



INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF ROLE-PLAY TECHNIQUES ON IMPROVING THE SPEAKING ABILITY OF IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to survey the effect of the role-play techniques on improving the speaking skill of Iranian intermediate English learners. For this sake, 60 female learners in the age domain of 18-26, who were studying at Kish institute, were selected based on their achievements on the OPT. The goal of the OPT was to homogenize the participants based on their proficiency level in English. The participants were divided into two separate groups; the experimental group and the control group. Each group had 30 participants. Then, the experimental group got treatment based on the use of role-play techniques. At the end of eight weeks, a posttest of speaking was administered to both experimental and control groups. Then learners' accuracy in simple present, simple past, and present perfect were assessed. The results of this study demonstrated that the experimental group that was treated by the use of role-playing techniques in teaching acted much better than the control group in English conversation post-test. Hence, the result of this study proved that the role plays techniques teaching has a noticeably positive effect on Iranian intermediate English learners' conversation ability.

Keywords: Interaction, Turn-Taking, Conversation Ability, Literary Discourse, Role-Play

INTRODUCTION

Speaking can be recognized as the most widespread way to transmit the message to others, and the ability to communicate effectively is a basic requirement that needs to be taken seriously in English education. Likewise, classroom interaction has been said to be one of the crucial means of learning in classrooms which has an important role in language classrooms (Azadi et al., 2015).

The role-play technique is the way to teach speaking by setting up the students in situations in pairs or groups. This means putting two or more students together and giving them a handout sheet, which they can, first, read and study, taking time to look-up unknown words and asking their friends about meanings and pronunciation, then, give them a little more time to practice speaking, with everybody in the room reading aloud to get a feel for the role they will be playing and get used to the words, sounds, phrases, and the rhythm of the language (Holmes, 2004).

Role-play-based activities focusing on meaningful language, interactive communication, and cooperative group work can stimulate participation (Dailey, 2009). Cooperative learning tasks are also often used in language teaching. Cooperative learning is an instructional approach that encourages students' learning through group interaction. It provides maximum opportunities for meaningful input and output in interactive and supportive environments (Ghaith, 2003). These benefits encouraged the researcher to begin a study on this teaching area.

It is important to know how role-playing helped the students to overcome the constraints to interact though the speaking skill. Hopefully, this research will be useful because other teachers and institutions could use the theoretical support from this investigation to carry out future investigations about the use of role-playing to face speaking (Criollo Erazo, 2018). The strength of flexible role play forms a new conversational practice and creates a positive atmosphere in class. Students enjoy and relax while they are learning. Teaching language with the help of drama has such capacity because it gives a context for listening and meaningful language production, in which learners need to use their language resources. This research's main objective focuses on the way how role-playing affects the students' English speaking skill development. Drawing upon the issue under study, the present research seeks an answer to the following question:

- Do role-play techniques have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skills?

Based on the above research question, the hypothesis of this study is as follows:

Role-play techniques do not have any effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skills.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Role-play can be a very successful tool in the teacher's hands. As its prime goal is to boost students' interaction in the classroom, educators should not forget about incorporating such a speaking activity to reflect learners' theoretical knowledge of a language in practice (Kuśnierek, 2015), and also it can be said that the part learners and teachers are expected to play a role in carrying out learning tasks as well as the social and interpersonal relationship between the participants (Shumin, 2002).

According to Porter-Ladousse (1987: 3), "role-play activities range from highly controlled guided conversations at one end of the scale to improvised drama activities at the other; from simple rehearsed dialogue performance, to highly complex simulated scenarios." According to Scrivener (2005: 155), in role-play, learners are usually given some information about a role. These are often printed on role cards. Scrivener also stated that role cards have an important function, thus, learners are equipped with crucial information about their roles. Gołębiowska (1987: 13) indicates that in role-play learners are given a task to complete and to do it, they are told who they are, what their opinions are, and what they know that is unknown to the other students.

