



The Implementation of Role Play to Improve Speaking Skill: An Action Research with Grade Six Students

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the effects of Role Play on the improvement of speaking skill of grade six students. The research utilized quantitative research approach which involved the pre-test-post-test design. A total of 21 students participated in the study, comprising 12 boys and 9 girls. The fully scripted role play technique was used as an intervention strategy. English proficiency achievement test was applied before and after the role play activities in order to gather the data. The experiment lasted for six consecutive weeks. Data were analyzed and interpreted using inferential statistics t-test with $p < .05$ level of significance, mean, and standard deviation. The results revealed a mean score of 45.7 in pre-test, 67.8 for the post-test, with a mean difference of 22.1 and the significant value (p) obtained was .000. The findings indicated higher scores in the post-test, vis-a-vis the pre-test of all 21 research participants. Thus, it is commendable that the implementation of role play technique helps in improving speaking skill of students and provide an alternative to ESL teachers in Bhutan to teach speaking skills.

Keywords: Improving; speaking skill; role play; grade six students.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language is the driving force for developing interpersonal skills in every walk of life. It is the standardized international language

for studying multidisciplinary subjects and practice professional specializations. English is academically essential for students' development process like cognitive, psychological and effective communication skills. In Bhutan, English

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language was introduced as a Second Language (ESL) in 1961 during the reign of the third King of Bhutan. Ever since its inception English has been used as a medium of instruction in Bhutan for more than five decades now, still the majority of the Bhutanese students and graduates find it difficult to communicate in English with fluency. A lot of students fail in Examination as a result of not being able to understand and interpret what their teachers said in the class. "Mastering English, especially speaking skill, is importantly needed for the students to allow them to communicate with other people globally" [1].

La Prairie M [2] claimed that Bhutanese graduates lack fluency in the language. There are lots of reason for not being able to communicate in English: lack of opportunities to practice the skills, lack of attention placed on importance of speaking and speaking English is limited within the four walls of the classroom. In the Bhutanese classrooms especially in the primary classes, students are not given ample time to practice oral communication skills, thus, they have very little knowledge of language education and cannot speak even a simple phrase. This shows that students are not motivated to use English in the classrooms. Most of the classroom practices are characterized by teacher talks, teacher presentations and comments where use of oral communication by the student is very limited.

Moreover, "the primary school teachers in Bhutan seemed to be using a limited range of strategies and materials, which did not fit individual needs and interests" [3]. It was also observed that most of the materials used by the teachers to teach the language were found to be outdated and repetitious. It is vital to note that teaching at any level requires students' exposure to varieties of learning materials to retain their interest and cater to diverse learning needs. Speaking was found as the most challenging among the four language skills [2] and "one main factor was the use of obsolete teaching method by the language teachers. New and varied teaching techniques must be adopted to develop the speaking skills of the Bhutanese students. Therefore, this study has been undertaken to bridge the gap through the use role play technique".

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the effectiveness of role play in improving speaking skill of the class six students.

2. To study the differences in the mean achievement scores of students in speaking after the implementation of roleplay.

1.2 Reconnaissance

This is derived from a French word (*reconnaitre* – to look at) and has connection with warfare (to survey the scene to find out strategic points of interest). According to [4] "reconnaissance consist of three part namely: situational analysis, analysis of competence of the people involved, and 'literature'. Together these comprise an overview that will encompass the realities of the situation in terms of resources and practices (situational analysis), the profile of competences of key players (competences) and a connection with previous work in this and related areas ('literature')."

1.3 Situational Analysis

After teaching English for more than 24 years at various class levels in the schools of Bhutan, I have learned that the majority of Bhutanese students possess low attitude towards learning English due to the nature and complexity of the subject, which demands mastery of the four strands that are essential in all aspects of curriculum.

In particular, the researcher have observed that most of the students are reluctant to speak English in the classroom discussions and outside the class. This issue has become more apparent after teaching English to class VI students at Norbugang Primary School, Pemagatshel for last 4 years and having discussed with colleagues who shared same concerns. From all these experiences, the researcher have realized that this issue deserved some immediate attention so as to avoid uncertain consequences in future.

Speaking skill is the most important skill to acquire foreign or second language learning. Among the four key language skills, speaking is deemed to be the most important skill in learning a foreign or second language [5] asserts that "Speaking is a skill which deserves attention every bit as much as literary skills, in both first and second language. To most people, mastering the speaking skill is the single most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language".

