The Effectiveness of Group Work Role Play on EFL Students' Accuracy in Speaking Skill at Dong Nai Technology University

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ABSTRACT: *In recent years, role-play activities have been widely used in the ESL/EFL classroom as an effective teaching method. This research paper aimed to investigate how group work role play activities can produce effect on students' accuracy in speaking skill as well as how students get involved in the activities at Dong Nai Technology University. The experiment lasted in eight weeks and about fifteen students took part in this project. Oral tests were designed at the end of the experiment to measure students' improvement. In addition, three research methods employed in my research were observation, semi-structured group interview and students' diaries in order to perfectly understand how group work role play activities affected the participants and their attitude toward role play. The research paper came up with a positive result that all students participated in the activities and generated strong motivation in the classroom. As the research observed, the lessons with role play seem to be more interesting and attractive. In the contrast, an unexpected outcome was that role play could help improve students' fluency but not accuracy. This paper points out both strong and weak aspects of using group work role play in improving students' accuracy in speaking English. Based on the principal findings, conducting this research greatly affects our future practice as teachers. We believe that this research can help us respond to new challenges and become a better practitioner. As a consequence, this process would make tremendous impacts on our future practice.*

Keywords: *Role -play; speaking ability; accuracy; learning attitudes; engagement.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the need of learning English in Vietnam has developed rapidly. English is considered as a compulsory subject at school since grade 3. In addition, the 2020 project of the MOET has set off an explosion of interest in learning English in the Vietnamese education system (MOET, 2016). Different language centers have been established with different courses to satisfy the learning needs of the learners. Therefore, teaching and learning English at schools in Vietnam is still a challenging job. For university students, they have to respond to the challenge of trying to master English, especially the speaking skill, in order to seek a good job, gain a higher promotion or study overseas.

In that situation, as a lecturer in a university, I would like to do something to contribute to the success of my students as well as develop my career path. I decided to conduct a study named "The Effectiveness of Group work Role Play on EFL Students' Accuracy in Speaking Skill at Dong Nai Technology University". In this research, I would like to identify whether the application of role play can help improve the accuracy of my students' speaking skill and to classify the attitudes of students toward the use of role play activities in the classes. In order to investigate the effectiveness of group work role play activities, the following questions are supposed:

1. How can group work role play activities enhance students' accuracy in speaking skill?

2. How do students engage to group work role play activities in classroom?

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Description of the context and material

I have been teaching at Dong Nai Technology University for nearly four years. It is a private university which is located in the South of Vietnam. I work in Faculty of Foreign Languages and I am in charge of teaching English subject for students from different majors such as English Major, Information Technology, Electrical Engineering- Electronics- Mechanics- Construction, Health Sciences, Tourism Management or Business Administration. Depending on the different features of different majors, we design a variety of teaching and learning plan. Particularly, I will mainly focus on the communication skills which include speaking and listening skill for students whose major is Tourism Management. My class size is often from 15 to 25. Students' level is pre-intermediate. An academic year is divided into three semesters and English subject will normally account for forty-five periods each semester and each period lasts forty minutes. The classroom is designed in U-shaped with movable tables and chairs, which is very highly convenient to conduct various classroom activities. My students, who come from different backgrounds, are from the age of 19 to 23. In this study, the course book Let's Talk 1 (Leo Jones, 2007) was used.

Although there are some students who are afraid of speaking in class and I have to encourage to help them overcome their shyness, most of them are active and like to take part in classroom activities. I sometimes feel surprised by their creativity and imagination. For this reason, they show no interest in traditional lessons with Grammar Translation method. Tran (2017) claimed that she did not like to listen to her teacher passively. She enjoyed working with her friends in classroom activities. The assessment involves oral tests (60 percent), class participation (20 percent) and class attendance (20 percent). In the grading criteria of the final test at the end of the course, the accuracy of the pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary accounts for 50 percent of the total mark. However, students do not usually achieve good test results due to poor performance in the final exam. In addition, my students often rise to misunderstanding because of too many grammar and pronunciation mistakes and then they cannot be able to have effective communication with the others. However, these tourism students need a high level of English to prepare for their future jobs like international tour guides, tour designers or tour executive. Therefore, I would like to make an effort to better the learning environment and help them engage in the classroom activities and them enhance their learning outcomes in terms of accuracy in speaking English.

