Research Article

EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE-PLAY IN ENHANCING ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS OF SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS: A PRE-EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH STUDY AT KHANUWITTAYA SCHOOL, KAMPHAENGPHET

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Abstract

This study aims to1) compare the students' English-speaking ability before and after the hypothetical role-playing activity test, 2) assess their English-speaking ability after the hypothetical role-playing activity test using the CEFR standard language competency level of A2, and 3) evaluate the student's satisfaction of the learning management process using hypothetical role-playing activities. For the sample group, 42 seventh-grade students (second semester, academic year 2022)from Khanuwittaya School, Kamphaeng Phet Province, were selected through random sampling. This pre-experimental research design study utilized the One-Group-Pretest-Posttest Design model. Data collection instruments included five role-play lessons, pre-post-tests to assess English speaking ability, and questionnaires to assess students' satisfaction with the role-playing activities. The study was conducted for five weeks. Data were analyzed using independent t-tests, mean, and standard deviation (S.D.). Research results showed that the English-speaking skills of the experimental group significantly improved after the hypothetical role-play activities designed for this study, with a 0.05 significant level. The English-speaking ability of the students after the CEFR posttest in all aspects was B1+, which was higher than the required CEFR level for junior high school, A2. The students rated the role-playing activities with a high satisfaction level, with a mean score of 4.01 and a standard deviation (S.D.) of 0.71. This study found that hypothetical role-playing activity effectively enhanced the participants' English-speaking ability, helped the students achieve the expected English language proficiency level following the CEFR standard, and was well-received by the students.

Keywords: Role-play,speaking skills,English-speaking ability.

INTRODUCTION

English is an international language used for communication around the world. As Thailand has moved towards internationalization since the opening of the ASEAN Community, learning English has become a must for all Thai learners. In the Thai education system, it is clear that English has played a significant role for Thai people. Learning English in this era is considered a must for Thai people in accordance with the Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E. 2551 (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E. 2551 emphasizes the importance of learning English used in everyday life as a global citizen. Learning a foreign language is a valuable tool that can facilitate communication, education, knowledge-seeking, and career development. It also helps individuals develop an understanding of diverse global cultures and perspectives, fostering friendship and cooperation with other countries. Learners can better understand themselves and others by learning about language and cultural differences in traditions, thinking, society, economy, and politics. Learning a foreign language promotes a positive attitude towards using it for communication. Thai educational institutions have recognized the English language's significance and incorporated it into their teaching practices, from primary to higher education levels. This aligns with the Basic Education Core Curriculum of 2008, which strongly emphasizes English language instruction. To provide students with the knowledge and good understanding of English, students need to master listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and be able to apply and adapt to use these skills correctly, effectively, and suitably to

various real-life situations (Sumitra, 1991 as cited in Somchit, 2008). Using role-play activities is a method for enhancing language learning and communication skills. Richard (2006) describes hypothetical roles as activities in which learners define pre-prepared roles and situations or exchange information based on given information or roles, i.e., Role-play activities are an effective approach for English language teaching. They involve learners taking on specific roles in a realistic scenario, enabling them to practice language communication skills in a meaningful way. To make the role more interesting, the instructor may have the learner participate in defining each conversation and role. The teacher may determine the learner's role and topic of conversation for role-play activities. However, the teacher may allow students to think independently about what to say and provides language accuracy feedback. Hypothetical role-plays enable learners to practice their English-speaking skills and apply them in real-life scenarios. They are an effective tool for English language training. The purpose of this study is to explore methods for enhancing English-speaking proficiency. Role-playing activities have been found to emulate real-world situations and are considered effective teaching tools. As a result, this approach to teaching has been employed to enhance the English-speaking skills of seventh-grade students. The content follows the secondary-level foreign language learning core curriculum, which aligns with the goals of the first-grade English class. The study aims to use the findings to create role-play lessons that enhance students' English-speaking abilities. In this study, students will be asked to engage in hypothetical role activities, which can foster a positive attitude towards learning and allow for non-strategic practice of English-speaking skills. Through these virtual scenarios, students can improve their English-speaking abilities.

