Non-English majored students' perspectives on the use of role-play technique to improve speaking skills at Thai Nguyen University of Technology

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Abstract- This paper looks at investigating non-English majored students' perspectives on the use of role-play technique to improve speaking skills at Thai Nguyen University of Technology (TNUT). The study employed the quantitative method and the data collection instrument was a questionnaire with close-ended questions. The findings show that most of the students know the importance of role-playing activities because they feel interested when they participate in role-play activities. Moreover, they believe that role-playing helps them improve their speaking skills and communicate well. In addition, most of them agree that they can overcome fear and shyness through role-play activities. Besides, role-playing is also a good way to help them become more active and confident. In reference to the types of role play, a majority of the students like role-playing controlled through cued dialogues and role-playing controlled through cues and information. They find these two types easier to perform in speaking activities. Furthermore, the students are also interested in role-play activities done in pairs.

Index Terms- role play, speaking, communication skills, technique, type.

I. INTRODUCTION

TO improve speaking skills, we have an effective method which is the role play technique. Role play seems to be one of the most interesting ones for the students to involve themselves in speaking activities. Burns and Joice (1997) point out that the students act or pretend to be someone else in the actual world situation that is brought into the classroom. Besides, they also state that role play also helps shy learners by providing a mask where learners 'difficulties in conversation are liberated".

Role play is very important in teaching and learning because according to Ur (1996), role play is virtually the only way that teachers can give their learners the opportunity to practice improvising a range of real-life spoken language in the classroom and is an extremely effective technique.

Knowing the importance of role-play in improving students' speaking skills, teachers at Thai Nguyen University of Technology

(TNUT) decided to use this technique in their lessons with the hope of helping students speak better and communicative effectively in real-life situations.

In applying role-play technique, teachers realize that students have different views about role play so understanding non-English majored students' perspectives on the use of role-play technique is extremely essential so that teachers at TNUT can employ role-play more appropriately to meet students' wishes. Therefore, we decided to conduct this research.

1.1. Aims of the study:

The study firstly aims at finding the students' perspectives on the use of role-playing as a technique in learning speaking skills for the non–English majored at Thai Nguyen University of Technology. Based on the research results, this study also provides practical suggestions for better use of role-play technique in learning to speak.

1.2. Research questions:

To achieve the aims mentioned above, this study tries to answer the following questions:

1.2.1. What are non-English major students' perspectives about the use of role-playing activities to improve speaking skills at Thai Nguyen University of Technology?

1.2.2. What suggestions can be given to the use of role play?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. What is speaking?

There have been different views and theories about speaking so far. Tarigan (1990) defines speaking as a language skill that is developed in a child's life, which is produced by listening skill, and at that period speaking skill is learned.

According to Ladouse (as cited in Nunan, 1991), speaking is the ability to express oneself in the situation or the ability to converse or to express a sequence of ideas fluently.

To learners at TNUT, speaking is one of the most difficult skills and teachers must find a suitable technique to solve this problem.

2.2. Definition of role play

Littlewood (1981) shows that when playing a role, the learners are asked to imagine themselves in a situation that could occur in their daily activities or outside the classroom. They are asked to adopt a specific role in this situation. They are asked to act as if the situation really exists.

Having the same viewpoint, Doff (1990) defines that it is a way of bringing situations from real life into the classroom.

In his book, Ur (1996) indicates that role play is a term referring to all sorts of activities in which learners imagine themselves in a situation outside the classroom, and using language appropriate to this new context.

2.3. Types of role play

Mcguire and Priestly (1981) divide role play into three types: Simple Role Play, Modeling Exercise, and Structures Role Play.

Simple Role Play is a role play which can be used on fairly simple level, concentrating and beginning with situation that will be familiar to the learners, and involving only two or four 'actors' at a time. The second type is Modeling Exercises consisting of the role played demonstrations of social skill or response by someone who is competent in its execution for someone who is not. The last one is a structures role play. When people have more complex sets of expectations, it is possible to run role-play in which individuals are given more elaborate instruction about who they are supposed to be and what would like to happen.

Unlike Mcguire and Priestly, Littlewood (1981) describes four types of role play.

The first type is role play activity controlled through cued dialogues in which learners will have their cues printed on separate cards. Therefore, students can predict a large proportion of what the other will say and to prepare the general gist of their own responses. The second type is role-playing controlled through cues and information. In this type of activity, one student is given detailed cues and the other has information enabling him to respond as necessary. The third one is role-playing controlled through situation and goals. Learners are initially aware only of the overall situation and their own goals in it. They must negotiate the interaction itself as it unfolds, each partner responding spontaneously to the other's communicative acts and strategies. The last type is role-playing in the form of debate or discussion. The situation is a debate or discussion about a real or simulated issue.

