

IMPROVING YOUNG LEARNERS SPEAKING SKILL THROUGH ROLE-PLAY

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ABSTRACT

In improving young learners speaking skill, role-play is one of the techniques that can stimulate students to communicate with fun. The activity will stimulate students to speak English and make learning alive. Role-Play also increases motivations and develops fluency in speaking. This study aims at finding out young learners' improvement in speaking skill through role-play. The research method was quasi-experimental using non-randomized pre-test and post-test group. Two types of techniques were used in two different groups—Role Play in the experimental group and Presentation in the controlled one. T-test was used to analyze the pre-test and post-test scores. The findings show a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores among two groups.

Keywords: young learners; speaking, role-play

INTRODUCTION

English is a very important subject in the elementary school where the writer is working. The learners study the materials from the teacher, sit in the class nicely and take notes. Teachers tend to dominate the teaching and learning process. Such a learning activity makes the learners passive and not think creatively (Ning, 2011). Considering that learners should be encouraged to be more active in learning and finding the knowledge by themselves, teachers should change their learning roles as a facilitator and motivator. This is in line with the idea that teaching is making the students learn by triggering, motivating, encouraging, guiding and facilitating the students to learn. Teachers help them to develop their knowledge and skills (Joni, 1993; Bowden & Ference, 1998).

English consists of four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing. As far as the writer's concern, some teachers at school only focused on reading, writing and listening. They mostly drill and ask the learners to memorize. As a result, it makes the learners' speaking skill weak because they never use it in communicating and interacting with others. The writer also found other weaknesses in learning speaking, namely: (a) the learners do not have enough motivation to practice in the class, (b) the learners have nothing to say, (c) the learners do not like the materials, and (d) the learners are too shy and afraid of sharing their opinions in front of the class.

Teaching young learners is different from teaching adults because young learners have their own characteristics. Young learners construct knowledge from other people (Vygotsky, 1978). It would be better to give them familiar topics such as families, friends or their school life, which are very helpful to make them speak in English. One of the techniques the writer used in this research is Role Play. It is suitable with the characters of young learners that they enjoy fantasy, imagination and movement (Pinter, 2006). The writer wants to encourage the students to communicate in English during the lesson, especially students who are not confident to speak in front of the class. They can communicate and help each other using English in group work. Role Play uses a student-student interactional pattern and helps the EFL learners to understand the importance of cooperation and

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to have an interest in learning. Role Play can be used as a method for teaching insight and empathy competence (Blatner, 2005). According to Killen (1998) role play can give students practice in thinking real-life roles and dealing with real-world problems.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Young Learners

Young learners are children aged between five until twelve years old, that spent on primary or elementary level of formal education before the transition to junior high school. According to Harmer (2001, p. 38), young children, especially those up the ages of nine or ten, learn differently from older children, adolescent and adults as the following ways: (a) they respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words, (b) they often learn indirectly rather than directly, that is they take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather than only focussing on the precise, topic they are being taught, (c) their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear, and crucially have a chance to touch and interact with, (d) they generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them, (e) they have need for individual attention and approval from the teacher, (f) they keep to talk about themselves, and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as the main topic in the classroom, and (g) they have limited attention span; unless extremely engaging, they can easily get bored, lose interest after ten minutes or so.

Brewster and Ellis (2004) support Harmer's theory that young children are different from older children, adolescent and adults because of some reasons: (a) they have a lot of physical energy and often need to physical active, (b) they have a wide range of emotional needs, (c) they are emotionally excitable, (d) they are developing conceptually and are at early stage of their schooling, (e) they are still developing literacy in their first language, (f) they learn more slowly and forget things quickly, (g) they tend to be self-oriented and preoccupied with their own world, (h) they get bored easily, (i) they are excellent mimics, (j) they can concentrate for a surprisingly long time if they are interested, and (k) they can be easily distracted but also very enthusiastic.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that young learners get bored easily and they have limited attention span. They can concentrate for a surprisingly long time if they are interested. Besides that, they have a lot of energy and are physically active. However, they are more concerned about themselves than others, they enjoy fantasy and imagination. Concerning the characteristics of young learners, how to make them enjoy and active in learning English should be the main goal.