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Research objectives

This study aims to:

1) Compare students' English-speaking ability before and after the hypothetical role-playing activity test.
2) Asses the students' English-speaking ability after the hypothetical role-playing activity test based on the CEFR standard language competency level of A2.
3) Evaluate the student's satisfaction with the learning management process using hypothetical role-playing activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role-play is considereda possible method for achieving active learning (e.g., Bonwell & Eisen, 1991; Westrup & Planader, 2013). The active learning approach has been defined in several studies, across subject matters, as an approach that actively involves learners in their learning process, letting the instructors act as guides and providing learners with opportunities to grow (Ghilhay & Ghilay, 2015; Graaf *et al.*, 2005; Pekdoğan & Kanak, 2016). As learners engage in critical thinking through representing characters and making decisions on how to advance through the scenario they actively engage in their learning process. Also, putting the responsibility of learning in the hands of the learners provides them with more control over their learning process. This kind of student-centric approach also leads to higher student engagement and participation (Bonwell and Eisen, 1991; Howell, 1992). Role-play in education requires a guide or facilitator to work with the learners. A study conducted by Cobo *et al.* (2011) revealed that adding a guide or facilitator was necessary to maximize the benefits of a role-play session. Another study using role-play discovered the importance of having mentors provide guidance to students during and after their role-play sessions (Nakamura *et al.*, 2011). Taking into account these revelations and combining them with our definition of role-play, three major components are needed to successfully implement role-playing: scenarios, roles/characters, and guides/facilitators.

According to Snow (2017, p. 112), "role plays are a form of pair practice that allows students the freedom to play, improvise, and create." In this case, students can apply their learning to real-life situations, even though they have not experienced those situations in person. For example, students pretend to be travel agents and customers in a conversation about how to book an airplane ticket. Besides, according to Diane (2000, p. 134),"role plays are essential in CLT because they allow students to practice communicating in different social contexts and different social roles, and role-plays can be set up so that they are very structured or in less a less structured way". It means the teacher tells the students who they are and what they should do. The teacher also tells the students what the situation is and what they are talking about. However, the students determine what they will say. Students also receive feedback on whether or not they have effectively communicated. Role play can help the teacher expand the classroom indefinitely and provide natural contexts for the language used. The students get the chance to express themselves in a more straightforward way. Furthermore, the world of the class is broadened to include the outside world-thus offering a much more comprehensive range of language opportunities. Students can also use the activity to expand their knowledge and express what they feel.

English speaking ability is one of the four language communication skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). It is the means through which learners can communicate with others to achieve specific goals or to express their opinions, intentions, hopes, and viewpoints. In addition, people who know a language are referred to as "speakers" of that language. Furthermore, speaking is the most frequently used language skill in almost any setting. Speaking is expressing one's thought, ideas, and feeling, which use the ability to pronounce the words to organize the words into phrases or sentence to choose the words related to the topic. Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of contexts. From this definition, we can share our ideas with others through oral communication. Speaking is usually symbolized as expressing feeling to others. Through speaking, humans can connect their minds in every aspect of life. That makes the students more fluent in their communication. Because when they speak, they know what they are thinking and how they feel about it. Furthermore, as people speak, other people judge the person's character and make assumptions about what they are thinking and why. Speaking for communication is designed for the intermediate to advance level classroom. It will not focus on communication, which usually becomes a "trap" for the students because of the routine activities of every chapter. Still, it will concern the students' activities cooperatively where they can work in groups consisting of two, three, four, or even more students with different activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This current study is pre-experimental research, which utilizes statistical analysis to analyze numerical data. This section addressed the participants, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis sequentially.