2.4. The importance of role-play

According to Stephen D. Hattings (1993), role play is very important in teaching speaking because it provides students with chances to practice communicating in different social roles. Moreover, it also allows students to be creative and to put themselves in another person's place for a while. He also shows that role play would seem to be the ideal activity in which students could use their English creatively.

Ladousse (1989) mentions that role play is one of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation. Furthermore, it also encourages peer learning encouraged and increases the sharing of the responsibility between teacher and students for the learning process. Role play is perhaps the most flexible technique in the range, and teachers who have it at their fingertips can meet an infinite variety of needs with suitable and effective role-play exercises. In their book, Ladousse and series editor – Alan Maley say that role play is as important as it is because for some of the following reasons:

The first reason is that a very wide variety of experiences can be brought into the classroom through role play. The second reason is that role play puts students in situations in which they are required to use and develop those phatic forms of language which are so necessary for oiling the works of social relationships, but which are so often neglected by our language teaching syllabuses. In addition, some people are learning English to prepare for specific roles in their lives so role play is a very useful dress rehearsal for real life. It enables them not just to acquire set phrases, but to learn how the interaction might take place in a variety of situations. Lastly, role play helps many shy students by providing them with a mask.

III.   METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants in the study were one hundred non-English majored students including 15 female students and 85 male students. They have learnt English at school for ten years and then at TNUT for more than one term.

3.2. The instruments

In this study, a questionnaire was used in order to obtain information from the students about their perspectives on the use of role-play technique. According to Ary, et al (1979), there are two types of questionnaires which are structured, or closed type, and unstructured, or open type. The questionnaire in this research was a closed form, based on five-point Likert scale with the five values of response to the statement on the questionnaire; 1 was for strongly agree (SD), 2 for agree (D), 3 for neutral (N), 4 for disagree (A), and 5 for strongly disagree (SA).

3.3. Data collection procedures

The study was conducted at Thai Nguyen University of Technology from May to the end of June, 2022. To collect data for the study, the questionnaire was distributed to 100 students by surveying offline. After 30 minutes, the survey results were collected. Students were given 10 minutes to select the best answer to ten multiple-choice questions in part one, then they spent 5 minutes in part two, and 15 minutes in part three. All the answers made by participants were kept confidential to serve for the data analysis. In this study, the descriptive statistical procedures of SPSS Version 20 were used to analyze the data.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Students' perspectives about the importance of role-playing activities in English lessons.

No	STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Role-play is an interesting activity.	47%	43%	8%	1%	1%
2	Role-play helps me improve my communication skills.	48%	43%	7%	1%	1%
3	I can communicate in real-life situations through role-playing activities in the classroom.	42%	43%	10%	3%	2%
4	Role-playing helps me improve my speaking skills and I can choose roles that match my ability to speak naturally.	40%	53%	4%	0%	3%
5	Role-play helps me overcome my fear and shyness in front of crowds.	44%	47%	8%	0%	1%
6	Role-play helps me become more active and confident.	38%	51%	7%	3%	1%

Table 1: The importance of role-play activities

We can see from table 1 that many students strongly agree with the first view that role-playing activities are very interesting, accounting for 47%. Closely followed by the fact that 43% of students agreed with this view, only 8% students were neutral, and 1% of students disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Besides, in the second perspective, up to 48% of students chose to strongly agree and 43% students agreed that role-playing activities improve their communication skills. The number of students who were neutral, disagreed and strongly disagreed with this view made up 7%, 1%, and 1%, respectively. This shows that role-playing activities give students many benefits that make it easier for them to communicate with foreigners without hesitation.

For the questions No 3,4, 5, 6, the number of students who strongly agreed with these views was also quite high at 42%, 40%, 44%, and 38%, respectively. Regarding question 5 and 6, the number of students who agreed seemed to be slightly higher than students who strongly agreed at 53% and 51% and only 1% of students selected to strongly disagree. We see that role-playing activities make it possible for students to communicate easily in real-life situations, improving their speaking skills more fluently. It also helps them overcome their fear of standing in front of a crowd to become more active and confident.

4.2. Students' perspectives about types of role play.

Four types of role-playing are often applied in the classroom to create a variety of interactions.

Table 2 shows the different views of students on choosing the right role-playing activity for them.

It can be revealed from table 2 that role-playing controlled through cued dialogues was the most popular, accounting for 35% of students. This activity is most loved because it is the easiest to do (38%).

In addition, this activity is also loved by teachers because it is not difficult for the teacher to prepare them in the appropriate form. Also, William Littlewood points out that the teacher can use cued dialogues to elicit forms that he has just taught or which his learners would otherwise avoid. This use of the forms in a 'semi-communicative' context helps to prepare learners to use them later in a fully spontaneous interaction.

