, education, and tourism. Universities attempt to equip their graduates with the

necessary skills to obtain jobs in a society where youth unemployment is higher for educated young. English language skills are crucial for young people in the MENA region to improve their work opportunities (Grajek, 2017). With the introduction of the Internet, English has become a more integral part of communication between individuals speaking various languages and from various nations (Doochin, 2019). As a result, the need for Iraqis to communicate in English is skyrocketing (Al-Mofti & Hussein, 2019).

As a result, the Iraqi government has long encouraged Iraqi students to acquire English from primary school through university. It has made significant efforts to alleviate the issue, but progress has been gradual, putting a damper on overall advances (Al Hamdany, 2018). Despite years of compulsory English classes, Iraqi undergraduates struggle with a lack of speaking skills, translating into low language proficiency (Krebt, 2017).

The problems associated with speaking English as a foreign language are not limited to secondary and high school students; they also exist among university students studying English. Mahdi (2020) stated that Iraqi university students face many difficulties mastering and learning English, lacking several ingredients for language learning. The language teaching methods in Iraq are effortless and insufficient to master the language well. Al Hamdany (2018) stated that the traditional teaching method, i.e., grammar-translation, prevails in Iraq. Although the teaching of English has enhanced, the students remain weak. Speaking skill mainly receives less emphasis as it is the only skill not included in the exams. The focus is primarily on teaching reading and writing besides grammar and vocabulary, questioned in the exam (Elttayef & Hussein, 2017). It is confirmed by (Mhamad & Shareef, 2014) that the grammar-translation method is widely used and impedes Iraqi language learners from attaining skills to take responsibility for their learning and monitor or evaluate themselves. Consequently, most Iraqi learners still find it challenging to speak English (Keong et al., 2015).

In Iraq, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research settled on some textbooks named the 'New Headway' series, published by Oxford and divided into two parts. For university students, there is a student book and a workbook. In light of this decision, students in all Iraq Institutes must experience a 'New Headway' approach (Basheer, 2019). According to letter No. 5/8053 from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in 2018, teaching English for four study semesters and each part of the approved curriculum books is for one study stage, given that it is equivalent to two study units in each stage. As a result, the first stage is assigned to New Headway for Beginners, the second stage to New Headway for Pre-Intermediate, the third stage to New Headway for Intermediate, and the fourth stage to New Headway for Upper-Intermediate.

According to Sencar (2021), the New Headway remains one of the most frequently used course materials in a wide variety of language schools worldwide. One reason for this is that it is often recognized as one of the most adaptable course books to various sociocultural contexts. Even in these days of online and technologically driven learning, the most widely used aid in the classroom, after the board, is still the course book (Egitim & Price, 2020). Sencar noted that the New Headway series, which promotes communicative language instruction and a learner-centred approach, appears to be the most popular choice among English language schools worldwide. Communicative language instruction places a premium on the requirements of learners and is primarily concerned with offering flexibility and response to individual needs. While most coursebooks have a delicate design of learning activities and an appealing appearance, they are more likely to predetermine the learning objectives and provide little room for teachers to customize their lesson activities to match the unique needs of their students. The fact that most coursebooks have a shallow degree of flexibility to meet the varying demands of potential users in various circumstances is in direct opposition to communicative language instruction principles.

As a lecturer in one of the universities, the researcher has noticed that, in Iraqi university classrooms, students are not efficient in their speaking skills. This issue is evidenced through several studies that have been conducted in Iraq, such as (Khalil, 2018). Hence, the situation is problematic and requires some remedy for development and improvement since speaking ability is crucial for learning and teaching English as a Foreign Language (Asa'adi & Asuea'adi, 2018). As a result, new approaches and techniques for teaching speaking must be adopted and implemented.

The study was conducted at the University of Sumer in Iraq with undergraduates eager to enhance their English skills. Using role-playing techniques, experimentation was used in the classroom to help students overcome their difficulty speaking the target language. BENABADJI (2006) stated that students study English because there is a need behind their will. In addition, they want to fulfil specific educational requirements, find employment, continue their education, travel, earn more money, gain access to the culture of an English-speaking country, or acquire another foreign language for enjoyment.

