



THE IMPACT OF SCRIPTED ROLE-PLAY ON ENHANCING SPEAKING ABILITIES OF GRADE SEVEN STUDENTS AT LEBANESE PRIVATE SCHOOLS

*Dr. Ali El-Husseini

Assistant Professor, Lebanese University, Faculty of Letters and Humanities-Branch Four-Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

Several approaches have been used to enhance speaking skills for English foreign language learners. Among these approaches is the role play. This study aimed to investigate the impact of implementing scripted role play technique for a period of seventeen weeks on the development and improvement of oral skills and attitudes of eighth graders at a private school in Lebanon. The participants of the study were 56 learners divided into two classes (30 in the treatment group and 26 in the control group). The lessons were given two hourly three times a week. At the end of each lesson learners in the treatment group were asked to perform unscripted role-play activities whereas those in the control group did not have any such activities. Speaking pre and post tests were given to both groups to check the development of their speaking skills. Through a qualitative-quantitative approach, the research confirmed the efficiency of applying unscripted role play technique on the development of sub-speaking skills especially fluency and lexical resources. The correlation between unscripted role play technique with accuracy and pronunciation of the speakers was not very significant. Implications for learners, teachers, curriculum designers and future researchers were issued to develop more fluent and motivated English second language learners.

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INTRODUCTION

Role play is nowadays considered a major trend in language teaching. Role playing, a derivative of a sociodrama, is a method for exploring the issues involved in complex social situations. It may be used for the training of professionals or in a classroom for the understanding of literature, history, and even science (Blatner (2009). The British council (2012) supports this definition by arguing that incorporating role-play into the classroom adds variety, a change of pace and opportunities for a lot of language production and also a lot of fun! It can be an integral part of the class and not a 'one-off' event. If the teacher believes that the activity will work and the necessary support is provided, it can be very successful.

Purpose and significance of the Study: The increasing of effective communication skills in English make the teachers as well as the researchers look for good techniques to improve their students' speaking skills to use the target language.

The main objective of this study is identify whether the use of scripted role play is effective to improve the grade seven students' speaking abilities in one of the Lebanese private schools. The study is significant since speaking the target language is used and required in the market place. Scripted role play can be applied for some of the English learning purpose to increase students' speaking skill. It is not merely for improving students' speaking but also it can be applied in vocabulary learning and learning the language in general.

Statement of the Problem: The objective of teaching English to Grade 7 in Lebanese schools is to qualify the learners with the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Baker and Westrup (2003) considered that the speaking skill is neglected in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, and the whole attention is directed to the literary skills such as reading and writing. Bashir, Azeem and Dogar (2012) stated that the "students do not get any chance either in the classroom or outside to speak English. Speaking is not a part of our examinations" (p. 35). Baker and Westrup (2003) also mentioned that many teachers focus on "grammar

*Corresponding author: Dr. Ali El-Husseini,
Assistant Professor, Lebanese University, Faculty of Letters and Humanities-
Branch Four-Lebanon

and vocabulary because these areas are tested in our examinations” (p. 5). Moreover, Susanti (2007) stated that some students are unable to perform a speaking task successfully because they are incapable of speaking fluently in English. As an English language teacher, the researcher could notice that most of grade 7 students in the Lebanese schools have similar problems in speaking. Most students face many difficulties as they lack effective communication skills that provide them with new life experiences inside and outside the school. In Lebanon, the teaching- learning process is deeply teacher- centered and the teacher is usually the only source of knowledge. In fact, the students lack the effective communication skills that can provide them with new experiences among their life inside and outside the school.

The Hypotheses: The main purpose of this study is to check the following hypotheses

- H1:** The experimental group, which will be exposed to the role- play activity, will show significantly higher speaking proficiency mean scores in the post- test than students in the control group, who will not receive this training.
- H2:** There will be a statistically significant correlation between role- play activity and speaking proficiency levels.
- H3:** The experimental group will have higher motivation level at the end of this study than the control group.

Review of Literature

Some applied linguists (Ladousse, 2004; Richard, 2008; Susanti, 2007) state that students become better speakers when they are more confident individuals while expressing their ideas, opinions, attitudes and/or feelings using the L2 effectively. Liu and Ding (2009) and Rani (2009) identified role play as an “effective technique to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interests of learners, and make the language acquisition impressive” (p.140). Bell and Kahrhoff (2006) confirmed that “active learning happens when students engage in course material directly and personally. Active learning allows students to understand material not as abstract information removed from their experiences, but as directly relevant to their lives and world. Ments (1999) mentioned that one of the advantages of role- play is that it “is student – centered and addresses itself to the need and concerns of the trainee”. In addition, it involves “learners actively learning, so that they appreciate the value of participation, rather than just hoping to learn by absorption” (Killen, 2007, p. 283). Besides, Edge (1992), Gangel (2014), Martin, Lovat and Purnel (2012) and VanMents (1989), state that role play is highly motivating and fruitful because the students enjoy it and are eager to involve in it. According to Byrne (1986), role play activities are acceptable as teaching aids in the communicative approach since they allow students to use the target language to communicate and interact with each other.