The second type that is role-playing controlled through cues and information was also chosen by quite a lot of students, accounting for 33%., while 32% of students chose this as an easy activity to perform.

These two role-play activities provide a framework of specific cues for learners, helping learners reduce some of the responsibilities in creating interaction. This is similar to role-playing controlled through situation and goals. This is the type of activity that had the least number of students' favorites and students thought it's the least easy to do with 14% and 13% respectively.

As for role-playing in the form of debate or discussion, 18% of students loved this activity and 17% of students thought it is an easier activity to perform in the four types of activities.

It can be concluded that the two first types: role-playing controlled through cued dialogues and role-playing controlled through cues and information were preferred by the students and thought to be the easiest to perform. In contrast, the two last types: role-playing controlled through situation and goals; and role-playing in the form of debate or discussion were said to be more difficult to practice.

Types of role play	Students' perspectives	
	1. Which of the following types of role-playing do you prefer?	**2.** Of the four types of role-playing activities, which ones do you find easier to perform.
A. Role-playing controlled through cued dialogues.	35%	38%
B. Role-playing controlled through cues and information.	33%	32%
C. Role-playing controlled through situation and goals.	14%	13%
D. Role-playing in the form of debate or discussion.	18%	17%

Table 2: Students' perspectives about types of role play.

4.3. Students' perspectives about the topics in role play.

Table 5 describes students' views on their choice of topics in role-play activities.

Looking at table 5, we see the topic that students desired to perform was greetings in the first meeting, occupying 57%, 3% higher than the topic of hobby with 54%. Only 5% of students preferred the theme of the seasons of the year. The remaining topics such as dating and travel also had a fairly high number of students, 31%, and 37% respectively, which was slightly lower than the favorite city and the school topics with 19% and 18% respectively.

Besides, the most interesting topic when performing role-playing activities was hobbies, making up 23%. The topics about advice, seasons of the year, favorite cities, and schools all had 1% of choices.

For non-English students at TNUT, the choice of topics that was easiest to perform role-playing activities was to greet in the first meeting at 43%. On the contrary, the most difficult topic was advice with 20%.

In short, choosing a specific theme to perform the role-playing activity is to help the lesson become more abundant and more diverse. This encourages students to be creative to better reflect on a real-life situation.

Topics	Students' perspectives			
	Which of the following topics would you like to role-play?	Which of the following topics do you think are the most interesting themes when doing the role-play?	In the topics below, which one do you think is the easiest to do the role play?	In the topics below, which one do you think is the most difficult to do the role play?
Greetings on the first meeting.	57%	22%	43%	16%
Asking and giving direction	17%	7%	10%	16%
Hobby	54%	23%	23%	16%
Shopping	15%	8%	6%	6%
Eating in a restaurant	17%	8%	5%	16%
Inviting and responding	12%	3%	3%	6%
Date	31%	14%	15%	18%
Advice	11%	1%	2%	20%
Travel	37%	10%	14%	11%

The seasons of the year	5%	1%	1%	5%
The favorite city	18%	1%	2%	5%
The school	19%	1%	10%	5%

Table 3: Students' perspectives about the topics in role play.

V. CONCLUSION

In the study, the results show that most of the students know the importance of role-playing activities because they feel interested when they participate in role-play activities. Moreover, they believe that role-playing helps them improve their speaking skills and communicate in real-life situations. As for fear and shyness, most of them agree that they can overcome fear and shyness through role-play activities. Besides, role-playing is also a good way to help them become more active and confident.

In reference to the types of role play, a majority of the students like role-playing controlled through cued dialogues and role-playing controlled through cues and information. They find these two types easier to take part in speaking activities.

With regards to the topic, the students would like to talk about greeting, hobby and date and they believe that it is interesting to talk about these topics. On the contrary, the seasons, the favorite city, and the school are the least favored choices.

Role-play requires well-organized teaching materials therefore it is recommended that teachers should be well-prepared before conducting the role-play activity. Teachers should choose the appropriate topics that are suitable to the student's interests as well as the language functions that have been mastered by the students. Moreover, teachers should decide the number of students in each role-play activity that is proper with students' interests and topics. It is suggested that teachers should determine role-playing in pairs not in groups so that students can actively participate in role-play activities.

In addition to this, although there are 4 types of role-playing, it is advisable for teachers to choose the types of role play that are appropriate to their students' wishes. The teacher should design role-playing controlled through cued dialogues or through cues and information.

Besides, while students practice with role-playing, the class become a little bit noisy, the teacher should be patient. Moreover, teachers should walk around the class to prevent students from using their mother tongue a lot. Moreover, teachers should manage time efficiently and effectively since role-play sometimes takes much time. Finally, teachers should make sure that the students have fully understood and have the information they need.

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