The researcher selected to examine the influence of role-playing techniques on the speaking skills of EFL undergraduates since English language graduates in Iraq have difficulty communicating in English, not only in literary expressions but also in situational conversions of street signs (Hussein & Albakri, 2019). Recently, emphasis has been placed on student-centred education to ensure that every EFL student masters the four language skills (receptive skills such as listening and reading, and productive skills such as speaking and writing) (Abdul-Majeed, 2018). Additionally, the learner must be armed with the skills necessary to push himself beyond the boundaries he establishes for himself.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Leong and Ahmadi (2017), speaking is one of the essential skills to develop and enhance effective communication. In addition, speaking seems to be one of the most challenging skills that students can acquire since it requires, first of all, much practice and also exposure. The authors stated that many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language. Speaking skills are the most challenging skills language learners face in language learning. Speaking is believed to be the most important of the four language skills. Many learners state that they have spent many years studying the English language but cannot speak it appropriately and understandably. Furthermore, using an appropriate technique is possible to improve learners' speaking skills.

According to Rao (2019), the speaking skill is more complex than the other skills, for learners should express their ideas on the spur of the moment. The difficulties of English language learners should be understood, and various techniques can be implemented to improve learners' speaking skills. This is possible if appropriate teaching methods are used. One of the methods that emphasized improving speaking skills is role-playing. It has a significant effect on speaking. Unlike the grammar-translation method, role-play helps the students use many phrases instead of focusing on grammar rules. Role-play develops speaking skills and increases the interaction among second language learners. It makes learners use the language successfully in many aspects of their lives (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021).

Role-playing is a teaching strategy that enables students to engage with the topic in a way that is not possible in a traditional method (Piscitelli, 2020). It requires the students to participate in a play to represent a specific role or character. It is an important way for the students to practice speaking. In addition, this way gives the students chance to communicate with other people provisionally. Role-play is a favourite activity in speaking class. In role-play, students need extra time to prepare what they have to say. The role gives some opportunities for the students to use the script with its difficulties. The teachers can guide the role-play. The responsiveness to the complexity is the technique to decide the score. This technique makes the test-takers more simple, intensive, and responsive (Wulandari et al., 2019).

To establish role-playing as a strategy for language development inside the EFL curriculum, a study of theories of language and ideas of second language acquisition is an absolute necessity. According to Purba (2018), three critical theoretical perspectives are considered when constructing a language teaching technique: structural, functional, and interactional. According to structural theory, language is composed of grammatical units such as phrases, clauses, sentences, and affixes. According to functional theory, language is a mode of communication that can be informative, emotive, persuasive, or social. According to interactional theory, a language is a tool for establishing interpersonal interactions and carrying out social transactions between individuals and society. Each perspective has a distinct role to play in the development of language education approaches. The final two theories lay the theoretical groundwork for Communicative Language Instruction.



Figure 1. Theories of Language

On the other hand, Scarcella and Crookall (1990) review research to reveal how simulation enables second language acquisition. Three learning hypotheses that they discuss are that learners acquire language when they are exposed to enormous amounts of comprehensible input, are actively involved, and have a positive effect (desires, feelings, and attitudes). According to Krashen's (1982) 'comprehensible input theory,' learners gain grammar and vocabulary via exposure to and comprehension of language that is somewhat above their present level of proficiency. Swain (1985) defines comprehensible output as the output that broadens the learner's language vocabulary as he or she works to produce the required meaning precisely and effectively. Scarcella and Crookall (1990) identified another critical aspect for successful language acquisition, which they refer to as the "positive effect." They reviewed the study literature on similar topics offered by numerous scholars, including Krashen (1982), Dulay and Burt (1978), and Schumann (1978).