Participants

The study's participants were selected using purposive sampling from the seventh-grade students enrolled in the second semester of 2022 at Khanuwittaya School. A total of 42 students were selected for the study.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Research instruments include role-play lessons, English speaking tests (pretest and posttest), and students' satisfaction questionnaire on role-play activities.

The lesson plans on Role play activities.

The researcher analyzed the content and developed a series of role-play lessons, each featuring appropriate role-play activities. The role-play content consisted of five learning plans, each spanning three hours, for a total of 15 hours of learning time dedicated to role-playing activities.This plan aligns with the E21102 subject curriculum, which are as follows:

Topic 1: Talking about personal Information
Topic 2: Telephone (on the call)
Topic 3: Giving Direction
Topic 4: Making reservations

Topic 5: Making an apology

The English-speaking test: pretest and posttest

The English-speaking test consisted of a pretest and posttest, each requiring students to perform a role play based on a given situation. After completing the role-play lessons, students were given a posttest with the same content as the pretest to determine if there had been any improvements in their English-speaking ability.

Students' satisfaction questionnaire on Role play activity

The Students' Satisfaction Questionnaire comprises 12 items that ask the respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a statement using a five-point scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

Data collection

The study was conducted using development and data collection steps as follows:

Step 1: The development and assessment of instrument quality:

1. Critical analysis and synthesis of related approaches, authentic and learning principles, learning steps, and learning curriculum for drafting and developing lesson plans, pretest, posttest, and students' satisfaction questionnaire.
2. Validity check by experts using a 5-level rating scale for the lesson plans and using IOC for the pretest, posttest, and students' satisfaction questionnaire.

Step 2: The implementation of the role-play activities:

1. The developed Role play activities were implemented with 42 participants from Khanuwittaya School. This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design. The implementation was done for five weeks, with three sessions per week. Each session took an hour. A total of 15 hours was used to implement the lessons in the experimental groups.
2. During the implementation of role-play activities, students were required to perform role-plays based on three different hypothetical situations, each consisting of two roles. Students were allowed to choose two situations and were asked to play hypothetical roles with their peers and switch roles. To ensure unbiased scoring, the researchers separated the test subjects and asked them not to ask each other questions. After completing the posttest, two assessors were assigned to score the tests: one researcher and one experienced English teacher. The scores from both assessors were combined, and the average score was calculated.

Step 3: Assessment of the English-speaking ability of the students after the implementation of thehypothetical role-playing activities using the CEFR standard level of language competency level at A2:

The post-experiment results of the English-speaking ability assessment were used to calculate the average proficiency assessment based on the CEFR scale. The Ministry of Education requires compulsory (secondary) graduates to have a certain level of English proficiency, which is aligned with CEFR level A2.

Step 4: Data collection on results of the role-play activities from the pretest, posttest, and students' satisfaction questionnaire on role-play activities:

Participants were asked to take a pretest and posttest before and after using Role play activities. After completing the posttest, students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the role-playing activities using a satisfaction questionnaire.

Data analysis

Scores from the pretest and posttest, as well as the student Students' satisfaction assessment, were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean $(\bar{x})$ and standard deviation (S.D.).The scores from the English-speaking ability assessment, which included vocabulary and structures, accuracy, grammar, fluency, and communicative structure, were derived from the mean after the experimental test of hypothetical role-playing activities. These scores were then evaluated by dividing them by the CEFR percentage. English competency is required when compared with the CEFR framework level ofA2. After that, inferential statistics and t-test analysis were used to analyze whether test scores were statistically significant. Then mean scores of the pretest and the posttest of the experimental groups were compared.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Students' English-speaking ability after using role-play activities

There were two kinds of tests for the experimental group – pretestand posttest. Table 1 shows the result of the English-speaking test pretest and posttest that were taken before and after using Role play activities in experimental groups.