In-order to become a well-rounded communicator one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills e.g. listening, speaking, reading and writing, but the ability to speak skilfully, provides the speaker with several distinct advantages. [6] found out that “impacting students’ performance in speaking skills are shyness, peer pressure, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes. Other factors that hinder speaking performance could be due to lack of vocabulary and lack of exposure to the target language”.

Thus, the teacher researcher felt the need to identify students’ English speaking barriers so as to enhance English speaking ability and academic performances.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the concepts and literature related to the study in order to provide the theoretical background of the study. The study shares the results of previous studies that are closely related to the present study.

2.1 Speaking Skill

Speaking is the way of people to express and communicate ideas to others orally [7] defines “speaking as an activity to produce sayings in the form of words and sentences orally in order to communicate with others”. “Speaking is one of the four language skills through which learners can communicate with others to achieve certain goals or to express their opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints” [8,9]. States that “speaking needs not only the learners’ understanding about the way to produce the linguistic competence such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary but also comprehension about sociolinguistic competence such as when, why, and how to speak”.

According to [10] “there are many sub skills to speaking like accuracy, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and comprehensibility which helps the speaker in communicating with others and adds that the ability to make use of the above skills is called speaking skill of a person”. “The development of these skills is necessary to become a proficient English speaker. Students with good skills in reading, listening and writing are speculated to possess better speaking ability, however, it is found that students in general are hesitant to speak in English” [11].

According to [12] states that “the mastery of speaking skill in English is a priority for many second language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how much they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. It means that second language learning as the effective way to improve their speaking skill. They can increase the ability in spoken language”.

Speaking is considered as a very important aspect of learning a foreign language. As stated by [13] that “speaking in a second language or foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills. Thus, Speaking has evolved into an important skill that must be mastered in order to become fluent and successful in spoken communication”.

2.2 Role Play

Role play is the process of bringing a real-life situation into the classroom and having students imagine and enact the role of a character. Role play is a popular learning method for English speaking classes that can help students reinforce or revise vocabulary and expressions learned in class. According to [14] “role play can be defined as a simulation or an action in imitating a character, mostly student play act being someone else in the real world”. “Role play technique can be fun and lead to develop learning, which help EFL students to comprehend the importance of cooperation and to have an interest in learning” [15]. “There are three types of role play: fully scripted role-play, semi-scripted role-play and non-scripted role play. In a fully scripted role-play, each word is given, and each student should understand or memorize his/her role” [16]. “The primary objective of role play is to heighten students’ interaction and teachers must integrate such kind of speaking activity to reflect learners’ theoretical knowledge of a language in practice” [17]. “It provides students with opportunities to practice speaking in different social context” [18]. “Activities involving role play works best with primary school students motivating them to speak or argue in a light-hearted manner and helps in developing their confidence, enhancing their vocabulary and getting stronger to speak fluently” [19]. Students get to experience the language learned making up their own dialogue and they get an opportunity to explore beyond what has been learned in the classroom drawing on a full range of their language competencies.

2.3 Roleplay and Speaking Skill

According to [20] stated “role-play is a technique which can promote students to speak in the classroom. Role-play is a teaching technique in which students are given specific roles and they must speak and behave based on the roles they receive” [21]. Found out that “the implementation of role-play technique improves students’ both in speaking ability and self-confidence”.

[22] state that “the students who were taught through role play got better result than the students who were taught through information gap. Role play gives the opportunity to the students to explore their ability to be more active in teaching and learning process. The students have opportunities for stimulating their speaking skills which they can perform easily in front of the class. In other words, role play helps the students to improve their speaking skill”.

[23] found that “role-play improved the performance in the Iraqi English as Foreign Language students in speaking test”.

2.4 Overarching Research Question

How Can I Improve Grade Six Students’ Speaking skill through the use of Role play?

2.4.1 Sub questions

1. What is the mean achievement score of students in speaking skill before the implementation of role play?
2. Does roleplay help in enhancing students’ speaking skill?
3. Are there any significant differences in the speaking ability of students before and after the intervention?

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted a quantitative research approach which involved the use of pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of using role play in improving students’ speaking skill.