My innovation was conducted in 8 weeks. The research time frame was described clearly in my Innovation Unit. A research meeting was held in the first week to inform students about the research plan. I observed students participating in the role play activities designed by me and wrote diaries from the second to the seventh week. Group interview and data analysis were conducted in the final week.

There is plenty of research which investigated the application and the effectiveness of role-play as a teaching approach in various fields. (Blank, 1985) evaluated the impact of role playing, case studies, and simulation games in teaching agricultural economics. The findings showed that each aid can improve the effectiveness of students' learning. The researcher used role play as an exercise to help students practice solving problems. Meanwhile, I decided to employed role play as effective classroom activity to engage students with learning and better its outcomes.

In another research project, (Kerr, Troth, & Pickering, 2003) aimed to examine the attitude of information systems students towards role-playing, and the attitudes and experiences of information systems students directly participating in the role-playing exercise compared with those who are observing the role-play exercise as class audiences. Overall, the results indicated that role play helps students get involved in the lessons and understand the subject easily.

They also found that role play creates a friendly and fun environment for them to learn. The researchers employed tutorial groups to make a direct comparison between two groups of students while all students in my class participated in my research. Actually, experiential research can help the researcher have a deep and clear understanding about the effectiveness of the innovation. However, it is not very appropriate in my context. Then I want all of my students to be involved in my research.

1.2. Evaluation Methods

Three research methods employed in my research were observation, semi-structured group interview and students' diaries.

2.2.1 Observation(Griffee, 2012)

According to Lynch (1996), "sucessful observation requires something more than just sitting and watching" (p. 108). The classroom observation I used in my research was different from the ordinary observation. Griffee (2012) stated that ordinary observation does not always provide a riliable and strong source of information.

Fifteen students in my class were observed during the research process. This was a small scale research. Richie & Lewis (2006) claimed that the expansion of sample size does not mean that the research will come up with more evidence. In addition, the number of participants in qualitative research is often small (Dahlber & McCaig, 2010). The observation took place from week 2 to week 7. I did not use a video recorder so I taught and observed at the same time.

The researcher observed students by note-taking. It was notoriously difficult to observer students' performances and take notes at the same time. However, I did not want my students to distract from their work due to the video recorders. In addition, I wanted to observer my own class because students were not threatened by outsider observers and they, therefore, could present their best work (Hitchcock & Hudge, 1995).

Classroom observation has some ethical issues that I had to pay attention to. Firstly, I had to make sure all the participants volunteered to take part in the observation. If any of them had not wanted to be observed, they would not have been obligated. Secondly, it was important to ensure every student finished their informed consent form and returned it to me. Thirdly, I could not observe everything. I could see the surface of things (Richards J. C., 1998). Hence, I had to take note quickly when teaching and observing.

2.2.2 Semi-structured group interview (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006)

As stated by Kvale (1996), "An interview is a conversation that has a strcuture and purpose" (p. 6). I used interview as a way to collect data because I thought that it was quite easy to do. The participants were willing to talk. Moreover, the data from interviews could be combined with other kinds of data collection tools to strengthen interpretations (Griffee, 2012).

Even though interviewing is a popupar way to collect data, it still has some limitations that I had to take into consideration.First, (Flinders, 1997)claimed that the respondents may have an opinion but they cannot to express it it a clear way.Second, what students said and what they meant might not be the same, so the data collected can be misleading (Day, 1990). I had some solutions to deal with these issues. I had to make everything clear for my students so they would not misunderstand the topic. I also thought of what questions should be asked and how I asked my questions. I repeated the questions and explained it in more details (Griffee, 2012).