It is important to mention that if a teacher is not convinced about the validity of using role-playing, the activity itself "will fall flat on its face just as you expected it to" (Porter-Ladousse 1987: 8). Students' minds have to be involved and emotionally connected with a lesson, for example by a pleasant situation or a nice picture (Harmer 2012: 178).

Doff (1988: 237) stated that if role-play is not based on a dialogue in a coursebook or a text, students themselves have to decide what language to use and how a conversation should develop. Therefore, for the role play to be a profitable activity, careful preparation would be essential. Budden (2004) added that drilling the structures the players would need to use is very helpful, as learners are equipped with suitable language. It is also worth remembering that the teacher should make sure that students have understood both the situation to play and also what is on the role cards before the activity begins (Porter-Ladousse 1987: 12).

Moreover, educators should not use role-plays which are too difficult or too emotionally loaded until students are used to that kind of activity. Rather, starting with very simple



information-gap role-plays is advisable. During the first role-play learners may be more or less inhibited, but soon they will get accustomed to role-playing (Porter-Ladousse 1987: 11). Beyond question, students will need some time to prepare for a performance and then also try out their roles privately (Doff 1988: 237). Depending on the learners' language level, the amount of planning time may differ. Players at this stage of activity work in pairs or groups and discuss together what they might say. At higher levels, students will not need so much help with the language but they will need time to get into roles. Doff (1988: 238) explicated that the demonstration of the role-play is significant. The educator's task is not only to tell the class the situation to play, but also to do the exercise. The teacher may also elicit some structures that would be used in an activity. Having explained the whole task, the lecturer divides the class into pairs or groups. At the very end, she or he sets a strict time limit and tries to make every effort to stick to it.

Finally, Huang (2008) proposes that the teacher should assess the effectiveness of the role-play activity and examine if learners have successfully comprehended the meaning of vocabulary, sentences, and dialogues. The author adds that there are several ways to check the students' evaluation. She suggests that learners should be given oral and listening tests related to role-plays.

Kowalska (1991: 113) believes that role-playing develops learners' fluency in speaking. Learners' focus is put on the communication of meaning rather than on the appropriate use of language. Therefore, role-playing teachers may train students' speaking skills in any social situation (Porter-Ladousse 1987: 6). The next reason for incorporating role-playing in EFL classes is that some people learn for specific roles in life. They may want to work or travel in a worldwide context. It is very advantageous for these students to have tried out in a pleasant and safe environment of a classroom with the language they will presumably use. For such learners, role-play is a helpful rehearsal and what is more, it allows them not just to acquire phrases, but to learn how to interact in a variety of circumstances (Porter-Ladousse 1987: 7). Kowalska (1991: 113) remarks that role-playing develops learners' imagination. For the roles given to learners that may require creative thinking, players' imagination is in high demand. Besides, being able to think inventively might occur a useful skill in the future.

The teachers must figure out factors that affect their speaking performance to help learners overcome problems in learning speaking. Learners' speaking skill presentation or implementation can be inspired by the elements that come from performance situations (time pressure, scheduling, the criterion of implementation and quantity of encouragement or backing), affective factors (such as provoking, self-confidence and nervousness), listening ability and response or criticism throughout speaking activities (Nation & Newton 2009; Doff 1998; Shumin 2002; Bachman and Palmer 1996). Harmer (1991) asserts that the decisions that the teachers make about how to react to students' performance will depend upon the stages of the lesson, the activities, the types of mistakes made, and the particular student who is making that mistake. If the teachers correct whenever there is a problem, the conversational flow as well as the purpose of the speaking activity will be destroyed (Harmer, 1991). If the students are corrected all the time, they can find this very demotivating and become afraid to speak. They suggest that teachers should always correct the students' mistakes positively and with encouragement (Baker and Westrup, 2003).

