COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ROLE-PLAY VS TRADITIONAL METHODS IN TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS

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Annotation. *This article explores how role-play compares with traditional teaching techniques in developing speaking skills among secondary school EFL learners. Although the traditional group showed slight advantages in grammatical accuracy, the difference was minimal. These results point to the potential of role-play to create more engaging and communicative learning environments, particularly in settings where speaking practice is limited.*

Key words. *Speaking, role-plays, traditional way of teaching, comparisons, secondary school learners, fluency, accuracy*

Introduction

For many learners of English as a foreign language, speaking confidently can feel like the most difficult part of mastering the language. In secondary school settings especially, students often find few opportunities to use English in real-life situations, which makes classroom speaking activities all the more important. Traditionally, many teachers have relied on drills, memorized dialogues, and teacher-led question-and-answer sessions to develop students' speaking ability. While these methods do offer structure and control, they may not provide the level of interaction or spontaneity needed for learners to become comfortable using the language freely.

In contrast, role-play offers a more dynamic and student-centered approach. It encourages learners to imagine real-world situations and to use English creatively within those contexts. Through role-play, students can take on different personas, experiment with language in a low-stakes setting, and develop both fluency and confidence. Still, not all teachers are convinced that role-play is more effective than traditional techniques, especially when it comes to teaching grammatical accuracy or classroom management.

This study sets out to compare the two methods in a practical school environment. By observing and assessing student performance across both approaches, we aim to understand which method better supports speaking development—and how teachers might make informed choices in their classrooms.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a comparative design to examine the effectiveness of two teaching approaches for speaking skills—traditional methods versus role-play. Since the students were already grouped into intact classes, a quasi-experimental approach was the most practical. Both groups participated in a pre-test and post-test to measure changes in their speaking performance over time.

Participants

The participants included 40 students from a secondary school in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. They were aged between 14 and 15 years and had been studying English for several years as part of their regular curriculum. Based on informal classroom assessments and teacher input, the students' overall proficiency level was estimated to be B1 (intermediate) according to CEFR standards. The two classes were similar in size, background, and performance, which allowed for a fair comparison.

Procedure

➢ The intervention lasted for six weeks, with each group receiving three 45-minute speaking-focused lessons per week.

➢ The control group followed a more traditional approach, including drills, teacher-led discussions, and structured dialogues from their textbook.

➢ The experimental group, on the other hand, worked with role-play scenarios designed around everyday situations—such as going to a doctor, ordering food, or resolving a misunderstanding.

➢ Importantly, both groups covered similar themes and vocabulary, ensuring the difference lay in how the lessons were taught rather than what was taught.

Instruments

To evaluate the students' speaking abilities, both groups took part in a pre-test and post-test, which included:

➢ A short monologue task (speaking on a familiar topic for 2–3 minutes);

➢ A pair-based activity (dialogue or role-play).

The students were evaluated using a speaking rubric adapted from IELTS descriptors, focusing on:

- Fluency and coherence
- Vocabulary use
- Grammatical range and accuracy
- Pronunciation

Data Analysis

Each student's test was rated independently by two teachers to ensure fairness. The results were analyzed using basic statistical tools, such as paired sample t-tests for within-group improvement and independent t-tests to compare progress between the two groups. In addition, a brief student feedback survey provided some qualitative insight into their experiences.

Results

Quantitative Results

- Overall, both groups showed improvement from pre-test to post-test—but the role-play group's progress was more pronounced in several areas;
- The role-play group made notably larger gains in fluency and vocabulary;
- The control group showed slightly better results in grammar accuracy, though the difference was small;
- Pronunciation improved in both groups, with a slight edge for the experimental group;
- Statistical tests confirmed that improvements in fluency and vocabulary for the role-play group were statistically significant.

Student Feedback

In their post-course reflections, students from the role-play group described the lessons as more "fun," "realistic," and "motivating." Several said they felt less nervous speaking English after the course. One student wrote, "Role-play helped me speak more freely—I wasn't just repeating things; I had to think and react."

Meanwhile, students in the traditional group reported that they "learned grammar well" and appreciated the "clear structure" of the lessons, but some said they wanted "more chances to talk freely."

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that role-play offers clear advantages when it comes to helping students develop fluency and expand their vocabulary. These results align with previous research that highlights the benefits of interactive and communicative techniques in language classrooms (e.g., Huang, 2008; Ladousse, 2004).

It's worth noting that the control group's slight advantage in grammar may reflect the nature of traditional teaching, which often prioritizes accuracy and form. However, the overall communicative confidence observed in the role-play group suggests that students gained more than just language skills—they became more

willing to speak and engage with peers, which is critical in real-world communication.

From a teaching perspective, this study confirms that blending both approaches might offer the best of both worlds. Role-play can be used to encourage spontaneous speaking, while traditional exercises can be applied selectively to reinforce grammar and structure.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore whether role-play could be more effective than traditional teaching methods in helping secondary school learners improve their English-speaking skills. Based on the results, the answer appears to be yes—especially in terms of fluency, vocabulary development, and learner confidence. The students who took part in role-play activities were not only more engaged but also made more noticeable improvements in how easily and naturally they could express themselves.

That said, traditional methods still have a place in the classroom, particularly when it comes to building a solid foundation in grammar and structure. For this reason, it might be most effective for teachers to adopt a balanced approach, using both methods where appropriate. For instance, lessons could begin with controlled grammar practice and then transition into role-plays where students apply what they've learned in more realistic, communicative contexts.

In future research, it would be useful to examine how long-term exposure to role-play affects learners' speaking skills, or whether combining role-play with other methods like debates or storytelling brings additional benefits. It would also be helpful to explore teacher perspectives and classroom management challenges when using role-play, particularly in larger classes.

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