Group interview was conducted in the last week of my research. Each group included 3 to 4 students. Each interview lasted about 30minutes and was recored as well.

That all participants agreed to take part in the interview was necessary.The participants should not reveal what they hear in the interview if they were not allowed to do. The researcher also needed to keep the data confidentially.

2.2.3 Diaries (Dahlberg and McCaig, 2010)

Griffee (2012) defined diary journal as "a document maintained by an individual writing a report to himself or herself on some topic area, such as learning a language or teaching a course". Diaries can be used to investigate a problem or issue as Ellis (1989) did in his research. He wanted to investigate the learning styles of two teachers. I asked my students to write diaries to record their thoughts and feelings which could not be observed by myself.

Students were required to write their diaries at the end of each lesson using pen and paper from week 2 to week 7. However, there might be some lapse between the time the lesson happened and the time students wrote about it. This might lead to invalid data. I, therefore, encouraged my students to write their diaries right after the

lesson so that they might not forget something important. Students could write about how they felt; what they had learnt from the activities or how could they speak more correctly.

To analyze the data from the interview, I followed the steps guided by Griffee (2012). I listened to the recording and transcribed into words. Then, I read the transcripts for several times to know what my students talked. After that, I coded the data by focusing on the main ideas related to the topic and wrote a summary of the coded data for references.

I triangulated data because I wanted to have an in-depth overview about the result of my research. A single method cannot be enough to help the researcher adequately understand the issue (Patton, 1999). In addition, I also wanted to ensure the validity of the data. To do that, I needed to employ more than one method gather information from the participants. Then, I collected and categorized the data. I certainly compared data of 3 different tools mentioned above.

III.   RESULT

This section presents and analyze the result of the research in accordance with the research questions mentioned in the introduction section. The aims of the research are to investigate the effectiveness of group work role play activities on enhancing students' speaking accuracy and how students engage to role play in classroom. The findings were analyzed qualitatively. The data I collect highlighted the following areas:

+ Students' attitudes towards role play

To analyze the observation data, I read my note very carefully. I observed my students' attitude and interaction towards the activities. I noted which students participated in the activities actively, which students did not. The classroom atmosphere was also an important factor to measure the effectiveness of role play. Take it as an example, I considered the rate of students' correct answers and their motivation when studying role play. Furthermore, if I raised a question, I would notice which students raised their hands quickly to answer and which students were not ready. Some follow up questions were needed to see the difference before and after the activities. I drew out a conclusion from the evaluation above that it was suitable to apply role play in my teaching context.

The researcher taught students the lesson named "Food" and students were asked to join the role play activity called "At the restaurant". Students performed the roles of one receptionist, two customers, one waiter and one restaurant manager. This lesson was designed to teach students about the English In a restaurant. Chairs and tables were moved to fit the situation.

I wanted my students know some sentences structures they could use in a restaurant such as how to make a reservation, how to order or how to solve problems at a restaurant, etc. I certainly paid more attention to their pronunciation, intonation and grammar which I want them to improve.

During the time of the activity, most of students (80 %) were very active and volunteer to speak out. Students tried to complete the task well although they sometimes forgot what to say. The rest of the class observed and were willing to support their friends when necessary. Some of them even shouted the sentence if the characters could not remember any phrases or words. 100 percent of students who joined the activity had a chance to speak English.

The classroom atmosphere was truly dynamic. Students were excited to take part in the activity. Although some students were a bit shy and they appeared to hesitate, they still joined the activity and tried to speak as much as they could.

In short, students' engagement to the activity was illustrated by the class atmosphere and their positive attitude. As the research observed, the lessons with role play seem to be more interesting and attractive.

Fifteen students took part in the group interview. The purposes of group interview were to discover how students engaged to role play and how they could enhance the accuracy in their speaking. The interview was conducted in Vietnamese due to students' limited English ability in expressing ideas. The purpose of group interview

was to help the research know what students thought about group work role play. As I understand my students' characteristics, they work more effectively in groups then I believe they would be willing to share their experiences when they were with their friends. The whole interview was recorded in mp3 format by my cell phone.