Alzoun et al. (2017) examined the effect of role-play strategy on the Jordanian tenth grade EFL students' speaking skills. The results revealed that the role-playing strategy had a



significant effect on the five components of the speaking skill with the students of the experimental group. Further empirical studies on the effect of role-play strategy on developing other language skills are needed. Elliott de Riverol, (1991) examined the existing place of literature in the foreign language class atmosphere and studied the supporting impact its use has, both from a cultural and linguistic point of view. Examples provided were essentially from his personal experience gained from teaching adult Spanish English learners. Ahmed Muhammed (2003) declared that using literature in ESL and EFL classes has been an issue of intensive debate, at least for those who devaluate teaching literature to non-native students and learners in favor of applying only the traditional teaching methods of language teaching. For such a group as explained, engaging other than the well-known and well-famed approaches of teaching – including studying literary texts like drama would be wasting of time and attempting.

METHODOLOGY

The quasi-experimental research design was done with two individual groups of students that received various treatments and discussions. For the sake of estimating the causal impact of an intervention on the target population without random assignment, the mentioned research design was implemented. The research was done in the Kish institute in Rasht.

Sixty participants were chosen randomly from eighty intermediate students of Kish language institute, Rasht branch. Next, two individual groups were created that they were thirty. These two groups were named as experimental group one and experimental group two. The participants were in the age range of 18-26 and everyone was females with Persian mother language. The first experimental group learned English speaking skills through applying role-play techniques, but the second experimental group taught English conversation by Touchstone books which are known as a control group.

For determining two homogenous groups, OPT was held. The test was needed to get a comprehension of students' level of proficiency to the instructor. The test contains sixty questions, including 50 grammar and 10 graded reading comprehension questions. In the end, students are invited for accomplishing a writing task for the evaluation of learners' competence in tenses. For answering the questions 90 minutes were allocated to the students. In the end, sixty students were selected as intermediate level students based on OPT.

Materials and Procedures for the Pretest and Posttest

The most valid assessment of speaking is the oral examination. Besides the OPT, a couple of descriptive questions based on various topics like Time Management, Advertisements, Neighbors, Television, Flats /Accommodation, Fruits, Mirror, Bus and Taxi, Politeness, Daily Routine, Work/Study, Family were chosen. This oral examination was used as a pretest and posttest in this study. (Farhady et al., 2010)

Materials and Procedure for the Treatment of the Study

In autumn 1398, the study was administered. It had a quasi-experimental design. Sixty intermediate EFL learners were chosen as the participants of this study based on their activities in the OPT, one standard deviation (SD) above and below the mean. Then they were randomly divided into two individual groups which were termed as experimental and control group.



Next, the pretest was administered. It was an oral examination piloted with a reliability index of 0.78. Then, the experimental group was treated by the implementation of role-playing techniques in the teaching of English conversation.

The control group was treated by using Touchstone books for teaching English speaking. The book that was used as a textbook for the experimental groups was GOD of Carnage by Jasmine Reza. After 16 sessions in 2 months, the posttest was administered to evaluate the learners' advancement. The pretest and posttest questions were the same. We used one more teacher for scoring the tests to avoid subjectivity. But, the students' answers were assessed in vocabulary pronunciation, comprehension; but, Accuracy in simple present, simple past and present perfect was the significant fact which we were looking for. The extent that we used for our assessment was provided by Brown (2004).

Procedure

To see the effect of the on improving the speaking skill of Iranian intermediate English learners, various data collection methods were taken in action, for example, Field-work, Library Research, and Experiment. The method strategy of collecting data was Test, Note-taking, Tables, Sampling, Data Bank, Computer, Networks, and the Internet.

The speaking class was met 2 times a week. The teacher read the conversation aloud and then pointed a couple of students to read in front of the whole class. Then the teacher pointed out the students if they faced any difficult words or expressions to analyze and explain them. Students were asked to be in their assigned groups from the last class during the 2 hours. Only given some minutes to remember and practice their conversations. Then they were called up randomly to practice. This step conducted to encourage students, meanwhile, the teacher to grade their performance on a scale of 1 to 20.