3.1 Sample

The study used a convenience sampling technique. The total sample size consisted of 21 students comprising 12 boys and 9 girls of Norbugang Primary School, Pemagatshel, Bhutan.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

The speaking proficiency test was conducted twice to the sample group to compare the enhancement of the students’ speaking skills. The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the study and the post-test was conducted after the intervention which included different activities for speaking role play technique. Participants were asked to speak on the same topic for the pre-test and the post-test. The students were graded on four aspects of their speaking abilities: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. The speaking test was evaluated using speaking rubrics developed by Bhutanese Curriculum in 2014.

3.3 Reliability

To find out the reliability of the assessment rubrics, the researcher conducted the reliability test with another 20 grade five students in the same school. Cronbach’s Alpha Rating Scale was applied to measure the reliability of the rubrics. The reliability statistics Cronbach’s alpha (α) was 0.84 which signifies a reliable level of internal consistency.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used inferential analysis techniques in representing the research findings. The pre and post data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (23.0 version) software and the findings are presented in mean, standard deviation, t-test, and frequencies.

3.5 Implementation of the Role Play: The Intervention

The fully scripted role play technique was used during the intervention process. The researcher divided the research participants into different groups. The short ready-made plays such as *The Town Mouse and The Country Mouse*, *The Moon and her mother*, *The lost letter of mother Goose*, *Share the burden, who will bell the cat?* and *The Princess and Pea* were provided to the groups by the researcher and students were assigned different roles as per the characters in the play. Individual students were instructed to comprehend and memorized their role during their free time. During the role play class, students were given platform to enact their roles in front of the whole class and they were also

asked to share their experiences about the enactment. Subsequently, the researcher provided feedback and comments based on their enactment, whereby they were instructed to incorporate the suggestions and comments in the next meeting class. The role play class was conducted thrice in a week and the intervention lasted for six weeks. After the intervention, post-test data was collected using same tools which was used during the pre-test data collection.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Sample Group

The results of the sample group's pre-test and post-test are shown in Table 1. The students' post-test scores revealed that their performance had significantly improved. The pre-test scores ranged from 32 to 75.0, while the post-test

scores ranged from 58 to 89.3, indicating a significant improvement in the post-test scores.

Fig. 1 illustrates the difference in the level of achievement of individual student in the pre-test and the post-test. The post-test scores represented by the red line confirmed a significant increase in the scores compared to the pre-test scores (blue line). It reveals that every individual showed remarkable improvement in the post-test scores.

The Table 2 shows the score of pre-test and post-test of the sample group. The pre-test mean was 45.7, with a standard deviation of 9.5. The post-test mean score was 67.8 with an 8.4 standard deviation. The mean difference between the pre-test and the post-test was 22.1, showing an increase in the mean score of the post-test. The significant value being .000, lower than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$) indicated statistically significant rise in the post- test scores compared to the pre-test scores of the sample group.

Table 1. Individual scores of the pre-test and post-test

Student No	Pre-test (100)	Post-test(100)	Score Difference
1	40.5	62.7	22.2
2	43.0	64.6	21.6
3	44.6	63.0	18.4
4	68.0	89.3	21.3
5	32.0	59.0	27.0
6	55.0	78.4	23.4
7	46.8	59.0	12.2
8	52.6	76.8	24.2
9	36.0	66.0	30.0
10	42.8	69.0	26.2
11	33.6	66.0	32.4
12	36.4	62.8	26.4
13	62.5	82.4	19.9
14	45.5	72.5	27.0
15	36.0	58.0	22.0
16	53.7	73.6	19.9
17	52.0	72.0	20.0
18	40.4	64.3	23.9
19	38.5	61.5	23.0
20	47.0	62.0	15.0
21	52.0	60.7	8.7
Mean	45.7	67.8	22.1

Table 2 Comparison of pre-test and post-test of the sample group

Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean difference	P value
Sample Group	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	45.7	9.5	67.8	8.4	22.1	.000