After participating role play activities for several times, students had their own experiences about it. The researcher wanted to know how students engaged to it and what they thought about it.

During the time of secondary or high school, students had to study with traditional teaching methods such as grammar translation. They hardly ever had chances to study listening and speaking. Hence, most of them responded that they really enjoyed studying English with role play. Most students said they did not feel sleepy in class and expected more new activities in the future. Role play seemed to be the direct inspiration for the students.

One of the students answered in the interview that:

"It is kind of funny activity! I think I can speak more English in class. I feel confident because I can talk with many friends. I do not have to cope with pressure. I have never study speaking English with role play before so I think it is interesting. I hope the teachers can create more new activities for students".

Two thirds of the students answered in the interview that topics were changed every week so they did not get bored. I tried to prepare topics that students might be interested in. They enjoyed talking about the topic named "First date" most. The class atmosphere as well as students' motivation were really great. The rest of the students like other topics such as "At the coffee shop" or "Go shopping".

During the time of role play, most of students agreed that they like studying with this activity. They could improve their fluency (53.3 %). Only 33.3 % of students thought their accuracy was a bit better. The rest (13.4 %) had no ideas.

In addition, all students wrote their experiences and feelings about role play activities that they joined in class. From the collected data, I found that half of the students (50 %) wrote their diaries in details very carefully, while 36.3 % students just listed their ideas with single sentences. 13.7 % students wrote only some words or short phrases. Despite different types of writing, 80 % students had a positive attitude towards the activity and they were eager to joint it. Pham wrote in his diary in week 3 that "Today I am very happy. Teacher lets me play the role of a boy friends who is chasing a lovely girl. That's interesting! I think I can speak more!"

+ Some difficulties students encountered

In the observation, the research noticed that 60% of students pronounced the words incorrectly. Some students admitted that role play was fun but they do not feel comfortable in playing a role and it was quite difficult to pronounce the words exactly. Le stated that "The teacher tries to teach us how to speak in a right way but I cannot do it. English is very difficult. I cannot pronounce the final sounds well".

Some of the students admitted that they were shy and did not want to perform in front of their classmates. As I observed, these students were quite extroverted outside classroom but they were afraid of losing their faces if they made mistakes. Nguyen said he could easily talk to everyone outside but whenever it came to acting in front of friends, he found it difficult. That was why he often forgot what to say in a conversation.

Most of students (87 %) said they still made many mistakes, especially the pronunciation. It seemed that pronunciation was the biggest problem. Some even just sit quietly and did not want to act due to their shyness and hesitation.

A student said that he found it interesting to play the role of a customer. He knew what to say when he went to a restaurant. However, he suggested that students should have more time to practice because it was quite difficult to speak correctly as teacher required. In another role play activity, Tran said that he liked practicing intonation. He often watched you tube videos and he saw people talking naturally.
From the interview that, the result was not different from the observation. Some students were active, some were not. Most of them could speak but still had many mistakes. It was hard for them to improve their accuracy in a short

time.

+ What students learned from role play

In the interview, many students (86.7 %) stated that they knew many new words and sentences structures.20 % students said they liked role play but they felt a bit shy to speak out.

The interesting thing was that 60 % students said they could speak more accurately and 73.3 % said they spoke more fluently. However, this does not match with what I observed and what students answered in the interview as 60 % students made mistakes about accuracy. Students' performances are indicated in the following table:

Students' performances	%
- Be active to join the activity	80
- Be shy to speak out	20
- Speak more correctly	60
- Speak more fluently	73.3

Table 1: Students' performances in role play activities

IV.   DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of group work role play activities on Tourism Management students' speaking accuracy. Fifteen sophomores took part in this research for 8 weeks. Observation, group interview and students' diaries were three data collection tools used in this study.

According to the study above, the researcher had enough data to evaluate the innovation and then answered the two research questions of this study. 1) How can group work role play activities enhance students' accuracy in speaking skill? And 2) How do students engage to group work role play activities in classroom?