Besides, peer observation was conducted by asking students to grade their colleagues on a similar scale. Each pair member was scaled with each time of practicing a new conversation to evade of feeling uninterested.

The information of the current research was examined by holding an individual Sample T-test between posttests of the present study and administrating a Paired-Sample T-test between the pretest and posttest of the groups of the research.

RESULTS

The research question aimed to use role-play techniques in enhancing the English speaking skill of intermediate learners of Iranian context learners. The mean scores of learners' performance on both pretest and posttest as well as the standard deviations were calculated to observe the possible change in learners' performance before and after the treatment.

Table 1. Descriptive results of the experimental group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	EX Posttest	15.5333	30	2.50149	.45671
	EX Pretest	14.4667	30	2.20866	.40324

As is indicated in table 1, the number of participants has been 30 in the experimental group ($N_{EXPRE} = 30$; $N_{EXPOS} = 30$). The mean for the posttest scores of the experimental group was



shown to be 15.5333 ($\bar{X}_{EXPRE} = 15.5333$) as compared to the mean for the pretest of the experimental group scores which was 14.4667 ($\bar{X}_{EXPOS} = 14.4667$). As for the standard deviations obtained, there seems to be less variability among the pretest scores than the scores in the posttest of the experimental group. This may give an image of the experimental participants' scores to be of less range before conducting the treatment of the study.

Table 2. Descriptive results of the control group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	CON Posttest	10.6667	30	2.98656	.54527
	CON Pretest	11.3333	30	3.33563	.60900

As is indicated in table 2, the number of participants has been 30 in the control group ($N_{CONPRE} = 30$; $N_{CONPOS} = 30$). The mean for the posttest scores of the control group was shown to be 10.6667 ($\bar{X}_{CONPOS} = 10.6667$) as compared to the mean for the pretest of the control group scores which was 11.3333 ($\bar{X}_{CONPRE} = 11.3333$). The lower mean of the posttest scores may be indicative of the lack of effect as a result of the no-treatment of role play in the control group. As for the standard deviations obtained for the posttest scores of the control group, there seems to be less variability among the posttest scores than the scores in the pretest of the control group. This may give an image of the participants' scores to be of more range before conducting the treatment of the study.

Table 3. Independent Samples T-test results of the groups.

		t_{obs}	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speaking	Equal variances assumed	6.842	58	0.000
	Equal variances not assumed	6.842	56.269	0.000
	T-critical	2.000		

As is indicated in table 3, the observed t-value of the study was calculated between the posttests of speaking skill in the experimental and the control group of the study. The observed t value was calculated as 6.842 ($t_{obs} = 6.842$), and the degree of freedom was 58 ($df = 58$). The critical value of t is 2.000 ($T_{crit} = 2.000$). Thus, $t_{obs} > T_{crit}$. Finally, the level of significance was calculated as to be 0.000 ($p = 0.000$) which indicates that the difference between the posttest scores has been significant.

Table 4. Paired Samples T-test results of the experimental group.

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
EX Posttest-EX Pretest	3.395	29	0.002
T-critical	2.045		

As indicated in table 4, the observed t-value between the pretest and posttest of the experimental group of the study was calculated as 3.395 ($t_{obs} = 3.395$), and the degree of freedom was 29 ($df = 29$). The critical value of t is 2.045 ($T_{crit} = 2.045$). Thus, $t_{obs} > T_{crit}$. As is seen, the observed t is significantly higher than the critical t which shows that there is a noticeable difference. Finally, the level of significance was calculated as to be 0.002 ($p =$

0.002) which, additionally, indicates that the difference between the pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group has been significant.

Table 5. Paired Samples T-test results of the control group.

