

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE PLAYS AMONG FIRST-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Learning a second language is complicated for some people especially for first-year students. Learning a language seems boring and it requires effort from learners. In order to create more interesting and engaging lessons, role-plays can be great solution. Because it is both fun activity and useful for language skills. This study explores the importance and effects of role-plays among first-year students in university. The main purpose of the study is to examine how role-play influences students' motivation, confidence, and overall speaking ability, as well as to identify the challenges they face when engaging in such activities. This article investigated role-plays' influence on skill-building process with the help of mixed-methods approach involving 25 EFL students at Kokand university during four weeks. Results showed that with the help of role-plays students retained course materials better comparing to traditional lectures and also it worked to reduce anxiety in speaking. Moreover, role-plays helped to develop self-confidence of students in speaking on stage.

KEYWORDS: role-play, communicative skills, confidence, language proficiency, engaging, anxiety, skill-based, real-life situations

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are several ways to improve language skills; however, developing confident speaking skill is still problem among English language learners in Uzbekistan. There are several methods to improve communicative skills. Shadowing(imitating), recording own speech, or thinking in English can be good solution to develop confident speaking. However, some teachers prefer to use *Role plays* in classroom in order to enhance speaking skill of students. Role-play is a strategy which puts into several situations based on social context and learning goals. Students get a role and act based on a scenario. If it is used in speaking classes, helps to develop their interpersonal skills like communication skills. Moreover, implementing role plays in class can affect to students' self confidence in speaking. Students start to speak more confident in role-plays compared to in class communication. This method may help students how to act like native speakers and prepare them for an 'impromptu' speaking style. Using role plays in classroom can be an effective way not only to improve speaking, but also it helps to teach students how to work in team in real life. Moreover, it makes lessons more interesting comparing to traditional teaching style. However, there some tips which should be taken into consideration; characters of students, language proficiency, assessment, and time limit. Before implementing role plays, teachers observe characteristics of students because some students are shy and do not want to be part of role plays. After observing, teacher can

divide roles considering characteristics of students. If the teacher is also included in role, it may encourage shy students to be in the stage.

Language proficiency is also main point of role plays. The degree of the students affects to the quality of role play. It should not be too easy or too complicated. The topic should be chosen, accounting vocabulary. Assessing role play is considered as a main point because it affects to students. Assessment includes rubrics that explains what is considered in role plays. Mainly, rubric is designed to focus on language skill rather than artistic skill. It assesses how students are using acquired grammar, how they are using vocabulary, and the way of the pronunciation of the learnt words. Time management is part of role plays. In some cases, role plays are considered time consuming because of not putting time limitation for student's performance. In certain educational contexts, the systematic use of role play in speaking classes is still restricted, despite its acknowledged advantages. Therefore, more research is required to determine how role-playing exercises affect students' oral communication attitudes and speaking abilities. The purpose of this study is to assess role plays' efficacy as a teaching tool in language classrooms and investigate their significance in helping students improve their speaking abilities. It is anticipated that the results of this study will offer useful information to educators looking to enhance speaking instruction through interactive and communicative approaches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

By the mid-1980s role-playing pedagogy had come to include everything from quick warm-up games to more extensive projects, requiring weeks of preparation (Larousse, 1980). It also touted as a means of increasing student's motivation engagement and confidence (Larousse, 1987). According to research of Magos and Politti (2008, p.101) role-playing helps to communicate, express their feelings, enrich their vocabulary, and appraise their existing knowledge. It also emphasizes that role play offers a more pleasant language learning experience, creating a 'safe environment' where learners are relaxed creative and inventive (pp. 101-102). Shen and Swanthep (2011) argued that role play involves such speaking activities as behavioristic role-playing recording and comparing and listening and retelling which require student to repeat the speaking materials over and over again (p.6). Dorathy and Mahalakshmi (2011) stated that role-playing is essential in teaching English. It is great chance to put themselves in another person's place for some time and they feel various social roles. Role plays encourage students to be active in lessons and creates stressless environment (Maley, 2005, as cited in Axmadjonov&Yuldasheva, 2024).

Another research showed that role-playing helped students to be more active. Moreover, it affected to their communication skills and they started speaking more confident. (Ismoilov, 2018, as cited in Axmadjonov&Yuldasheva, 2024). As an English language instructor at Dong Nai University, the author has observed that first-year English majors frequently struggle with classroom speaking activities. These difficulties point to the need for more engaging and supportive learning environments – ones that reduce learner anxiety and promote active participation. Prior research has shown that many learners experience anxiety, lack confidence, or fear making mistakes when speaking in a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986). Speaking is one of the most essential skills for students majoring in English, as it plays a key role in their overall language proficiency and future career opportunities. To become confident and effective communicators, language learners need consistent practice in speaking. However, for

many first-year students, developing speaking skills poses a considerable challenge. This is often due to limited exposure to spoken English in high school and the restricted time available for speaking practice in university classrooms (Tuan & Mai, 2015; Zhang, 2009).

