THE IMPACT OF ROLE PLAY TECHNIQUE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL SPEECH IN FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: This study investigates the effect of the role-play technique on the development of oral speech in French language learning among beginner-level students. Using a task-based instructional approach, students participated in structured role-play activities designed to enhance their speaking skills. A pre-test and post-test were administered to evaluate the learners' progress in oral proficiency. The results indicate a significant improvement in students' fluency, vocabulary usage, and confidence after the implementation of role-plays. These findings support the integration of interactive, communicative methods in beginner-level foreign language instruction.

Keywords: Role-play, task-based learning, French language, oral speech, speaking skills, beginner learners, experimental study.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, proficiency in foreign languages has become an essential skill. Among the core language competencies, speaking remains one of the most challenging to develop, particularly for beginner-level learners. Speaking requires not only grammatical and lexical knowledge but also the ability to apply this knowledge spontaneously in real-life communication. For novice learners, this often presents a daunting task due to limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and fear of

making mistakes. Traditional language teaching methods have often prioritized reading and writing over oral communication. As a result, many students complete years of language study without developing sufficient speaking skills. Recognizing this gap, educators and researchers have increasingly advocated for the adoption of communicative approaches, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which aim to foster authentic communication in the classroom. Within this framework, role-play is considered one of the most effective tools for promoting oral proficiency. Role-play activities create opportunities for learners to simulate real-life scenarios in a controlled, supportive environment. This method encourages spontaneous speech, creativity, and interaction, all of which are crucial for developing communicative competence. Moreover, role-play reduces the affective filter by creating a playful context in which students feel less pressure and more motivation to speak. This is particularly beneficial for beginners who may struggle with anxiety and self-consciousness during speaking tasks.

The French language, known for its complex pronunciation and grammatical rules, poses specific challenges for beginners. In many educational settings, French is taught through a grammar-translation or textbook-centered approach, which may not provide sufficient opportunities for speaking practice. Therefore, introducing interactive and student-centered strategies, such as role-play, can offer a more effective pathway to oral language development.

In the context of French language education, Littlewood (2004) notes that communicative activities such as role-play help bridge the gap between controlled language use and real-world application. Beginner learners of French, who often struggle with pronunciation and sentence construction, benefit significantly from activities that allow them to practice language in realistic and low-pressure settings. Despite the growing advocacy for communicative approaches, the specific use of role-play among beginner-level learners of French remains underexplored, underscoring the relevance of this study.

Studies have shown that integrating role-play into language instruction leads to measurable improvements in fluency and vocabulary use. Savignon (2005) highlights how learners exposed to communicative methods, including role-play, perform better in speaking tasks and exhibit higher levels of motivation. Similarly, Liu and Jackson (2009) observed that students who regularly participated in role-plays developed greater self-confidence and reported lower anxiety levels.

Harmer (2007) underscores the role of role-play in promoting communicative competence by fostering learner autonomy and encouraging negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) argue that role-plays engage learners cognitively and emotionally, helping them internalize language structures more effectively. For beginner learners, these benefits are particularly crucial, as they often lack the confidence and experience to speak freely.

The theoretical foundation of this method is grounded in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes learning through meaningful tasks rather than isolated language drills. Ellis (2003) describes TBLT as an approach that allows learners to acquire language as they attempt to communicate in situations that closely resemble real-life scenarios. This strategy aligns well with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which highlights the importance of social interaction in the development of cognitive and linguistic skills. Role-play as a pedagogical strategy has long been recognized as an effective method for enhancing communication skills in language learners. It provides a platform for learners to use the target language in meaningful contexts that mirror real-life interactions. According to Jones (2002), role-play helps reduce anxiety by allowing students to step outside of themselves and engage in communication from a different perspective. This form of practice creates a relaxed and engaging environment that encourages spontaneous speech.

METHODS

This study involved 24 beginner-level students enrolled in an introductory French language course at a secondary school. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 19 years old and had no prior experience learning French. The students were randomly divided into two equal groups: an experimental group (n = 12) and a control group (n = 12). Both groups were balanced in terms of gender and academic background to ensure comparability. The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design. This design was chosen to evaluate the effectiveness of the role-play technique in improving oral speaking skills in French. Both the experimental and control groups received the same amount of instructional time and content coverage. However, the experimental group participated in structured role-play activities as part of their lessons, while the control group followed the traditional teacher-centered approach without role-play.

To measure students' oral language development, the following instruments were used:

- Speaking Pre-test and Post-test: These tests were designed to assess students' oral proficiency based on fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range, pronunciation, and interaction. Both tests were equivalent in structure and difficulty and were scored using an analytic rubric.

- Assessment Rubric: A detailed rubric was developed based on CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) speaking descriptors for A1-level learners. The rubric included five criteria: fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and interactive competence.

- Student Questionnaire: A self-report questionnaire was distributed after the intervention to gather qualitative data on students' attitudes, confidence, and perceived improvement in oral skills.

- Teacher Observation Notes: During the intervention, the researcher kept observational records of student participation, engagement, and challenges during role-play activities.

The role-play activities were based on real-life scenarios relevant to the language level and cultural context of beginner learners. These activities were designed to encourage students to use simple vocabulary and phrases that they had learned in class. Some of the specific dialogues and scenarios used during the role-plays included:

✓ *Scenario 1: Greeting and Introducing Yourself*

- Person A: Bonjour, comment ça va ?
- Person B: Ça va bien, merci. Et toi ?
- Person A: Ça va. Je m'appelle Dilchoda, et toi ?
- Person B: Je m'appelle Sabrina. Enchantée de faire ta connaissance !

