

## Implementing Task-Based Role Play Activities to Develop English Language Fluency at Qassim University

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### Abstract

English as a foreign language is applied as a difficulty in Middle Eastern students. Unfortunately, most educational facilities have learners whose English skills are rather poor. The intervention called for education approaches to solve challenges of English language difficulties. Therefore, an evaluation of the effectiveness of new and distinct approaches or ideas, particular to role-playing strategies, which are obtained from educational activities and plays, is especially relevant. Therefore, the significance of the present study lies in examining the effects of the use of role-playing strategies on the students' English speaking and writing skills. Since this was an intervention study, participants were assigned through random assignment to experimental and control groups. The research therefore concluded that since role-playing activities are tasks, then task factors were statistically significant on students' fluency in English.

**Keywords:** Role Play Activities; students; experimental and control; English Language Fluency; Qassim University.

### 1. Introduction

English is an official language which is accepted throughout the world, as it is regarded as an international language (Al-Mousah, 2020). English as pointed out by Al-Arifi (2020) is the globalized language for communication and interaction for a variety of countries and cultures for the purpose of speaking, communicating and learning. We can, therefore, conclude that the education of the English language has evolved and is now the second official language in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Lack of sufficient English language proficiencies emanated from

students' inability to use English as a foreign language (Manshar, 2020). This difficulty is not only felt in practice but also experienced in teaching English since there are no adequate modern methods involving the use of interactive activities. This led to children experiencing trouble in learning English and moreover, they were unable to speak English properly.

It is apparent that the level of English known by Middle Eastern students is not sufficient to learn this language. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the following areas that can help one in reducing hindrances of learning English as a foreign language; This is by establishing students' areas of weakness in English skills, known limitations of conventional teaching techniques, and perhaps trying to evaluate the impact of innovative approaches to English language teaching in enhancing students' abilities at the various lessons.

Learning techniques are the ways or processes employed by teachers to ensure that their learners adapt during the learning process. Methods of teaching English are as follows; The provision of interactive tools and the employment of different methods that can be adopted in teaching this subject so that people can be more involved while learning English, the most important language in the world which at present, is difficult to learn. A prerequisite study that falls under second language acquisition is an understanding of the learning strategies employed and the relation of these strategies to objectives and curriculum map achieved while considering levels and differences between Arabic and English cultures. Consequently, it is stressed that there is (Chamot and El Dinary, 1999).

Several methods have been used in teaching English and reforming a number of strategies, efforts have been made to improve on the conventional teaching methodologies to teach English as a foreign language. The efficiency of those approaches in the teaching process plays an essential role in causing language acquisition and attaining the desired level of accomplishment in students. Richards and Rodgers (2001) explain that activity involvement by students and the overall performance achieved in class depends on the type of teaching technique used by the teacher.

In the past few years, there has been a revolution in the methods used to teach English occasioned by technological advancement that brings the modern methods of teaching English. Such methods include conducting online learning, using virtual classrooms, and other features like learning applications, digital platforms, and role-play strategies. It also indicates that these

technologies are not only the means of attracting students' attention but are also helpful in building composite and effective environments promoting interactive education.

Besides, the result of the recent study also encourages the learning-teaching process that considers the learner differences that improve the student's understanding of linguistic concepts at special levels as well as in special needs. With the help of these methods, teachers can create individual classes and curriculum of education that take into account students' capabilities, address language barriers, and eliminate the monotonous effect of traditional learning, which in turn shifts the effectiveness of learning and attainment of the intended educational objectives. In this study, emphasis is given towards pinpointing the degree of impact that asserting the role-playing technique, in teaching English and its roles towards uplifting the student's fluency of the English language.

Unfortunately, it has been realised that students in many universities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have a weakness in the English language that hinders their ability to attain the necessary competence in this important area as well as traverse through academic and professional demands. These educational institutions endeavour to enhance the state of affairs with regard to English by implementing elaborate techniques of teaching.