Role-plays prepare students for real-life situations and improve their critical thinking (Sololova, 2010, as cited Axmadjonov&Yuldasheva, 2024). Role-plays is not only useful for communicative skills, but also it helps to build correct grammar, fluent speech, and improved pronunciation. (Gillian, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate how role-playing exercises, affect first-year undergraduates' motivation, self-assurance, and speaking ability, this study used a mixed-methods approach. In-depth interviews, classroom observations, and questionnaires completed both before and after the intervention were all part of the quasi-experimental design. By combining quantitative indicators of progress with in-depth accounts of participants' experiences, this technique allowed for the triangulation of data. Participants were twenty-five first-year students from the Foreign Languages and Literature major at Kokand University in Uzbekistan. Since they had taken part in role-plays since their first semester, they offered insights on long-term development. From basic to advanced, they were all studying English. Purposeful sampling from two speaking classes ensured group homogeneity in skills and prior exposure. Confidentiality and withdrawal rights were guaranteed, participants gave their informed consent, and university ethics approval was secured.

At first, students were given several small role-plays as a classroom assessment. There were both active and passive students, some of them had hesitation and shyness while speaking and acting given roles. However, there were also students who were confident in both speaking and acting. At first, most students were not willing to act in role-plays but after some activities they started to be active and taking part in role-plays seemed funnier than other activities. After practicing role-plays during four weeks, Online survey was taken in google forms with the same students who are attended in role-plays. Students were asked 10 various questions about the impact of role-plays. Type of the questions was Likert scale, including agree, disagree, partially agree, partially disagree answers. With the help of questions, it is investigated that how it affected their confidence and how they retained course material.

Example: Role plays improve your confidence in group discussions:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly agree

Do you think role plays help you retain course material better?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

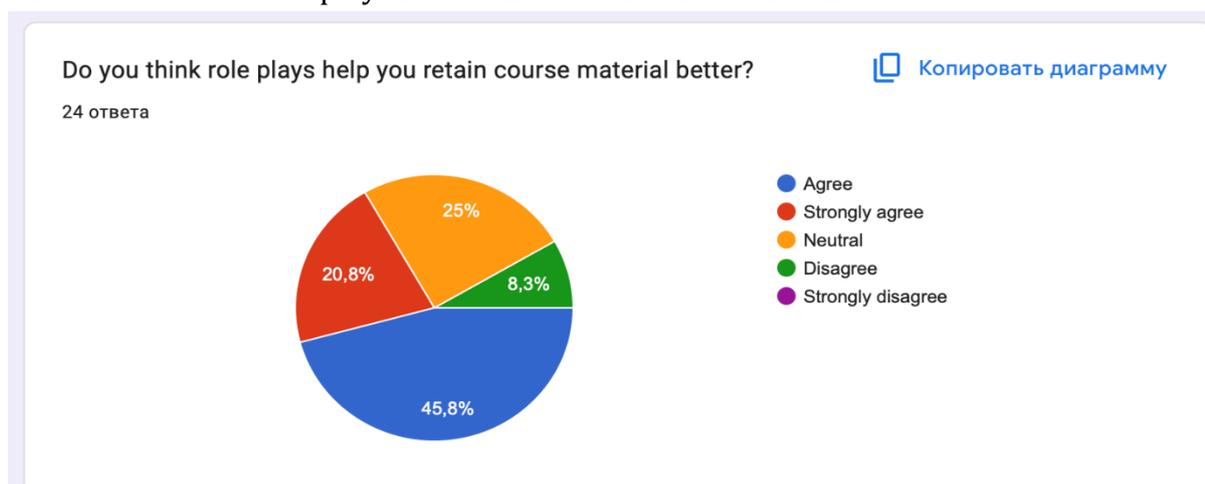
Disagree

Strongly disagree

Survey was taken on telegram group for twenty-five students and participants chose the option that is suitable for their perspective.

