

USING ROLE PLAY TASKS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL PRODUCTION SKILLS

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Rezumat. *Articolul prezintă un studiu a unor practici de utilizare a jocului de rol în vederea dezvoltării abilităților de comunicare a elevilor. Obiectivul fundamental al învățării limbilor străine este achiziționarea și dezvoltarea competențelor necesare pentru o comunicare adecvată situațional și acceptată social. Activitățile comunicative desfășurate în cadrul orelor de limba engleză sunt extrem de utile întrucât ele contribuie la formarea și dezvoltarea de competențe de comunicare și interacțiune. Prin participarea la astfel de activități elevul va fi capabil să utilizeze conștient și adecvat funcțional modalități și tehnici de interacțiune orală în diverse contexte comunicative și va dobândi fluentă în exprimarea în limba engleză prin producerea de texte orale.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *role-play, skill, production, technique, communication*

Introduction

One of the main goals of teaching English as a foreign language is to make pupils able to communicate in the target language. For the effective communication, pupils should be able to speak English fluently. In the speaking class, pupils must be able to speak English. If pupils have an inability to speak English, they will face difficulty in expressing their ideas in classroom activities. Therefore, pupils must have the ability to communicate and share their ideas, opinions and explanations in their classroom and outside the classroom as well. Role play provides an opportunity to pupils to express appropriate language functions correctly in the given roles and situation.

Tompkins (2001) defines role play as “it is one of the classroom teaching techniques that encourages learners to participate actively in the process of learning English. Thus, the foreign language students practice the target language in context similar to real-life situations where stress and shyness are removed” [7].

Role-play is regarded as an effective strategy for animating the atmosphere of teaching and learning English in the classrooms. Implementing role-play has a substantial influence to boost EFL learner’s speaking skill. Roles are determined as a way of identifying as well as labelling a combination of appearances and behaviours. Pupils are encouraged to form expectations on the basis of a person’s appearance, behaviour, and characteristics. They need to predict how this person will behave or act in a given situation. Holt and Kysilka (2012) were of the opinion that role-play techniques could be entertaining and aid in developing learning as these techniques help in improving the communication level amongst the pupils [2].

Role play is the medium which enables the learners to get an idea about different situations through various activities taken from the scenario of real life. According to Qing (2011), “Role play is defined as the projection in real life situations with social activities” [5].

Ments (1999) says, “In a role play each player acts as a part of the social environment of the others and provides a framework in which they can test out their repertoire of behaviours or study the interacting behaviour of the group” [4].

It also helps them acquire speaking skill and oral fluency, which also helps to boost their confidence level. As speaking skill requires more practice and exposure, this technique can play an effective role.

In role play, the teachers give pupils selected topics with selected words and phrases that help them increase their vocabulary. Vocabulary is a key element of learners' understanding and communicative ability in any language. However students of English are observed to face many difficulties with vocabulary, which have been attributed to the widespread use of traditional methods focusing on memorization. Role-play potentially offers an enjoyable way to encourage students to use vocabulary appropriately in simulated authentic situations.

Role play gives opportunities to learners to pretend to be someone else. Such a technique may assist timid pupils to overcome their shyness of speaking. Shy students often have difficulty talking about their experiences or about themselves. The fact that they are someone else makes them feel that their own identity is not implicated. As speaking skills need substantial exposure and practice, role play can be a good platform in an ESL classroom. It also helps pupils adopt the appropriate moods and verbal expression of the provided context, which they then act out during the performance stage.

Role play is an interactive teaching method which provides creativity and innovation in the way a particular classroom is conducted. The teacher has to be aware of the pupils' ability to decide on the most appropriate topic to be carried out in the activities. Role play is an effective method which pays particular attention to the speaking in the target language. Maxwell (1997) claimed that role play can result in pupils' improvement in speaking skills. It can assist learners to improve their second language [3]. Under the same note, Richards and Rodgers (2001) defined role play as an activity which can develop pupils' interpersonal and social relationship [6]. Similarly, Chen Jun (2006) proposed that role play can provide the pupils a wide range of opportunities to practice the real speech in the classroom [1].

Through this activity, learners are able to gain a different experience related to their life and other social situations, which help them become more open from their rigid behavior.

It is very significant to teach pupils some skills that they can use in the everyday interaction and role play can be an effective technique for this. For example, to practice how to express complains and apologies in a foreign language, pupils might have to role-play a situation in which a customer in a shop returns a faulty article to a salesperson. In a role play, pupils imagine a role (e.g. a police officer, a shop assistant), a situation (e.g., buying food, planning a party) or both. Role play should

be improvised; learners decide exactly what to say as they go along. Situation, roles and useful expressions are the three parts in a role play.