Acting becomes the most important feature of the innovative form of education known as role-playing. Thus, Role-playing offers learners a chance to engage in the use of target language and conversational resources, which promote real-life sociable interaction in various social situations and in different roles (Al-Sanaidi, 2010; Richards, 1985). Role play is a type of communicative event where learners are assisted in manufacturing a meaningful language interaction that engages all the learners in some aspects of language use which include tone, body language, gesture, tone of voice and intonation among others (Abidin et al. (2012); Cheng, 2011).

Implementing this strategy in the development of the English language assists in building the student's linguistic competency thus speaking fluency and confidence in the usage of the English language since this strategy provides students with a chance of acting out roles and pretending conversations which are closer to the target culture as the learning of target language as a foreign language is learning of target culture. Therefore, it facilitates the students to achieve the situation that they would possibly meet in day-to-day lives and the professional world

which makes language learning more real in comparison to fictional. Moreover, such activities help to boost the students' social communication skills and promote interaction in multicultural settings. Conversely, for Kusnierek (2015), role-play can be described as a communication process whereby the professor and students swap responsibilities or illustrate a scene to an audience. To the degree that it is sufficient to increase the students' confidence to express their opinions and emotions in a foreign language (Asensio, 2015; Zhang, 2010).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

As for the key strengths and weaknesses universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia face versatile difficulties, such as, it seems, there is no or weak understanding and usage of the second state language – English. This weakness is brought about by several factors and among them is the student's inability to effectively apply English as a foreign language (Manshar 2020). First, with regard to the ways of teaching the English language, any furthering is supplemented with a critical lack of acceptance of new methods of education based on interactive activities.

Prior research suggested that the approaches employed in education to teach the English language today are not adequate to amply the needs of the students, and consequently, improve their language ability hence the difficulty in their ability to learn the language and fluently speak it. This state of affairs leads to the necessity for the further introduction of new educational approaches aimed at the development of English lessons and polishing students' language skills. One of the useful strategies mentioned above is role-playing as it gives a learner a chance to practice in the target language during the imitation of real-life interactions to occur in various social domains. Thus, there is an urgent need to assess the role of the role-playing strategy in the development of the English language among students in Saudi universities. This research will aim at establishing the efficiency of this strategy in the enhancement of English language proficiency and fluency among students which will help in making suggestions on how to build upon the current curricula that are being offered thus increasing the efficiency of the teaching of the English language.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the effectiveness of implementing task-based role-playing activities in developing English fluency in the Department of English Language and Literature at Qassim University?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in developing students' English language fluency that can be attributed to the experimental group through the post-application?

### 2. Literature Review

Specifically, Al-Arifi (2020) followed a study's objective designed to determine the teaching challenges relating to the English language. The target population for the present research study was the female English language teachers teaching at the primary level in Al-Quwayiyah Governorate. The questionnaire responses contained one teacher. As for the methodology of the research, it was carried out using the method of descriptive analysis with the help of the SPSS program. Various issues concerning the educational context, curriculum, and conventional methodologies were highlighted as the most prominent difficulties of English as a foreign language teachers.

More recent theoretical predictions have been made by Light Brown and Spada (1993), the educational approach is cooperative learning based on segregating activities into academic and social learning domains and the teacher's role is transformed from the controller of knowledge to the facilitator of students' learning. The idea behind this is grounded in the fact, that motivation, which a favorable environment makes, helps with the language learning process. Therefore, a comfortable environment removes the pressure that students feel when they need to speak in a foreign language. With group learning, students practice how to interact and communicate with other people hence, learning how to relate with fellow students better. This is done by developing tasks that require people to work in groups and solve problems, thus increasing the usage of English in realistic and manifold circumstances.

Strategies of role-play have attracted attention recently, especially as a way of enhancing children's English. Thus, the purpose of the study demonstrated by Kim and Chen (2021) is to assess the impact of using role-playing techniques in the development of communicative competence and critical thinking skills of English language learners.

Some of the recent analyses have identified the importance of the methods of effective innovation in English language education. For example, in their study, Garcia and Nguyen (2023) examined the question of how the curriculum on culture which is given at school can enhance students' performance and language learning. The most significant one is the role-playing strategy which serves as an essential foundation for this context because it can enrich students' interaction and natural usage of English in various courses of life. Though this kind of strategy proves helpful in enhancing the students' linguistic proficiency, it also helps to develop enhanced self-esteem and interaction skills in different life situations.