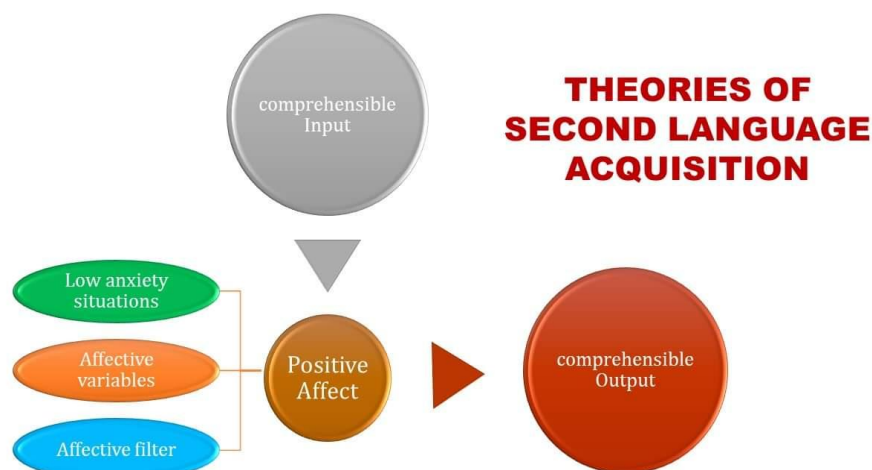


Figure 2. Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Role-playing may be divided into three categories: fully scripted, semi-scripted, and unscripted. All the words are written down in a fully scripted role-play. Each student should know or be able to memorize his or her part (Harper & Morris, 2005). Such a type of role-playing explains the model conversation in the textbook. The main goal of the conversation, after all, is to make each piece of a language meaningful and easy to remember. Low-level students who do not know what is going on in the semi-scripted role play might be able to use this kind of role play, says (Byrne, 1986).

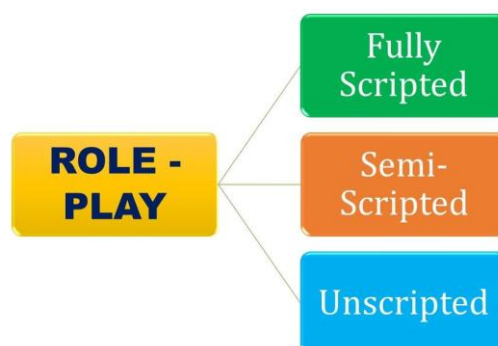


Figure 3. Types of Role-play

There are some missing words in the second role-play, and students should know how to fill in the gaps with words that fit the situation (Livingstone, 1983). So, students can change the main conversation in some way and start their conversation. Such role-playing might be semi-controlled because the teacher or a prescribed textbook gives students language input. However, students also need to choose the materials based on a frame that gives them a real-life context. This type of role-playing can be used with students at the upper-beginner to intermediate level of English proficiency. They should already know the main steps and move to more complex tasks because semi-scripted role-play is less structured and less controlled than fully scripted role-play.

In the third type of role play, in which students are given dialogue keywords (Dickson, 1989), keywords and information, or contexts and objectives in less controlled and structured tasks, students establish a mini-conversation based on the dialogue keywords mentioned previously, materials or contexts are used to fill in gaps (Pi-Chong, 1990). They suggest that non-scripted role play gives an excellent opportunity to use technical knowledge in specific scenarios. Non-scripted role-playing may be beneficial for students in the intermediate to advanced levels because it allows students to engage in unstructured role-playing that sometimes requires unique abilities such as problem-solving.

According to Bawa (2020), it is critical to identify the issue you want learners to solve, the topic for the scenario that best suits the situation, and the entire time allotted for the session to construct a successful role-play session. Establishing these characteristics will provide the groundwork for developing the session. The time constraint will help measure the issue's difficulty while connecting the theme and problem will make it simpler to construct roles/characters that fit. The next phase will be executed, which will need the session to be held in a space large enough for participants to converse easily with one another and with the teacher.

Role-playing entails assuming another person's identity, which is why it is often referred to as pretend-play. It is a valuable and adaptable instrument that aids in the comprehension of theory through practical experience. It might be a deliberate choice to accept a role or an unconscious one to fulfil a societal obligation. It is critical to recognize that role-

playing has its own set of rules and principles that must be followed if you wish to benefit from them. Concentrate on the beginning, be particular in expectations, comprehend the objectives, and look for attainable and concrete outcomes while considering how to make it effective. Role-playing teaches students what will work in a specific situation and what will work against them (Bhasin, 2020), as demonstrated in his article "Role-Playing: Definition, Objectives, and Importance."