Speaking Skill

Some experts define speaking in different ways. Tarigan (1981) states that speaking is an ability to pronounce words in expressing ideas and thoughts. An activity when people use their voice to deliver their opinion, suggestion, information or even criticism. Clark and Clark (1997) state that in speaking people put ideas into words, talk about perception, feeling and intention. They want other people to comprehend what they are talking about. They assert things to change their store of knowledge and ask questions to get information.

Fulcher (2003) states that speaking is a verbal language that humans use for communicating with each other. Therefore, speaking is the active use of language to express meanings so that other people can make sense of them. Meanwhile Bailey (2005) supports Fulcher's theory that speaking is one of the basic language skills that consist of productive systematic verbal pronouncement to conduct meaning. It means that speaking is the most demanding skill which allows us to communicate effectively. It gives us the ability to convey information verbally and in a way the listener can understand.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that speaking is an interactive process using acceptable language to express meaning with a certain purpose that involves two or more people with whom the

speaker or listener have to react to what they hear during the conversation and the most important part in daily life to give information and communication.

Teaching Speaking

The goal in teaching speaking today is communicative efficiency. Teachers focus on student's participation and the teaching learning process should attract the students to be active in class, so that they will be motivated to learn in the classroom. Teaching speaking class makes a teacher to teach the students how to organize their teaching. Nunan (2003) states that teaching speaking is to teach learners to: (a) Produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns, (b) Use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language, (c) Select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter, (d) Organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence, (e) Use language as a means of expressing values and judgements, and (f) Use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called as fluency.

Desuggestopedia

The characteristics of students, especially when studying foreign languages, is that they are very enthusiastic and interested in trying something new but they are not confident. Students are afraid of making mistakes and failing when they speak in a foreign language. Moreover, teachers try to use new points of view about learning foreign languages by respecting students' feelings or teachers apply an affective-humanistic approach Celce-Murcia (1991). Language learning can occur at a much faster rate than ordinarily transpires but the basic reason is inefficiency due to psychological barriers. The teacher should make the students trust and respect the teacher by 'desuggesting' their limitations and suggesting how easy it will be for them to succeed by integrating with fine arts it can provide positive suggestions for them. "Desuggest" is the opposite of suggest. It is used to eliminate the negative feeling and Suggestopedia is used to reinforce the positive feeling and to release the full mental power.

These are some elements in desuggestopedia: (a) classroom set-up in this part teacher should create the classroom environment which is bright and cheerful, (b) peripheral learning in this technique absorbs student's attention by putting important information on a poster, and (c) in a role play students are asked to pretend temporarily that they are someone else and create their own lines relevant to the situations, active concert and passive concert. Role Play is one of the techniques in desuggestopedia in which students are asked to put themselves into somebody else or put themselves into an imaginary situation as stated by Budden (2006). It is very interesting to use role play in teaching speaking for young language learners.

Role Play

Basically, the characteristics of young learners, especially grade 5 students are that they easily get bored and enjoy their imagination themselves (Ladousse, 2009). Role Play technique is highly flexible, leaving much more scope for the exercise of individual variation, imitative and imaginative. Burke and Sullivan (2002) state that students are stimulated to employ the language and then improve fluency and pronunciation with the chance to participate in role plays.

Joyce and Weil (2000) state that Role Play is a teaching strategy that fits within the social family of models. The strategy emphasizes social nature of learning, and sees cooperative behaviour as stimulating students both socially and intellectuality. Role play is a way of bringing situations from real life into the classroom as stated by Doff (1992). In Role Play students need to imagine a role, a context, and improvise a conversation. The context is usually determined, but students develop the dialogue as they process. This differs from reading dialogue aloud.

Gołębiowska (1987) indicates that in Role Play learners are given a task to complete and in order to do it, they are told who they are, what their opinions are, and what they know that is unknown to the other students. She stresses the fact that students are told who they are, namely, that they play the role of somebody else. Being

cast in a role of a different character may diminish the fear of speaking, as these are not the speakers who make mistakes, but the personalities played by them. The key feature of Role Play is that learners can become anyone they want for a short time. Role Play can engage an entire class, and it can be fun and lead the whole team to more effective learning (Holt & Kysilka, 2006).