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
CON Posttest–CON Pretest	1.670	29	0.106
T-critical	2.045		

As indicated in table 5, the observed t-value between the pretest and posttest of the control group of the study was calculated as 1.670 ($t_{obs} = 1.670$), and the degree of freedom was 29 ($df = 29$). The critical value of t is 2.045 ($T_{crit} = 2.045$). Thus, $t_{obs} < T_{crit}$. As is seen, the observed t is lower than the critical t which shows that there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the control group. Finally, the level of significance was calculated as to be 0.106 ($p = 0.106$) which, additionally, indicates that there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores in the control group.

To sum, there is a considerable difference in the performance of the two groups on speaking skill's test ($p = 0.106$, $p > 0.05$), since the achieved p-value is smaller than < 0.05 , presenting that there is a considerable difference between the results of these two control and experimental groups. As it is exhibited the learners who had received treatment through the applying of role-play techniques in teaching speaking skills significantly did better than the control group. T-Test exhibited that there is a considerable difference between the experimental group and the second one as the control group in this research. The results showed that the treatment which had been used for the experimental group was effective for the learners. Because of the results from the post-test scores showed that there is an important difference between the learners' performances on their posttest. As the upper table shows, a considerable difference ($p = 0.106 < 0.05$) was found between the performance of the learners of the experimental group on the pre-and post-tests offering that the treatment period length has been effective for the experimental group.

The current study attempts to answer the following research question. The question will be repeated and the response, based on findings of the study, will be brought below.

Q. "Do role-play techniques have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skill?"

In line with the findings of the analysis presented in table (4.4), the conclusion is positive. The role-play techniques affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skills and made a great enhancement in the learners' speaking skill advancement. The present investigation exhibited that it is critical to put stress on it. Consequently, the null hypothesis of the research, i.e., "Role-play techniques have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skill" was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The main result of the analysis revealed in tables showed a positive response to the question of the study. It was found that using role-play techniques do have a positive effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill. This was confirmed via the higher mean scores that the experimental group achieved in the post-test. Particularly, the experimental group's performance was more distinguished than that of the control group in the post-test. Moreover, the pre-test results for



both groups did not show any statistically great difference between the two experimental and control groups. This conveys clearly that proceeding the claim of the experiment they mutually had approximately comparable speaking proficiency levels. That is to declare, they had the same language background.

The findings of the present investigation, as inferred elsewhere, showed that the experimental group had better gain scores on the post-test than the students in the control group performed. Experimental group participants within 16 sessions for treatment under teaching through applying role-playing techniques to them in learning English conversation had better self-esteem and self-confidence for taking a part in any conversation topic which they were going to face. Moreover, the accuracy in using simple present, simple past and present perfect which was crucial for the investigator to assess was significantly better in the experimental group, After all, there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group.

Another conclusion that is associated with role-plays is that students made sense of the different scenarios that were presented through the topics of the role-plays. These topics were so real and actual for the students, that they found the connection between them and future situations where they could use the language practiced during the role-plays. In this regard, it is indicated that role-plays sham realism and permit learners to organize for upcoming circumstances where they have to put English in action. In this sense, the learners expressed the usefulness of working with actual scenarios in the role-plays since this helped them to feel more confident to speak in English.

Communication games are one more category of speaking activities which is stated by Harmer (2001: 272) as well; the word game activity provided a component of fun along with a lesson (of course, learners draw pictures, answer to problems, etc.), nevertheless obviously games were intended to incite communication amongst learners and frequently rest on an information gap.

In organized tasks, learners were requested to provide performance on a topic of their own choice which is related to their interest. This kind of mentioned drills intended to advance the informal, natural conversation. Even though it was more of a writing form task, if conceivable, students were obliged to speak from notes rather than do the writing.

By being pre-planned, a questionnaire guaranteed which all the questioner and person answering to the questioner had a little to declare and tell to each other; if well organized, they might inspire the usual usage of strong and boring language-related forms.