Therefore, foreign language students practise the target language in context similar to real-life situations where stress and shyness are removed. The language teacher should use effective tasks which will contribute to the implementation of simple situation into complex real social situations. For example,

Suggested situations

➤ **Time to Eat!**

Goal: Pupils will master typical vocabulary and phrases used in a restaurant by understanding and responding appropriately to prompts.

Words/Phrases:

- Food-related vocabulary
- May I take your order?
- I would like...
- Check, please?
- Will you be paying by cash or credit?

Description: In this role play, pupils test their knowledge of food vocabulary and common questions/phrases used at restaurants. For beginners, stick with simple questions like “How can I help you?” and “What would you like to drink?” Vocabulary should also be simple, such as “soup” and “ice cream.” For more advanced classes, you can introduce higher-level vocabulary and vary the questions.

In order for pupils to be successful, it is important to pre-teach some of the more common phrases pupils might encounter. For the actual role play, divide the class into small groups. Learners should take turns being the server or guest. Circulate to make sure students are using the phrases correctly and instruct the students when to switch roles.

Tip: Add an extra element of practice and creativity by letting pupils design menus before performing the activity.

➤ **Taxi!**

Goal: Pupils will utilize their knowledge of direction words and polite requests to accurately give oral directions.

Words/Phrases:

- Direction words
- Names of locations and local businesses (bank, restaurant, hotel, etc.)
- Go left/right/straight
- Where to?

- Take the next right/left.

Description: Most people will find themselves in a taxi at some point in their lives. Hopefully, the driver will be much better than the one they're going to get in this activity! He or she is new and the passenger has to tell them how to get to their desired location!

With this ESL role play topic, pupils have the opportunity to practice giving and clarifying directions. Again, it can be adapted for different ages and learning levels. Be sure to pre-teach vocabulary and phrases like stating an address in the proper order: first the number, then street name. You may also take time to introduce directions such as “left,” “right” and “straight.”

Once pupils are comfortable with the language, divide learners into small groups. Assign the roles of driver and passengers. Pupils should use the pre-taught phrases to engage in a short dialogue about directions. It is best to give the class a time limit. Once time is up, the pupils should switch roles so that each pupil has the chance to be both driver and passenger.

➤ **Is There a Doctor in the House?**

Goal: Pupils utilize appropriate medical phrases and vocabulary used at a doctor's office or hospital.

Words/Phrases: Body parts; Physical ailments; How are you feeling?; Where does it hurt? I have a _____. What do you recommend?

Description: No one knows when an emergency will arise and they're in need of medical attention. Let's make sure pupils are prepared to express their aches and pains in English. Depending on the age of the students, you can design the pre-taught vocabulary accordingly. For younger pupils, stick with words like “runny nose” and “cough”.

For older pupils, you might want to include such things as “high blood pressure.” It may also be a good idea to ask the pupils what medical words they want to know—some of them may have specific words related to their health they want to practice and you can help them find the right translations.

For a successful role play, divide pupils into small groups. Assign pupils the different roles and set a time limit for them to perform the dialogue. Make sure you give each learner a chance to be the doctor, nurse and patient. If you have time, ask groups to volunteer to present their skit in front of the whole class. Tell them to be super dramatic!

There are some **advantages** of using the role-play in the EFL classrooms. Thus, the role play:

- improves learners' speaking skills
- helps pupils obtain better scores and performance, to develop personal skills such as cooperation and decision making.
- offers an enjoyable way to encourage pupils to use vocabulary appropriately in simulated authentic situations.
- challenges pupils to be creative.

- helps to develop cultural competence, confidence and self-efficacy.
- increases pupils' intercultural awareness and develop overall communicative competence.
- helps the learners in overcoming their inability to speak in English in real-life situations.
- reduces the inhibitions of the learners who feel shy and cannot speak comfortably with the whole class.

Disadvantages:

- during role play in a large class room the situation gets chaotic
- the performers sometimes forget their dialogues

Conclusion

In a few words, we can say that role play technique has positive impact in improving learners' speaking skills as it gives the pupils a chance to explore different situations of real life and enables them to speak accurately and confidently in that situation in the target language. It is considerate to be one of the best strategies to improve the skills of initiative, self-awareness, problem-solving, communication, working collaboratively in groups. Although during role play in a large class room, the situation gets chaotic and the performers sometimes forget their dialogues, which create embarrassment, eventually with the help of little feedback from the teachers, this problem can be resolved. Teachers may give prompt verbal feedback or written feedback in case of technical difficulties while recording acts.

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