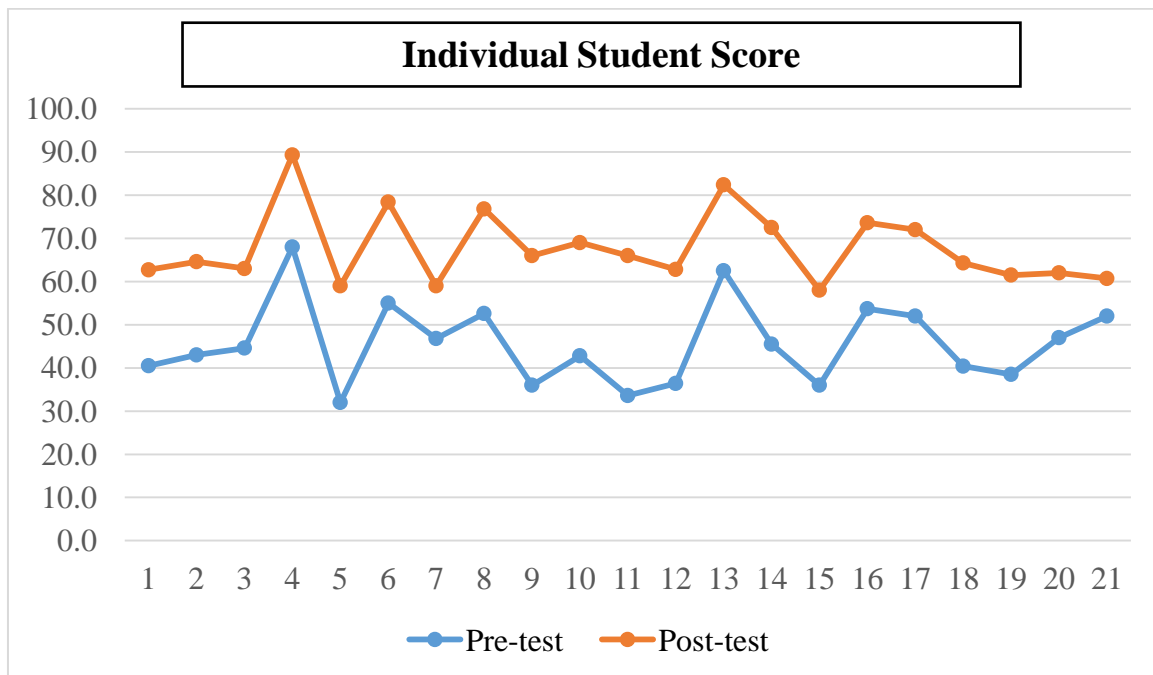


Fig. 1. Line graph showing the individual score of pre-test and post-test (Speaking test)

5. DISCUSSION

The study confirmed that the integration of roleplay helps in improving students speaking ability if they are provided with conducive environment to learn and practice in an inspiring ways. Data gathered through the speaking proficiency test of grade six students before and after the implementation of roleplay showed that the post-test mean score 45.7 was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score 67.8 with the mean difference of 22.1 The significance value (P) was 0.00. These findings revealed that there was drastic improvement in students' speaking skill after the implementation of roleplay.

The above result align with [22] state that the students who were taught through role play got better result than the students who were taught through information gap. Role play gives the opportunity to the students to explore their ability to be more active in teaching and learning process. The students have opportunities for stimulating their speaking skills which they can perform easily in the front of the class. In other words, role play helps the students to improve their speaking skill.

Further, [20] justified that role-play is a technique which can promote students to speak in the classroom. Role-play is a teaching technique in

which students are given specific roles and they must speak and behave based on the roles they receive. The finding also correlates to the earlier study conducted by [21] found out that the implementation of role play technique improves students' both in speaking ability and self-confidence.

Above findings revealed that the use of role play technique bring improvement in speaking skill of students.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that role play is an effective technique for developing students' speaking skill. It can be generalized that role play technique improved the learners speaking skill. It is due to the positive aspect of the role play technique in EFL classroom. Moreover, it develops confidence and creativity in students as they are motivated to take part in speaking skills.

The regular practice of role play makes the students fluent in English. Further, it develops vocabularies which help to choose suitable words that fit the situation. Finally, the study demonstrates that role play has a significant pedagogical impact in EFL classrooms in improving the communicative skills of the students.

Role play technique has positive impact in improving learners' speaking skills as it gives the students a chance to explore different situations of real life and enables them to speak accurately and confidently in that situation in the target language.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are suggested;

- 1) The use of role play technique has been found to enhance the English speaking skills of grade six students. Therefore, the use of this technique should be encouraged in teaching speaking skills in the other grades too.
- 2) Teachers should use the role play technique to teach reading using literary text such as essays, poems and stories in English besides teaching speaking.
- 3) Role play technique may be used in teaching other subjects to observe if the technique bring similar outcomes.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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