Other research carried out by Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) involved the IELTS speaking examination used as a pre-and post-test to investigate the impact of role-play on the speaking proficiency of sixty semesters of Iranian EFL students. According to the research, learners' scores in the speaking post-test were significantly higher.

Henisah. Et al. (2023) examined the application of role-play as a pedagogical tool for enhancing speaking skills and improving the overall quality of English instruction for students requiring special attention. This research specifically targets first-grade pupils in vocational high schools, as role-play can render the learning experience enjoyable and free from stress, while also being highly memorable. The incorporation of role-play as an active learning strategy is anticipated to yield positive outcomes in teaching effectiveness by fostering student motivation. Employing this approach to teach the speaking components of a language cultivates a high level of enthusiasm and motivation among students. Data for this study was collected through observations, interviews, and a questionnaire survey. The implementation process of the role-play method in a speaking class includes several steps: identifying the discussion topic, selecting the scenario and crafting the dialogue, instructing students on the dialogue, rehearsing it, adjusting the scenario and dialogue as needed, and finally, presenting the dialogue to the class. Research findings and expert insights indicate that role-play is a highly effective method for improving students' speaking abilities..

Besides, Rojas Encalada, and Villafuerte (2018) investigated how using role-playing (RP) as a teaching method in English classes might improve the speaking abilities of EFL students in Ecuador. This study examines the characteristics of RP, which has its roots in psychodrama, as well as the instructional strategies that support it, such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Task-Based Learning (TBLT), Cooperative Learning (CL), and Communicative Learning

Teaching (CLT). As a result, RP is a teaching method that exposes students to real-world scenarios in order to improve their capacity to speak with peers in a natural and relevant way about their everyday experiences as well as their future work settings.

In addition, Waluyo (2019) suggested theme-based role-play as an alternate method for enhancing EFL learners' communicative ability within task-based instruction. The study investigated how students (N = 782) performed theme-based role-plays throughout the course of a 12-week academic term and how it affected their performance on the final speaking exam. The results supported the hypothesis that students' performances in theme-based role-play predict the development of their communicative competence. He concluded that the topics and contents of role-play activities, roles of students and teachers as an individual and a group, and teachers' provision of support may play key roles in implementation.

Besides, Sinwongsuwat (2014) carried out research studies on 26 second-year English major students at Songkhla Rajabhat University in Thailand. The research established that literal role play gives learners a lever to handle conversation difficulties and work on certain target aspects of the languages they are learning in real-life contexts and as such has a comparative advantage of enhancing the learners' communicative competency in English.

Essentially, Huang (2008) offered research concerning the dichotomy of role-playing as the key method to enhancing students' and instructors' confidence in the use of a second language to express themselves and their emotions without much pressure. The outcomes of the study are NY: This study showed that role-play can very much reduce students' constraints in speaking a foreign language which, in turn, enhances their self-confidence and their interaction with the tutors in class and therefore improves achievement and fluency in English.

Similarly, David (2014) noted that students' engagement in role-play enhances their desire to communicate with other people in collaborative learning activities in a foreign language. In so doing, the understanding of the lessons and outcomes of the research reveal that students who undertook role-playing activities were more inclined to contribute to group chats and group work hence improving their language and communication.

Finally, a study carried out by Suchada and Tasanameelaep (2018) on the effects of role-playing simulation activities in the improvement of 45 Thai EFL university students' business English oral communication. The findings from the questionnaire showed that students had

positive attitudes towards learning through role-playing simulation activities. They recommended that teachers should provide more adequate practice with problem solving and fluency building in order to promote more sustainably successful oral communication in business English environments.

### **3. Methodology**

This part deals with a description of the method and procedures used in this research, as it deals with: The rationale of the study, the participants involved in the study, the research instrument that was used which is the English language skills test and how the validity and reliability of the test were affirmed. This part also featured the demonstration of the -application of the role-playing strategy and the statistical processing methods applied to the data collected In the study.