This facilitates the development of their oral communication skills and provides them with a wide range of opportunities for the improvement of their language ability (Sutcliffe, 2008). However, Klanrit (2007) argued that although role-play activities can really help develop students’ oral ability, the students only slightly gain new elements of the target language or language use via role-plays. Therefore, just like in any other

kind of communicative activities, it seems to be likely or unlikely that EFL students will be able to attain language accuracy, appropriacy and fluency when performing scripted role-play activities (Liu and ding, 2009).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study will make use of the two approaches: Quantitative and qualitative. The former is mainly statistical and deals with numbers and measurement scales. Gay and Airasian (2000) suggested “Quantitative methods of research are based on the collection and analysis of numerical data usually obtained from questionnaires, tests, checklists, and other formal paper-and-pencil instruments”. Since the aim of this study is to investigate the effect of implementing the role play approach on students’ speaking skill, then its numbers will be compared, calculated, categorized and interpreted to reveal numbers. So this approach will best serve the purpose of this study. On the other hand, a questionnaire will be filled by the participants since this is a useful model for collecting data directly by sampling a specific group of participants at a single point in time. This method is flexible and the researcher will be objective in gathering her information. The questionnaire will be administered after implementing the role play over the term to see the students' views about the new teaching techniques and whether it contributed to their motivation.

The participants: The participants of this study will be 57 students distributed into two heterogeneous sections (A and B): 30 students in A and 27 in B. Section A will be the control group following the traditional teaching\ learning process. Section B will constitute the experimental group which will be exposed to a treatment which is the use of the role-play practicing speaking.

Pre and post tests: Speaking pre and post tests were given to the participants in both sections (A and B) before and after the treatment, which took 17 weeks, and their scores before and after treatment were compared to see whether implementing the role play technique would make any difference to learners' proficiency. The tests are adapted from the British Council basic speaking test, and they are supposed to measure the level of the learners' proficiency before and after the treatment.

The Questionnaire: It was administered to the learners after implementing the role-play technique in the class room to investigate the students’ views about the new teaching technique and whether it contributed to their motivation.

Data analysis: After the pretest was given to both sections, the teacher in section B implemented scripted role play technique in a 3 hour session over the period of around 17 weeks (one semester) in order to collect and gather all the information needed for the study. At the end of the term, the post test was given to both classes to see whether the implementation of role play made any difference through comparing the scores of both tests. During the term, the researcher attended class B where role play was implemented to make sure that everything was ok. After the post test, the learner questionnaire was administered to see the learners' reaction to their new experience. Then an interview was held with section B teacher to see her reaction to the implementation of role play as well.

RESULTS

The overall results show that using scripted role play in general helped and improved students' proficiency in conversations more than learners who were exposed to traditional teaching. The results show that the mean in both pre and post tests for the control group was nearly the same in all sub skills except in pronunciation. This implies that the proficiency in the control group did not improve at all in three sub skills: fluency, lexical resources, and accuracy, but the pronunciation sub skill improved slightly. Moving to the experimental group, results show that the mean of all sub skills did not show any improvement but the average shows the following results. The average of the fluency sub skill shows that it has increased by 1 point from 9.4 to 10.4. and lexical resources increased by 1.8. from 7.56 to 9.36. Pronunciation increased by 0.47 from 9.3 to 9.47 and accuracy by 0.27 from 9.2 to 9.47. The sub skills which showed significant improvement are fluency and lexical resources, while accuracy and pronunciation showed slight improvement. Table One shows the difference in the total sub skills average and mean in both control and experimental groups.

Table 1. The average and mean of total scores for both control and experimental group

		Total	difference
Pretest control	Mean average	38 37.7	
Posttest control	Mean average	38 37.73	Zero 0.03
Pretest experimental	Mean average	35.5 37.06	
Posttest experimental	Mean average	37 39.01	1.5 2.01

Table One shows that the control group showed no improvement in the mean and average of the total scores of the speaking sub skills. The mean was 38 in both pre and post tests with difference of zero. The average increased insignificantly 0.03. On the contrary, the experimental group showed significant improvement in both the mean and average of the total scores of the speaking sub skills. The mean increased by 1.5, and the average increased by 2.01. This implies that Hypotheses One and Two of the study were supported.

Qualitative Analysis: A questionnaire adopted from Schmit, Boraie and Kessabay (1996) was passed to the experimental group to investigate the impact of implementing role play tasks on the motivation level of the students after being exposed to the treatment. Analysis of the questionnaire show that role play tasks rendered fruitful and motivational for the majority of students. Eighty two percent of the subjects agree that unscripted role play has a positive effect on developing learners' oral proficiency skills. 96% of the subjects agreed that English classes attracted them more than before due to role play, and the item which received the least agreement is role play improved structural level (70%) , though this percentage is still considered high. This means that Hypothesis Three is supported.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results show that the use of scripted role play technique can improve speaking abilities of Lebanese EFL learners. They also reveal that the students can be extremely satisfied with this technique. It enables the students to formulate their turns and give them a better opportunity to improve their English speaking, as Ladousse (2004) argues.

The findings of the research confirm that role play is effective in boosting learners' motivation to learn a foreign language. They also confirm that speaking fluency and vocabulary gain is correlated with implementing role play technique. The success in improving students' speaking ability depends on various techniques that are used in class to make it more lively and enjoyable. The use of scripted role play with Lebanese EFL has proved to be useful in improving the learners' English learners and in increasing their motivation to participate and learn. This should have great implications for teachers, educators and syllabus designers.

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