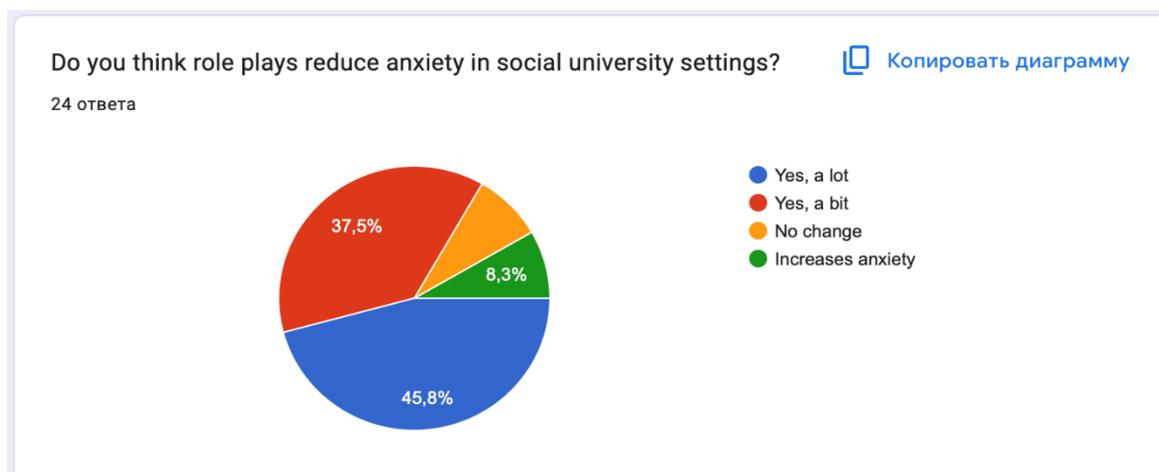
RESULTS

The research conducted among 25 first year students in Kokand university, majoring English language and literature. Students realized the impacts of role-plays in communicative skills and confidence. 45 % of students considered that role-plays are fun activities to reduce boredom in traditional classes while 25 % of students chose role-plays for skill practicing. Results showed that role-plays are very effective way for building teamwork, accounting 99 % positive responses. The results showed that 78 % of students chose option “Agree” when they were asked «Did role-plays improve your confidence in group discussions?» While almost 21 % of participants chose the option “neutral”. The research investigated that implementing role-plays in class is more engaging than traditional classes, only 8,3% participants did not see any differences between role-play classes and traditional classroom.



1-diagram. Impact of role-play in retaining course materials.

Based on the information the diagram gave, implementing role-plays in classroom help students retain course materials better. However, it is considered neutral for 25 % of participants while 8,3 % participants chose the option «disagree».



2- diagram. Anxiety reduction.

Overall results showed that for most participants, role-plays helped to reduce anxiety in social university settings. Based on the results of research, role-plays have more positive effects rather than negative ones when it is used in appropriate way. Overall it is considered as a

helpful activity in improving speaking skills and confidence for first year students of university. Results showed that implementing role-plays in classroom is considered both fun activity and skill based activity for students.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate effectiveness of role-plays in classroom among first-year students of university. The research found that students who participated in role-plays improved their communicative skills comparing to traditional classes. Moreover, results showed that implementing role-plays in classroom is more engaging rather than theoretical lectures.

These findings are aligning with Maley (Maley 2005, as cited in Axmadjonov&Yuldasheva, 2024) who stated that role-plays create funnier and stressless environments for students who wants to put themselves into several real-life situations. Similarly, to our research their findings explored that role-plays are fun activity for developing skills. The research discovered that role-plays helps first-year students to lessen their shyness and anxiety. Another finding (Horwitz et al.,1986) showed that role-plays made students to be more active moreover it helped to reduce hesitation and anxiety in participating. Based on the information that results showed, students started speak more confidently after practicing role-plays several times as a fun activity. This finding align with Ismoilov (2018) as cited in Axmadjonov&Yuldasheva, 2024) who reported a similar improvement in students speaking skills who were attended in role-plays.

The research investigated that implementing role-plays among first-year students of university helped to retain course materials better compared to traditional lectures. Magos and Politti (2008, p.101) stated that role-plays assisted to acquire knowledge better and improved its usage in real-life situation. Overall, applying role-plays in teaching first year students helpful to make them participate in classroom in an active way. Moreover, it (role-play) helps to reduce anxiety of students while giving speech on stage and prepares them for several real-life situations that can be happen in their life.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of research and discussed articles, role-plays are useful applying for university students who are majoring English language (in the first year). Implementing role-plays can make lessons more engaging and interesting and also make students to participate in activities. Moreover, it helps to lessen anxiety of speaking and improve speaking skills. Practicing role-plays not only helps to reduce social fair but also it develops their confidence while being in stage among their peers. It is recommended to choose authentic cases to make role-plays so that students can be ready for real-life situations. In some cases, role-plays are considered as time-consuming activity, that's way it is suggested to make limitation for duration of role-plays.

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