The quasi-experimental approach was followed, however, people were randomly divided into two groups, experimental and control groups in which the effect of one or more independent variables on one or more dependent variables is to be treated. One can note that the primary feature of the predefined quasi-experimental approach is the purposeful establishment of the conditions to which a researcher is exposed. No different groups will experience different feelings. The quasi-experimental approach was adopted by the current study to determine the relationship between the independent variable which consists of the method of teaching the English language; the role-playing strategy and the dependent variable which is the development of the level of students' fluency in English among Saudi university students.

#### **3.1 Population and Participants**

The target group of the study include the bachelor's degree students of the Department of English Language and Literature of the Qassim University at KSA. For the experiment, Qassim University was selected to deploy for the academic year (2023-2024) for several reasons, including the willingness of the university administration its use and application of fresh strategies as solutions for a poor level of English among university students, their appropriate educational faculties and environmental means and necessary instruments for deploying the experiment. The possibilities of its application as a strategy and testing the effect it has on the targeted audience.



In the framework of the Department of English Language and Literature two groups of students were chosen: the first group of 18 male and female students and the second group of 18 male and female students as well. Then, the two student groups were sorted into the experimental and control groups where Student Group 1 was in the experimental group and was instructed in the subject of English language skills using the identified role-playing strategy while the division categorized Student Group 2 as the control group and was taught according to the conventional approach.

### **3.2 Test Preparation Method**

Identify the objective of the test. The test follows a role-playing strategy that seeks to establish the existing level of English proficiency among students in the Department of English Language and Literature of Qassim University. The test consists of five sections, each of which measures a different role-playing skill: performing, responding, differentiation, change, and innovation. To evaluate the student's progress in applying this strategy, we administer a pre- and post-test.

**Preparing test questions:** Since the role-playing strategy is applied here, questions are developed correspondingly, emphasizing different skills it. Several questions for every role-playing skill have been developed separately in advance to be used during the training.

**Determine the test specifications and type of questions:** As mentioned earlier, the test is planned to include five parts, and each part reviews the specific kind of role-playing strategy skill. Describing each of the questions used in the procedure, the author stressed that each question was aligned with the particular skill and focused the students on role-play and collaborative activities.

**Test instructions:** Specific directions are discussed with students, for example not to circle the selected answer and say 'This is the one' accompanied by pointing at the answer with a pencil; before moving to the next question in each part of the test, the demonstrative technique of turning to role-playing is used.

## 4. Result

### 4.1 The Face Validity of the English Language Test

The apparent validity was confirmed in relation to the general impression of the test with regards to the type of vocabulary used, the method in which the test was constructed, the amount of clarity and specifically the level of objectivity of the test and the utility of the test for its intended purpose. In order to establish the construct validity of the test items, it was administered to arbitrators who are experts in measurement and evaluation, methods of teaching, curricula and those dealing with skill development courses for detection. In relation to the intended purpose of the tests, regarding the correspondence of the test questions to measure the five listening skills of predicting, inferring, expressing an opinion, distinguishing, issuing judgements, and criticizing, it can be stated that the study questions are quite scientific and accurate for the age group of bachelor's students. The required changes were made depending on the observations that the arbitrators made. The questions that were approved by the arbitrators and were accepted were the questions that elicited an approval rate of (80%). Regarding the test, the comment was made to reword two of the questions in relation to the skill in reading comprehension.

### 4.2 Construct Validity of the Listening Skills Test

The evidence for the construct validity of the English language test was determined by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient of each test question with the total score sum of the skill tested by reading, writing, speaking, listening, and the results of vocabulary and the sample used was from outside the sampling frame of (30) male and female students the table below shows the result. (1).

**Table (1) Correlation coefficient values for the listening skills test questions with the total score of the skill they measure (n=30)**

Writing Skill		Listening Skill		Reading Skill		Speaking Skill	
Correlation coefficient	QN	Correlation coefficient	QN	Correlation coefficient	QN	Correlation coefficient	QN
0.440**	1	0.801**	1	**0.856	2	**0.839	1
0.427**	2	0.750**		0.631**	3	Role-play skill	
0.635**	3	<b>Fluency</b>				**0.545	3
		0.520**	2	0.767**	1	**0.870	4

The correlation coefficient is statistically significant at the significance level ( $0.01 \geq (\alpha)$ ).