Krebt (2017) discovered that role-playing enhanced students' performance on speaking assessments in Iraqi English as a Foreign Language. As a result, the experimental group seemed to succeed due to their involvement and practice of role-playing tactics such as group work and peer collaboration. It follows that if the class is presented as a community that supports one another, it will have the chance to strive toward common goals. This strengthens their capacity to communicate with and comprehend one another, the most acceptable foundation for all learning. Additionally, the present study's findings demonstrate that role-play techniques provide an appealing atmosphere for students to thrive in, resulting in increased attention to learning and motivation to participate in role-play techniques. Through role-playing tactics, students assume a new persona and practice communicating in a foreign language in ordinary situations.

In their research, Sari et al. (2021), the effect of role play on improving students' speaking ability: A library research, investigated how existing literature discusses the effect of role play as one of the teaching techniques on students' speaking ability. In this research, the researcher used library research. Library research can be defined as research that is supposed to collect data and information through journals. In addition, the data that has been found with library research could be the base and primary tool for the researcher. The data was in the form of journals and previous research studies as a primary data source. Through several proven data, role play showed significant improvement for students in learning speaking. The study also revealed that the students were delighted with this technique. It enabled the students to formulate their turns and gave them a better opportunity to improve their English speaking. Those studies revealed that the role play technique is an effective technique to increase students' speaking skills and is one of the teaching speaking methods.

In his research, The Impact of using Role Play Techniques on Improving Pupils' Speaking Skill for Primary School, Rayhan (2014) evaluated the effectiveness of role-playing techniques on improving female students' speaking ability for primary school pupils. According to the findings of this study, the subjects in the experimental groups who were taught using the role-play technique showed considerable improvement in their ability to communicate verbal information. This is based on a statistical comparison of the subjects' scores on both groups of pre-and post-tests, which was conducted. Students appeared to be more involved with the subject in a role-playing class, negotiating with one another and helping one another than they were in a standard lecture setting. The role-playing class also provided an effective method for students to take greater responsibility for their learning and share their knowledge with their classmates.

Permatasari (2016) found that having a role play as one of the activities in the classroom, the students had better speaking skills because they had more opportunities to practice their English. Role-play successfully attracts the students' interest and motivation to participate in the English classroom actively. They did not get bored because role-play provides fun and enjoyable activities. Besides that, the activities in role-playing used some situations related to their future surrounding as a nurse; it made them like having a real conversation in an actual situation and felt like being another person who was they were learning English in the classroom as a student.

Altun (2015) stated that role-play techniques influence the development of speaking skills of language learners. Simply put, the study has proved that role-play techniques provide learners with the necessary components learners need to develop their communicative competence. Role-play techniques present language materials in a natural way to learners. Through repeated exposure to language elements in role-play techniques, learners learn the language incidentally. Furthermore, role-play techniques provide a good opportunity for learners to learn the everyday language. Constant exposure to language elements and everyday language in role-play techniques enables learners to develop vocabulary and language skills. It has been found that role-play techniques naturally present the language items. Hence, learners acquire the language quickly and role-play techniques contribute to language skills and vocabulary development.

III. METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental technique was used, and the authors focused on the pre-and post-tests. Two experimental and control groups would have to implement this technique. The researchers gave the experimental group a pre-test, a treatment session, and a post-test. Fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation were all considered in the assessment process. Nine weeks of treatment were required. Meanwhile, the author administered only a pre-and post-test to the control group. All second-grade students enrolling in the College of Basic Education at the University of Sumer from 2020-2021 in the Arabic language department were included in the study.

Technique of Data Analysis

The researcher collected data by administering a test to students on speaking subjects in a monologue. The tests provided the data for the analysis. The students' grades were classified into two categories. Group A: Scores on pre-and post-tests for students who learned through role-playing. Group B: Pre- and post-test scores of students who learnt without using the role-playing technique. The rubrics would be used to examine the students' speaking abilities, and the researchers would utilize the Paired Sample T-test, with the data being analyzed by the SPSS program. It was utilized to

determine the statistical significance of the difference between pre-and post-test scores for each group. Additionally, the independent T-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two groups.