The Advantages of Using Role Play

Ladousse (2009, pp. 6-7) states some advantages of using Role Play:

- a. A very wide variety of experience can be brought into the classroom through Role Play. The range of function and structures, and the areas of vocabulary that can be introduced, go far beyond the limits of other pair or group activities, such as conversation, communication games, or humanistic exercise. Through Role-play we can train our students in speaking skills in any situation.
- b. Role Play puts students in situations in which they are required to use and develop those phatic forms or language which are so necessary in oiling the works of social relationship, but which are so often neglected by our language teaching syllabuses. Many students believe that language is only to do with the transfer of specific information from one person to another. They have very little small talk, and in consequence often appear unnecessarily brusque and abrupt. It is possible to build up these social skills from a very low level through Role Play.
- c. Some people are learning English to prepare for specific roles in their lives: people who are going to work or travel in an international context. It is helpful for these students to have tried out and experimented with the language they will require in the friendly and safe environment of a classroom. For these students, Role Play is a very useful dress rehearsal for real life. It enables them not just to acquire set phrases, but to learn how interaction might take place in a variety of situations.
- d. Role Play helps many shy students by providing them with masks. Some more reticent members of a group may have a great deal of difficulty participating in conversations about themselves, and in other activities based on their direct experience. These students are liberated by Role Play as they no longer feel that their own personality is implicated.
- e. Perhaps the most important reason for using Role Play is that it is fun. Once students understand what is expected of them, they thoroughly enjoy letting their imagination trip. Although there does not appear to be any scientific evidence that enjoyment automatically leads to be agreed that in the case of the vast majority of normal people this surely is so.

Nyquist (2003) supports Ladousse's theory by proposing that the advantages of Role Play are:

- a. Actively involves participants.
- b. Adds variety, reality, and specificity to the learning experience.
- c. Develops problem solving and verbal expression skills.
- d. Provides practice to build skills before real-world application and when 'real' experiences are not readily available.
- e. Enables learners to experiment in a safe environment with behaviors which strike them as potentially useful and to identify behaviors which are not.
- f. Can provide an entirely new perspective on a situation and develop insights about feelings and relationships.
- g. Provides teacher immediate feedback about the learner's understanding and ability to apply concepts.
- h. Improves the likelihood of transfer of learning from the classroom to the real world.

Role Play is one of the techniques that can stimulate students to communicate with fun activities. These activities stimulate students to speak English and make learning come alive. Role Play also increases motivations and develops student's language fluency. They are activities to promote interaction in the classroom as stated by

Ladousee (2009). In Role Play, activities and pleasure are inherent in the activity itself. So, it can improve teamwork in which active learners can help passive ones in a speaking class.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research employed quasi-experimental design, two groups with pretest and posttest. Two types of techniques were used in two different groups. The result of the posttest was compared to the pretest in order to show the improvement of young learners speaking skill through role-play.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in private elementary school in Surabaya. The school employs both Oxford and national curriculum. The research treatment was held for 2 weeks in January 2020. The research treatment was conducted twice a week, started with pretest in the first week, ended with post-test in the second week.

Participants

The participants of this research are forty fifth graders of EFL learners in national school. There are three classes, each of them has twenty students. One class served as the pilot class, the other two as the subjects. The researcher used two classes to ensure the consistency of the result in all classes.

Treatment

The treatment was done three times for the experimental group with the time allocation 30 minutes each. Below is the treatment process that was done in this study.

Table 1. The steps of treatment

No	Controlled Group	Experimental Group
1	The teacher greets the students.	The teacher greets the students.
2	The teacher introduces the topic.	The teacher introduces the topic.
3	The teacher explains briefly about 'If Conditional type 1.'	The teacher explains briefly about 'If Conditional type 1.'
4	The teacher shows the spider web with questions related to the topic.	The teacher shows a story that's taken from students' class book.
5	The teacher asks the students to think about the topic.	The teacher divides the students in groups consisting of five, and then each group discusses to answer the questions.
6	The teacher lets the students write their answers to the questions on spider web.	The teacher distributes the script and lets the students decide which role each should take.
7	The teacher asks the students to memorize their draft.	The teacher asks the students to memorize the lines based on their part and they can improve it
8	The teacher asks the students to present their script in front of the class.	The teacher asks each group to perform the role play in front of the class.
9	The teacher reviews the lesson and tells the next material for the next meeting.	The teacher reviews the lesson and tells the next material for the next meeting.