Table 1. Comparison of students' English-spelling skills before and after using Role play activities

Test	Mean	S.D.	D	t	df	Sig
Pretest	8.42	1.99	3.63	11.89 *	41	0.0000
Posttest	12.05	1.38				

*$p < .05$

The results show statistically significant improvement in English speaking ability from the pretest to the posttest using a t-test, paired with two samples for means. The test scores of experimental groups showed that the mean score of the posttest was higher than the pretest at .05 level of significance, as shown in Table 1

The test results after the role-playing activity experiment were used to assess the students' English-speaking ability compared with the CEFR competency level at A2

After the activity experiment, the evaluation of the students' English-speaking ability indicated that they had achieved a level above the required CEFR standard language proficiency criteria level of A2.

Table 2. Shows the average score from the English-speaking ability study after the student's hypothetical role-playing activity compared with the CEFR level at A2

Topic	N	Scores	$\bar{x}$	Percentage: Global Scale of English (Score: 90)	Level of CEFR
Vocabularies and structures	42	20	8.98	40.39	A2$^+$
Accuracy		20	13.40	60.32	B2
Grammar		20	11.81	53.14	B1$^+$
Fluency		20	11.60	52.18	B1$^+$
Communicative strategy		20	13.07	58.82	B1$^+$
Total's average			12.05	52.97	B1$^+$

The results show statistically significant improvement in English speaking ability from the posttest analysis to percentage showed that the average score from the English-speaking ability study after the 20-point scored role-playing activity was 52.97 percent, which is B1$^+$ level in the CEFR standard.

The results of the students' satisfaction with the role-play activities to enhance their English-speaking ability

Table 3. The average student satisfaction score with role-play activities to enhance their English-speaking ability

Topic of list	N	Mean	S.D.
1. Content	42	4.10	0.67
2. Role-play activities		4.00	0.68
3. English-speaking ability		3.93	0.77
Total		4.01	0.71

The results revealed that the study's participants were highly satisfied with the role-playing activities, as indicated by their responses to the satisfaction questionnaire. The mean score was 4.01, with a standard deviation of 0.71, indicating a high overall satisfaction level.

DISCUSSION

1. Based on the English-speaking ability measurement scores collected before and after the experiment, it was found that the average score after the test was higher than the average score before the experiment. The study observed an average English-speaking ability score increase from 8.42 before the experiment to 12.05 after the experiment, representing a significant increase of 3.63 points. This improvement in English-speaking ability can be attributed to the use of hypothetical role-playing activities that simulate realistic scenarios, including asking for general information, making phone calls, making inquiries, booking reservations, and making apologies, which students are likely to encounter in their daily lives. The research findings were consistent with the research conducted by Somruedee Khamphasee, And Sunita Kositchaiwat (2021), which claimed that hypothetical role-playing activities could help students develop their English-speaking skills. The students will be fluent in English through hypothetical role-playing activities that help them to speak naturally and provide opportunities for expression, as it is one of the most popular theatrical activities used in language teaching. It is an activity that allows learners to use their personalities. It also provides the actors with the opportunity to express themselves naturally as a result of using hypothetical role-playing activities. The study found a statistically significant (0.05) improvement in the English-speaking skills of first-year students after using hypothetical role activities, as shown in the posttest scores. This is consistent with a similar study conducted by Manita Sithiprai and Yachai Pongboribun (2021) on the topic of "English Speaking Skills Development on WE Are Friends," which found that 79.17% of sixth-grade students achieved practical skill scores and 80% of the students passed the criteria, exceeding the set standards.

2. The English-speaking ability of the students after the experimental hypothetical role activities were compared with the required CEFR standard level of language competency at A2. The post-experiment assessment of English-speaking ability was based on the average score according to the CEFR after the experiment. The CEFR standard language competency criteria are arranged from the least to the most difficult. Accuracy is at the B2 level, communication at the B1+ level, grammar at the B1+ level, fluency at the B1+ level, and vocabulary and sentence structures at A2+. All characteristics of language proficiency are at least at level B1+. These criteria are consistent with the study by Kulchalee Thupatemee and Prakob Khunarak (2012),"A study on English teaching management, policy, and guidelines for implementing the European language competency framework in secondary schools". The study revealed that the use of CEFR frameworks in schools was generally moderate and varied at a statistically significant level of 0.05. This aligns with the Ministry of Education's policy on English education reform, which requires implementing the European Union's CEFR framework as the primary basis for teaching English in Thailand's basic education system. The required CEFR level for 9th-grade students is A2 for secondary schools.