Validity of the Test

The authors used tests to assess students' speaking abilities to achieve a high degree of content validity. To determine whether the topic for the speaking test was valid, the writers developed the topic for the speaking test using the college's curriculum and English book.

Reliability of the Test

The authors used a speaking rubric to grade the students' speaking ability scores to determine the speaking test's reliability. Additionally, to ascertain the results of the pre-and post-test speaking tests, the authors invited two raters to assess students' speaking abilities in experimental and control classrooms at the College of Basic Education. After acquiring the data, the authors enlisted the assistance of two raters' assistance to collect information about the students' speaking abilities. The writers chose the raters based on their qualifications, including a TOEFL score of 500 or higher and at least five years of experience teaching English. The authors employed inter-rater reliability to determine the test's dependability. The writer linked the students' speaking scores from both raters at this point and recognized the relevance of the inter-rater finding. Additionally, SPSS would be used to examine the calculation.

IV. FINDINGS

Scores were used to collect data for this investigation. The data came from pre-and post-test ratings of speaking ability by two raters. The author selected 40 students as examples. They were separated into experimental and control groups. This article made two significant findings: (1) the outcome of tests (descriptive statistics) and (2) data analysis using the dependent sample t-test (paired sample t-test) and independent sample t-test. The dependent sample t-test (paired sample t-test) was used to determine the following: (1) the significant difference in students' speaking ability attainment before and after role-play instruction. An independent sample t-test was used to ascertain the following: (2) the statistically significant difference in students' performance of speaking skills between the experimental and control groups.

According to the descriptive statistics collected in the experimental group, there was a significant difference in the experimental and control groups' attainment of speaking skills. As can be seen, the lowest pre-test score was .00, the highest was 13.00, and the mean was 7.8696. The post-test score ranged from .00 to 18.00, with the mean being 11.2174. On the other hand, descriptive statistics revealed that the control group's lowest pre-test score was .00, the highest was 18.00, and the mean was 7.2609. The post-test score ranged from .00 to 18.00, with an average of 8.696.

In terms of the paired sample T-test results in the experimental group, the mean score of students' speaking skill achievement in the experimental group's pre-test was 7.8696, with a standard deviation of 3.89993. Meanwhile, in the experimental group's post-test, the mean of the students' speaking skill achievement was 11.2174, with a standard deviation of 5.07182. In the control group, the mean score of students' speaking skill achievement in the pre-test was 7.2609, with a standard deviation of 4.53489, according to the results of the paired sample T-test. Meanwhile, the mean of the control group's students' speaking skill achievement in the post-test was 8.8696, with a standard deviation of 4.62507.

To compare the mean scores of the two groups, the experimental group had a score of 11.2174 while the control group had a score of 8.696. This shows that the experimental group outperformed the control group in overall post-test results. This supports the hypothesis that the experimental group outperformed the control one.

V. INTERPRETATION

According to the findings, the students in the experimental group improved their speaking ability before and after the intervention. It indicates a difference in speaking ability before and after exposure to role play. There was a substantial difference in speaking achievement in the experimental group before and after therapy. The mean difference between pre-test and post-test in experimental conditions demonstrated this. As a result, role play might have significantly increased students' speaking abilities and participation in the teaching and learning environment. When the students acted out the role, they had to understand the character and perceive information about their roles. Furthermore, when teaching role-playing, the teacher employed drills to engage the students in the classroom actively. As a result, it is possible to conclude that role-playing could improve students' oral communication skills in the classroom.

VI. CONCLUSION

According to the research findings, role play is an excellent strategy for developing students' speaking abilities. The result indicates that the mean score for speaking abilities in the experiment and controlled groups is 11.2174 and 8.696, respectively. It may be concluded that the role-play approach aided in developing the learners' speaking abilities. The benefit of using role-play in the EFL classroom is that it helps students build their confidence and inventiveness by motivating them to participate in speaking activities. Students become proficient in English as a result of their regular role-playing exercises. Additionally, it builds vocabulary, which aids in selecting appropriate words for the scenario.

Finally, the study demonstrates that role-play has a significant pedagogical impact on improving students' communication abilities in Iraqi EFL courses.

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