Before conducting the treatments, the writer instrument was tried out first to the pilot class, VA. First, they were told to pick a partner, but it took such a long time because they wanted to pick their own best friend and they were really picky in choosing their partners. It took more than ten minutes. Therefore, the writer and the partner decided to pick the pairs based on the attendance list.

Then the teacher gave each couple fifteen minutes to prepare and two until three minutes to present their dialog. However, they needed more time in the preparation, so the writer gave them ten minutes to prepare.

Data Collection Procedures

First of all, the researcher collected the scores of the English Final Speaking test from the last previous semester. The scores were to determine whether both groups have relatively the same competence in speaking. Then, the pretest and post-test scores of both groups were also collected. The pretest and post-test was designed by the writer in order to test the participants' speaking skill in which they had to work in pairs to make. They have to answer the questions in the dialogue based on their imagination and perform a dialogue based on situations adopted from their textbook. A speaking rubric was designed to score the participants' performances.

Technique of Data Analysis

After doing the treatments, the writer analyzed the data which were the scores obtained from the pretest and posttest, using t-test (Two Samples Assuming Equal Variance) to answer the research question. T-test assesses whether the means of two groups are *significantly* different from each other. This type of analysis is appropriate to compare the means of two groups, in this case experimental and control groups.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In order to prove whether there is a significant difference between the speaking achievement of the experimental group and the control group, the writer analyzed the data using the statistical calculation based on the following steps.

The first step was to formulate the statistical hypothesis whether the Ho was accepted or rejected with a 0,05 level of significance, which means that the chance of making the wrong decision was maximally 5%. Next, the writer calculated the pretest and posttest scores using the t-test formula. The Ho is considered accepted if the value of t obtained was less than t table at 0.05 level. Then, the writer calculated the gain scores' mean of the pretest and posttest. The result of the calculation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Result of the T-Test

Group	Mean of Pre-test Scores	Mean of Post-test scores	The Gain between the Mean of Pre-test and Post-test Scores.	t_{table}	t_o	Sig/no t sig
VB (Experimental Group)	70.75	81.5	10.75	2.024	2.153	Sig
VC (Control Group)	72.5	75.5	7.5			

Based on the calculation above, it was found out that the gain scores' mean of pre-test and post-test in the experimental group, VB, was 10.75 and the control group, VC, was 7.5. With the level significance at 5%, the writer found out that the t_o of the experimental group and the control group was 2.153. Since t_o (2.153) is greater than t_{table} (2.024). It can be concluded that Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted. In other words, there is a significant

difference between the speaking achievement of 5th grade students who were taught using Role Play and those who were taught using Presentation. Accordingly, it can be concluded there was a slight increase in the speaking achievement of students in the experimental group (VB) than the control group (VC).

Discussion

Related to the finding above, there are some possible reasons why Role Play is deliberated better than Presentation. First is that Role Play was something new for them and made the students enjoy the learning activities more than Presentation. This is because Role Play let the students use their creativity in learning and they could add their own words and also put themselves into an imaginary situation state by Budden (2006).

Moreover, cooperating creativity in learning can go along the way towards making teaching practice more effective and certainly more enjoyable for both teachers and students. Presentation could make the story a little bit hard to understand if the presenter did not really have a good intonation and pronunciation. Presentation also made the students bored because all the students present the same thing without expression and body language in the story.

Second, by doing Role Play, the students can increase awareness of self (mind and body) and others (collaborations and empathy). It improves students' creativity and clarity in communicating verbal and nonverbal ideas. Students could create and add more sentences based on the characters roles that they played. On the other site, while the students did the presentation in front of the class, the writer noticed most of the students presented based on the script given without any improvements. As a result, the students did it based on the teachers' script without any improvements and all the students presented the same material and less intonation. It can be said they did a presentation based on the script given with less expression.