Observing the results presented in Table (1), we can identify the following: The correlation coefficients between each test question with the total of the skill it intends to measure are all positive values and statistically significant at the level ( $0.01 \geq (\alpha)$ ), and the correlation coefficients' values vary from (0.427) to (0.870), and this shows that the questions in each skill do measure what they propose to measure.

### 4.3 Test Stability

The reliability of the English language test was confirmed in two ways: The first was done by getting the internal consistency coefficient in accordance with Cronbach Alpha, and the reliability coefficient in this method was (0.86). With regards to the second method, the test-retest reliability method was adopted and for this, the test was given to the exploratory sample of (30) Male and Female students and then after two weeks, it was again given to the same students. It is in this way that the Pearson Correlation coefficient was arrived at to be equal to (0.83). These values are considered appropriate and determine the stability of the test which measures the level of university students. Before and after using the role-playing strategy.

### 4.4 Test Correction

The test entailed (10) test questions in the test taker's English language proficiency. The correct answers were rewarded two points and for wrong answers, the students lost two points. Since the general score is computed as the sum of the scores that students get in the specific fields, it is clear that the range of the general score is between (0) and (20) marks.

#### 4.5 Study Design

O1 X O1 EG:  
O1 - O1 CG:

Where:

- (EG, Experimental Group) = the experimental group.
- (CG, Controlled Group) = the control group.
- (O1) = the pre- and post-application of the listening skills test.
- (X) = the experimental treatment (a teaching strategy based on critical thinking skills).
- (-) = the conventional method.

#### 4.6 Procedures

It consisted of obtaining the necessary approvals to conduct the study, reviewing the theoretical materials related to the research topic and its variables, then preparing the study tool represented in testing the student's level of fluency in the English language, ensuring their validity and reliability, and selecting and appointing the students participating in the study experiment, according to the learning method, in two groups: instructional group taught based on the role-playing list strategy, a second instructional group was taught based on the list strategy but as an experiment, and finally, there was the control group which was taught in a normal way. The English language skills test was administered to the students of the control and experiment groups for equalizing statistical variables. After that, the treatment was implemented: The intervention which is, in this case, the independent variable is the experimental (a strategy for teaching a list of role-playing activities used) while the other is a control that includes the traditional or usual approach to teaching. Finally, a test was also conducted on the bachelor's degree students in the Department of English Language in the experimental and control groups after the overall completion of the implementation of the treatment. The students' answers were corrected, written down by the teacher, and then transcribed to the computer and statistically analysed with the aid of the "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" (SPSS-V. 25). When the answers to the questions set in the study were obtained, they were followed by the extraction of results which in turn were discussed, proceeded by coming up with recommendations.

The following part provides and analyzes the results of the study concerning the research question What effect does a teaching strategy based on role-play have on the fluency of the English language among the bachelor’s students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Qassim University:

**Q1: Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in developing students’ English language fluency that can be attributed to the experimental group through the post-application?**

To answer this question, the cloud averages and standard deviations of the bachelor's degree students' scores were extracted for the English language test, which aims to evaluate the student's level of fluency in English language skills, and Table (3) shows the results of this: To answer this question, the cloud averages and standard deviations of the bachelor’s degree students’ scores were extracted for the English language test, which aims to evaluate the student's level of fluency in English language skills, and Table (2) shows the results of this:

**Table (2) The arithmetic means of the experimental and control group in the English language test in the post-test**

Tribal scale		Post scale			The levels
standard deviation	Arithmetic mean	standard deviation	Arithmetic mean	The Group	
4.23	9.05	3.51	14.72	Experimental	English Language Test
3.57	9.22	2.21	11.22	Control Sample	

This can be deduced from Table (2) indicating the general backwardness between arithmetic means related to the post-measurement test of students', level of fluency in the English language for all skills. In order to establish the relevance of these differences between the arithmetic means the following one-way analysis of variance was used as depicted in Table 3):

**Table (3) one-way analysis of variance**

The amount of impact	ETA square	Sig	F value	Mean squares	The total	Source of variance	level
		0.001	12.806	110.250	110.250	Pretest	<b>English language Test</b>
Medium	0.52	0.00	703.646	6058.028	6058.028	Between groups	
				8.609	292.722	The error	
					6461.00	the total	
					402.972	Corrected total	

It can be said that the differences between the means of the two study groups or groups with and without the application of the proposed procedure in the English language skills test for bachelor's students in the post-application are indeed statistically significant at a significance level of (0.00) as shown in Table (3) with an F value of 703.646 and an effect value of 0.52. Differences in the above parameters saw the experimental group, which was trained through role-playing activities record the highest arithmetic mean of 14.72. The result of this study suggests that the proposed teaching strategy of using role-playing task activities to teach English has benefits on the student's fluency in the language.