Firstly, students' engagement to the group work role play could be found from the interview. 86,7 % of students could learn something new after studying with role play. Most of them did not feel bored and enjoyed classroom atmosphere. More than half of students said they could improve their fluency. Besides that, the researcher also saw students' performances through observation.60 % of students made mistakes about accuracy. This was also expressed in students' diaries in which 73.3 % of students could improve their English fluency. From the discussion above, the researcher concluded that group work role play did not help students improve their speaking accuracy.

Secondly, the information from three data collection tools indicated that role play helped students have more motivation to learn and it created a dynamic learning environment. The data form observation showed that 80 % of the students were active to join the activities. This number was the same with the number in the diaries. 13 students (86.7 %) answered in the interview that they could know many new words and sentences.
In short, the data combined from these data collection tools answered the second research question that students were fully engaged with the group work role play.

Overall, the findings were not as I expected. Students still made many mistakes when they spoke. An unexpected outcome was that role play could help improve students' fluency but not accuracy. In addition, the total time for my research was not enough to get the most valid data. My findings agreed with research conducted by other in terms of students' engagement and motivation. I would like to know if this activity was adequate to enhance students' accuracy but it was not successful.

Today, Vietnam is trying to develop the educational system, especially English. This is proved in 2020 project by MOET, for example. Our school is not an exception. The principal of our school has high expectations of students'

English ability then the lectures have to work under pressure. I myself have to prepare well in order to bring students lessons of high quality. However, the facilities at language classrooms are still poor. Hence, teachers often encounter some difficulties when teaching. One more thing is about the students' background. Different students with different levels if rather hard to teach. All these stuff have affected the success of innovation, I think.

After analyzing the data, I would like to suggest for further studies that they can be done with other English teachers in the English faculty in order to get more reliable findings. The English teachers can help the researcher get more information about the role play if they take part in the interview as well. In addition, they can also observe students and take notes. As a matter of fact, the researcher can sometimes miss rich experiences of students. Besides that, I would like to add more interesting topics and can ask for help from the faculty to set up some activities at the canteen or outside classroom. I also think of using video recorder to all students' body language or facial expression which is important for data analyses.

V.   CONCLUSION

The applications of role play activities in practicing English speaking skill in Vietnam are quite popular. However, each teacher has a different way to apply them in various contexts. Based on the features of my context that I explained above, I employed group work role play activities to engage my students in the speaking lessons and help enhance their accuracy in speaking English. This paper points out both strong and weak aspects of using group work role play in improving students' accuracy in speaking English. It answered my first research question:

How can group work role play activities enhance students' accuracy in speaking skill?

My innovation did not work very well. Most of students agreed that role play activities that I employed in classrooms helped them pay more attention to the lessons and they enjoyed studying. They, therefore, could improve their English. However, they still made a lot of mistakes, especially the pronunciation. Therefore, the result was not as good as I expected. My innovation would be better if it were conducted in a longer time. 8 weeks of the research process was not enough to help much enhance one student's speaking accuracy.

Based on the data collected from observations, interviews and students' diaries, it came to the conclusion that students were quite interested in the group work role play activities. They felt comfortable and enjoyed the dynamic learning environment. As a result, it answered my second research question:

How do students engage to group work role play activities in classroom?

Nevertheless, I should make more effort to create more interesting and appropriate role play activities for my students in terms of kinds of activities, topic, or characters.

Conducting this research greatly affects my future practice as a teacher. I believe that this research can help me respond to new challenges and become a better practitioner. As a teacher, I provide myself with many things like teaching skills, well-prepared lesson plans, or assessment tasks and hope that they would improve students' learning outcomes. However, every classroom, every student is different. In another word, that is the complex classroom. Therefore, one good way for me to look back on my own practice is to conduct my research right in my classroom. In addition, conducting this research would give an overview on how to broaden my students' outcomes as well as my pedagogies and then develop my career. As a consequence, this process would be likely to have some impacts on my future practice.

VI.   REFERENCES

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