A dialogue involved two roles and characters. The related role of an interviewee, that was less non-challenging and less activated in conversation turn-taking according to realistic statistics, and the related role of an interviewer. Frequent dialogues were vital parts of more organized and well-structured tasks, for instance, reproductions or schemes.

Besides, the related structure facilitated the participants (learners) to converse with other English language utterers. The current discussed fact is pertinent to my study since it showed and concluded that role-plays are an adequate technique that facilitates the development of the students' fluency.

Henceforth, the individual can realize that the teaching program encompassed stimulating and inspiring conversations and dialogues that accomplished a fundamental starring role in increasing and promoting the students' motivation to participate in the speaking activities. This



might cause enhancement in the students' entire performance in the post-test as the students of the experimental group were asked to respond to the questions in the next part of the test which were flexible questions that means all questions were open-ended and desired a well-ordered thinking level to synthesize appropriate sentences that show their ideas; their consequences were better than those of the control group in this regard. For instance, questions were asked by the teacher from the learners about their feelings regarding teaching goals. These mentioned questions prevail on learners to employ the words and structures they educated with the improved class of pronunciation, fluency, and expected grammar. In the end, the results showed that the speaking skill of the experimental group improved in nearly an acceptable way. This would not have been got without applying role-play techniques in teaching conversation skills.

The primary purpose of this study was to see if role-play techniques have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skill and also talking about a class which is characterized with the literature of literature and vice-versa. This approach drills enhance students' team working based on co-operation while the individual accountability certifies the responsibility of each student to work on the assignments. All in all this method is a good choice for passing old and traditional teaching attitudes.

This study comes to the end that the using role-play techniques have a positive effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skill and if we want to say in details; it developed learners speaking accuracy in simple present, simple past and present perfect tenses significantly. The next significant characteristic of getting role-play techniques into classes is turning current teacher-centered classes into the classes which are based on a student-centered approach. Moreover, related activities to these classes are useful and practical for making and keeping all the students' active in-class participation. The related activities not only work as explained but also enhance students in discussion skills but also in writing as well.

Many limitations and delimitations are referred to as obstacles to the attitude of getting a clear result. It shows that a small group of the population was accounted for in this research. So the generalizability of findings can be treated moderately. Secondly, this study time length could be longer and extended for getting a more reliable result which can be trusted.

As inferred above, there are diverse areas where new studies could come to more ends to prove the effectiveness of the applying of role-playing techniques in the teaching of English conversation. Moreover, this research is restricted to the intermediate level students; therefore, the findings are not generalizable to the other levels. The other boundary and limitation of the present study was the students' age range from 18-26. So the result is not being generalizable to other learners with other age range. This study has been done about speaking skills while it can be generalized to other skills according to the researcher's point of view. Finally, this research could be repeated in another setting with various participants at different levels to enhance the reliability of the results. It is prescribed that future studies require to be accomplished due to the limitations of age and gender of the present study. Moreover, further studies can be amended by involving larger groups of participants.

CONCLUSION

This research was intended to investigate the role-play techniques' effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skills. What result of the study proved was that the



experimental group which was under treatment of learning role-play techniques performed so much better than the control group in conversation ability and speaking skills. The study results emphasize the hypothesis of the probability of the impact of the bringing of role-playing techniques to the class and train students based on them, which would enhance their speaking skill and conversation ability, so it proved the hypothesis of the study.

Using the role-play techniques in teaching English conversation can promote and enhance the students' self-esteem and confidence to take an active role in real conversations which ends in being competent in a real speaking situation. Moreover, the students' accuracy in applying the simple present, simple past, and also present perfect fixed. The participants were students of Kish institute in Rasht, Gilan, Iran. Finally, the students understood and perceived the learning of the English language fantastic and pleasurable with the high interest for carrying out easily and successfully and arriving at one-hundred percent of learning achievements for both learners and teachers.

List of Abbreviations

ESL: English as a Second Language

OPT: Oxford Placement Test

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

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