3. The result of the students' satisfaction questionnaires on the hypothetical role activities. The students were asked to answer the satisfaction questionnaires divided into three categories to determine their satisfaction levels on lessons using hypothetical role activities: 1) content, 2) hypothetical role activities, and 3) English speaking ability. The research found that the students, on average, rated their satisfaction levels as 4.01 with a standard deviation of 0.71. The results of each category are discussed as follows:

- Regarding content, students are very satisfied with a Mean of 4.10 and an S.D. of 0.67. Apart from the content of the hypothetical roles that are interesting and related to daily-life situations, finding other content suitable for the learner is also difficult. One possible explanation for this result is that students have used the language effectively because it was at an appropriate difficulty level based on their knowledge and skills. The hypothetical role activities' contents were focused on allowing students to understand the meaning through context and action. It is important to ensure that the students understand the topic more easily to use the language properly. The outline includes other situations in which the instructor wants the learner to act to achieve the intended effectiveness. The task's difficulty level should be within the learner's level. In addition, role definition (Role) is essential to role representation.
- Students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the role-play activities, particularly with the hypothetical

roles that simulate everyday situations (Mean = 4.00, S.D. = 0.68). These activities effectively teach students how to use English in their daily lives, which can be attributed to selecting appropriate and interesting hypothetical roles. Richard (2006) 's concept claimed that using everyday life situations will significantly contribute to students' interest in using the language and will result in better language learning. Littlewood (1981) and Ments (1989) cited the key role models that support the hypothesis that if students assume a near-real-life situation that may occur outside of the classroom or in general everyday situations, they will have a high level of motivation for their activities. It also encourages students to be positive and feel safe in expressing their attitudes and feelings and connecting closely with the world outside of their classrooms.

- Regarding English-speaking ability, students showed a high level of satisfaction, with a mean score of 3.93 and a standard deviation of 0.77. This could be attributed to the effectiveness of the hypothetical role activities in enhancing students' English-speaking skills. This result is consistent with the research conducted by Sumitra Anwatakul (1997), claiming that students have the opportunity to practice until they become proficient and confident in using language. Campbell and Wales (1970) said that hypothetical role activities help students improve their English-speaking skills when they have sufficient slow language practice and are promoted correctly. Speaking skills are effective when they are well grounded in practical listening and speaking skills. Littlewood (1981) and Richards (2006) said, "Developing communication skills that emphasize listening-to-speech skills requires self-directed learning". Hypothetical role activities encourage students to practice speaking and listening in large groups and sub-groups through frequent and diverse roles in various situations. This has led to increased confidence in the use of the language and has resulted in improved English-speaking skills.

Conclusion

The research findings indicate that the use of hypothetical role activities is an effective method for enhancing students' English-speaking abilities. The study demonstrated that the experimental groups' posttest scores were significantly higher than their pretest scores at a .05 level of significance. This improvement is evidence of the positive impact of hypothetical role activities on students' speaking skills.

Notably, the students achieved the expected level of English language proficiency based on the CEFR standard, indicating the effectiveness of the hypothetical role activities in achieving language goals. Furthermore, students' satisfaction levels with the use of hypothetical role activities were very high, reflecting the effectiveness of this approach in enhancing learning experiences. Overall, using hypothetical roles is a powerful technique that provides students with various opportunities to apply English in real-life situations. This approach can help students improve their speaking abilities in a classroom setting and develop the confidence and skills to communicate effectively in everyday life.

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