The researcher explains this observation to the effectiveness of the task-based role-playing activities. Having conducted these activities, as a university teacher, the improvement of the students' performance as well as their mastery of the English language was evident. The following activities have greatly assisted in enhancing the achievement levels as well as the motivation to learn among the students and their level of English. The context of the role-playing activities was to offer a number of pedagogical and learning activities and hence contributed to helping the students develop ways of discovering meaning and connecting it to their past experiences. This also created a platform for the students to work within groups, thus enhancing the process of communication among them.

## **Q2: What is the effectiveness of implementing task-based role-playing activities in developing English fluency in university students?**

Task-based role-playing activities were also found to enhance the University students' fluency in English remarkably when provided. Based on the findings of this study, students were able to enhance their linguistic abilities in English with ease and competency by using English and by creating realistic and variable conditions. The study showed that when the Role-Play strategy was employed, the students' general effectiveness in using English in relevant contexts such as restaurants, airports, hotels schools etc. was enhanced. The students were grouped into small groups, they were enlightened on what was expected of them, this created a nice learning atmosphere. Allotting much time to consider ideas and the execution of the same during the activity was instrumental in enhancing the realization among students. Moreover, the assessment of the performance of the students after each Role-Play session helped them analyze themselves in terms of quality and performance to be able to perform much better in the subsequent Role-play performance. Used by the teachers, the aspects that have been observed include the fact that there is enhancement of confidence while speaking English and sharing information with fellow learners thus fostering teamwork and sharing of incidences.

When it comes to teaching literature and drama, one has shown that utilising Role-Play, to act out scenes from the novels or plays, enhances students' comprehension of the texts and their mastery of appropriate and natural English. These activities also assisted the students the gaining their language skills through dramas, which are mimic and practical agendas.

Thus, the findings of this study are consistent with previous studies as the present study has similarities with Sinwongsuwat's (2014) work that investigated 26 second-year English majors at Songkhla Rajabhat University, Thailand. The study also revealed that scarcity of conversational challenges allows the learners to practice the required TL features in real-life communication and thereby have a better communicative proficiency in English.

In addition, the findings of this study are consistent with previous studies as the present study has similarities with Waluyo's (2019) work that suggested theme-based role-play as an alternate method for enhancing EFL learners' communicative ability within task-based instruction.

The findings of this study also, are consistent with Suchada and Tasaameelaep's (2018) study on the effects of role-playing simulation activities. They suggested that teachers should provide

more adequate practice with problem solving and fluency building in order to promote more sustainably successful oral communication in business English environments.

The study's results align with Huang's (2008) research on role-playing strategies' role in enhancing the effectiveness of the educational environment. This study focused on the use of role-playing as a major approach to boost students' and instructors' confidence in expressing their thoughts and feelings in a comfortable setting. The study's findings revealed that role-playing significantly reduces students' fear of speaking a foreign language, which boosts their self-confidence and increases their participation in class, both of which have a positive impact on their academic achievement and fluency in English.

In addition, the study goes in line with Rojas Encalada, and Villafuerte's (2018) investigation how using role-playing (RP) as a teaching method in English classes might improve the speaking abilities of EFL students in Ecuador. As a result, RP is a teaching method that exposes students to real-world scenarios in order to improve their capacity to speak with peers in a natural and relevant way about their everyday experiences as well as their future work settings.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following set of recommendations is presented:

1. Leading the instructors of the university to adopt the teaching that incorporates the aspects of role-playing activities as the effective one in the development of the English language.
2. Providing faculty with special training on how to use the teaching method of incorporating role-playing activities.

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