Based on the writer's experience when she was observing the experimental group, she found out that at the beginning, almost all students were ashamed to play the characters that they got because this was a new method for them and they never did it before during the lesson. The writer was sure that by doing the role-play the students were given a chance to pretend to be someone else. This was such a technique that could help timid students to overcome their shyness of speaking. Reticent students often have difficulty talking about their experiences or about themselves. The fact that they were someone else makes them feel that their own personality is not implicated (Porter-Ladousse, 1987) However, when the teacher helped them along the way, they began to catch up and started to play the characters with expression and use body language.

The writer also found that Role-Play could change a passive class to become more interactive. Role Play is fun and motivating, the students get the chance to speak more and it is useful to extend knowledge into feeling. Moreover, Role Play is a teaching strategy that fits within the social family of models (Joyce and Weil, 2000). These strategies emphasize the social nature of learning, and see cooperative behavior as stimulating students both socially and intellectually. Role Play is also a technique that can make the students work in pairs, support one another and to make class more interesting and to reduce students' boredom. The teacher only as a facilitator and only guide the students to develop their creativities based on the real-life situation.

However, Role-Play let the students be in their happy place since they did not have to think about making mistakes because they can use their own imaginative self-expression. Moreover, the students are desuggesting their limitations and suggesting how easy it will be for them to succeed by integrating with fine arts. It can provide positive suggestions for them based on Lozanov and Miller as cited in Larsen-Freeman (2000). Besides that, they can use their own expression of thoughts and a feeling of each student's minds. As stated by Doff (1988), not only children fantasize, but also teenagers and adults often imagine themselves in different situations. In this case the writer let the students do what they naturally find enjoyable.

Nevertheless, the control group did not get scores as high as the experimental group. One of the factors was that some students couldn't memorize well the draft that they got from the teacher. They prepared in a short time and some of them need extra time to answer the questions and present it fluently in front of the class. Another factor was the students in the control group should memorize the draft as the teacher gave it to them and it's quite

difficult for them to do it the same. Of course, they were bored because they could not use their own imagination to improve it and made them a little bit reduce their creativity.

Besides, the control group also made an improvement on their speaking achievement. The mean of the control group's pretest was 72.5 and after the treatments their mean score was 80. The reason is because the students did the presentation in their speaking activity. Moreover, by doing presentations they made it easy to deliver the important points to a public audience (Kamrul, 2013).

Finally, after all three treatments had been done, the experimental group hardly found any difficulties when they did the posttest. Consequently, they got a little bit higher speaking achievement than the students of the control group.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

One of the great things in using role play is letting the students in their happy place since they do not need to worry about making mistakes. This can happen because they can use their own imaginative self-expressions by desuggesting their limitations and suggesting how easy it will be for them to succeed and integrated with fine art. Another great thing in using role play is that communication in it will stimulate and encourage other students to speak fluently. It can happen because the students feel comfortable and not ashamed when a friend gives them a solution and helps them in the group. They will do the best to help each other to make their group perform well.

Since the significance of this strategy is shown through the result, we can say that Role Play technique can improve students' speaking skill and Role Play technique is a comfortable place to practice their speaking skill. They can improve and use their own words and imagination to explore their characters that they get on that script. Most of the time they are pushed to work in a group and support each other to speak in English fluently even if they are not in a group with their best friend, they can reduce their selfishness and improve each character in that script. The students are very active and helpful when they are asked to share their ideas for the improvement of their character that they get since they want their friends to hear their ideas.

Based on the finding of this research, there are some suggestions which might be beneficial for teaching and further research. For teaching, Role Play can be considered as a technique to enhance the students' motivation and self-confidence in speaking. English teachers should be more selective in choosing the materials that are appropriate for the students' level of competence. Moreover, the teachers should choose stories that are familiar or related with their daily lives. This can make it easier for them to express what they have in mind. For further research, it is recommended that the next researchers do the treatments more than three meetings to give students time to adjust in the teaching learning activities.

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