✓ *Scenario 2: Ordering Food in a Restaurant*

- A: Bonjour ! Comment puis-je vous aider aujourd'hui ?
- B: Bonjour, je voudrais un café et un croissant, s'il vous plaît.
- A: Très bien. Vous souhaitez quelque chose d'autre ?
- B: Non, merci. Ça sera tout.

✓ *Scenario 3: Making an Appointment*

- Person A: Bonjour, je voudrais prendre un rendez-vous avec le docteur.
- Receptionist: Bien sûr, quand seriez-vous disponible ?
- Person A: Demain matin, si possible.
- Receptionist: À 10h00, ça vous va ?
- Person A: Oui, c'est parfait. Merci!

These dialogues were selected to cover a wide range of basic interactions that are common in daily life, providing learners with a meaningful context for their language use. The goal was for students to practice both speaking and listening skills in a relaxed, real-world setting.

The study was conducted over a six-week period during the spring semester.

•**Week 1 (Pre-testing Phase):** All participants took a speaking pre-test. The test consisted of a short dialogue and individual monologue on familiar

topics (e.g., introducing oneself, talking about daily activities). Their performance was recorded and evaluated according to the rubric.

- **Weeks 2–5 (Intervention Phase):**

The **control group** continued with the regular curriculum, focusing on vocabulary, grammar exercises, and written tasks with limited oral interaction.

The **experimental group**, in addition to standard lessons, participated in 2–3 structured role-play activities per week. These role-plays simulated real-life situations relevant to the learners' level such as:

- Greeting and introducing oneself
- Ordering food in a restaurant
- Asking for directions
- Making appointments
- Shopping at a store

Each role-play was preceded by a short vocabulary and context-building session, followed by student performance in pairs or groups. Feedback was given immediately after each activity.

- **Week 6 (Post-testing Phase):** All students completed the same speaking test format as in Week 1. Their post-test performances were recorded and evaluated using the same rubric.
- **Week 7 (Qualitative Data Collection):** Students completed a questionnaire about their learning experience, and teacher observations were analyzed to provide additional insights into the impact of role-play on student engagement and performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative results of this study revealed a significant improvement in the oral speaking performance of students in the experimental group who participated in role-play activities, compared to the control group. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of both groups. The average pre-test score of the experimental group was 10.4 (out of 20), while the post-test score increased to 15.7. In contrast, the control group showed a much smaller improvement, with a pre-test average of 10.2 and a post-test average of 12.1. Statistical analysis showed that the improvement in the experimental group was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that role-play had a measurable impact on students' speaking abilities. The improvement in the experimental group was most noticeable in the areas of:

- Fluency: Students spoke with more ease and fewer pauses.
- Pronunciation: Exposure to repeated phrases in role-plays improved pronunciation.
- Interactive Competence: Students learned how to keep conversations going and respond appropriately.

The control group, while showing some gains, particularly in vocabulary recall, lacked the same level of fluency and confidence.

Data from student questionnaires indicated that: 87% of students in the experimental group reported increased confidence in speaking and 92% found role-plays enjoyable and useful for practicing real-life situations. Some students initially found role-plays challenging but reported that repeated practice helped them overcome anxiety.

Teacher observations also confirmed that students in the experimental group were more engaged, active, and willing to participate in oral tasks.

The findings of this study strongly support the use of role-play as an effective technique to enhance oral communication skills in beginner-level French learners. The

significant improvement observed in the experimental group aligns with existing research in language pedagogy.

Firstly, these results confirm the theoretical assumptions of **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**, which emphasizes learning through meaningful interaction. Role-play provided learners with authentic contexts to apply newly acquired language skills, encouraging spontaneous use of vocabulary and structures.

Secondly, the reduction in speaking anxiety and the increase in confidence among students highlights the **affective benefits** of role-play. As suggested by Jones (2002) and Liu & Jackson (2009), students perform better when they are relaxed and emotionally engaged. Role-play introduces a semi-structured setting where students can take risks without fear of judgment, which is crucial at the beginner level.

Thirdly, these findings have **pedagogical implications**. They suggest that language teachers, especially in contexts where oral communication is underdeveloped, should integrate role-play regularly into their lesson planning. Moreover, using culturally and linguistically appropriate scenarios ensures that the activities remain relevant and meaningful.

However, some limitations must also be considered:

- The sample size was relatively small and limited to one institution.
- The intervention lasted only four weeks, which may not be enough to capture long-term retention.
- Individual learner differences (e.g., personality, prior language exposure) were not controlled.

Despite these limitations, the study clearly demonstrates that incorporating structured role-play activities leads to significant gains in speaking proficiency among beginner learners of French.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the impact of role-play techniques on the development of oral speech among beginner-level French language learners. The results of the quasi-experimental design indicated that students who engaged in task-based role-play activities demonstrated significantly greater improvement in speaking proficiency compared to those who followed traditional instruction methods. The findings confirmed that role-play is an effective method for enhancing various aspects of speaking, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and interactive competence. Moreover, role-play activities helped reduce learners' anxiety and increased their motivation to participate in oral tasks, thereby creating a more dynamic and communicative classroom environment.

The study supports the integration of communicative approaches, particularly role-play, into beginner-level foreign language curricula. Such strategies not only facilitate language acquisition but also foster learner confidence and engagement. Given the challenges associated with teaching speaking skills, especially in the early stages of language learning, role-play offers a practical and enjoyable alternative to conventional methods. However, the research was limited by its small sample size and short intervention period. Future studies could extend the duration of the experiment, involve learners at different proficiency levels, and explore the long-term effects of role-play on language retention and fluency.

In conclusion, the role-play technique proves to be a valuable pedagogical tool in promoting oral competence in French language learning. Its incorporation into classroom practice is strongly recommended for educators seeking to improve the communicative skills of their students from the very beginning of their language learning journey.

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