

The effectiveness of role-playing technique in improving Thai 7th graders' English communication skills

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Abstract

The aims of study were to determine the effectiveness of Role playing as the technique used in improving students' speaking skills of English communication and report the extent to which this technique was effective. This study applied quantitative method with pre-experimental design. One class of 7th graders of Songserm Wittaya School, Thailand consisting of 30 students become the sample of the research. The data were collected by using pre-test and post-test which measured students' English communication in dialogue, before and after the research. These data were analyzed statistically by using paired-sample t-test. The findings revealed that the students performed better in the post-test than in the pre-test in which they reached mean score of 10.50 in the pre-test and increased to 17.70 in the post-test. Additionally, the significant difference on students' speaking achievement in pre- and post-tests was indicated by the higher score value compared to t-table. Thus, this research concluded that Role playing used as a technique in improving 7th grade students' English speaking for communication was effective., hence, null hypothesis was rejected.

Keywords: English speaking skill; English communication; Role-playing technique

INTRODUCTION

English is the world's most widely used international language and plays an important role in the lives of many people due to the influence of the advancement of technology and the era of information in the society. As a result, English is becoming more and more important especially for communication. English is also the world's lingua franca, in which at the present time, it is used as a tool for driving communication processes among nations and its people in order to keep up with the era of speed change. Therefore, it can be said that English is used to develop some countries to be as prosperous as other countries and importantly as a medium for the transmission of culture and good identity of the country to the world community. In the ASEAN, Thailand is one of the countries that participates in economic, security, social and cultural cooperation, hence this country realizes that it is imperative to develop its nation's education, as well as in English field.

In accordance with that, teaching English to Thailand students becomes one of the major priorities by providing the students with the skills and ability to apply knowledge of English in everyday life. In this country, English is taught as a compulsory subject with the hope that the students will be able to compete with other graduates of other countries to take part in all sectors of the world. Schickedanz & York (2016) said that learning a refers to the abilities of acquiring the language skills, namely: speaking, listening, reading and writing, as well as in English. Among these four skills, speaking is considered as the most important one to be learnt by the students in order to make them able to build communication both in written and spoken contexts. By having good ability of speaking English, the students will also be able to transmit information in the process of conveying ideas and meanings. Brown, et.al (2018) proposed variety of speaking elements as follows: *First, vocabulary development*: students need to know and learn words to call things otherwise they can only use gestures; *second, correct speaking skills*: students are required to understand the goal of their speaking whether it is to transfer information to action (transactional function) or to build relationships with other people, including knowledge of cultural aspects and social contexts (interpersonal function), hence the students will use appropriate language expressions suitable with social levels, values and behaviors that form social norms; *third, the development of syntactical speech and language rules* known as syntactic development; *fourth, the expressions used to show feelings*; *fifth, groups of communication skills*, that is good social interaction with others.

Besides those elements, students should also learn 'discourse', that is knowledge of how to manage and associate words and the order of speaking and listening of the interlocutor. Another aspect should be learnt by the students is 'pragmatic', that is the knowledge of the goals and context of language in which the speaker knows how to align the message with the context and the listener uses the information in that context to help them understand the ideas of the communication. In short, in order to learn English, students have to know the whole knowledge of this language. In the use of language for communication, the objective is to provide accurate and appropriate spoken information for both speakers. Bromley, et.al (2015) defined speech for communication as conveying sentences through sounds, gestures and symbols to communicate; it is the process of transferring information from one person to another.

From the definition mentioned above, it can be concluded that speaking for communication is a process where the messenger conveys or transmits the language as information to the recipient. Exchanging messages with recipients is a conversation between two or more people of speakers and listeners. It is also the process of conveying meaningful information from one person to another through sound including gestures or symbols to communicate to others. In order to communicate effectively, people need to know the rules and other elements of language, such as correct speech, pronunciation, accent and language level appropriate to the person in different social situations. There are many important factors that contribute to effective communication for both the sender

and the recipient in order to understand correct and consistent conversation. Those factors are including the following language components:

- The grammatical component of speech is the knowledge of linguistic structures, lexical types, word functions, etc. (Bern, et.al., 2014). This is first and foremost because the way each type of language structure differs in both the nature of the sentence and the complexity of the text. Therefore, communication is different as well.
- The content component is theoretical knowledge. Language proficiency, that is, knowledge that can apply the principles of language in communication including knowledge of grammatical competence, knowledge of vocabulary, sentences, and text, it can be divided into 2 types:
 - 1) Knowledge of practice, knowledge language function, linking words, sentences or various messages to convey meaning and be applicable to social situations.
 - 2) Knowledge of theories means that language user has the ability to use the relevant content knowledge as needed to convey meaning and the process of psychology refers to the use of vision and hearing, including access to various information (Bachman, et.al, 2014)
- The linguistic elements appropriate to the situation where the speaking is taking place; using language appropriate language for different people and situations (Nunan, 2016), as well as knowledge. In language used and in responding to situations, it is the practical use of language that arises after the students have mastered the language, that is, the selection of words, phrases and sentences that are correct and appropriate for the right time to begin a conversation.

In a communication, the elements needed to negotiate an understanding of the messages, thoughts and opinions of the interlocutor are: needs, feelings, various emotions, etc. However, communication can be achieved in real life. It can be the results of classroom practice. Usually, knowledge is measured after learning by taking a grammatical proficiency test (Lynch, et.al., 2015). Further, Harmer (2016) said that an interpersonal communication is needed to show compassion and create a good feeling for one another in certain such as proposing requests, showing blessings, asking for apologies and showing thanks as a form of friendship. The language is used in small groups until the social level goes up. It is the creation of an imaginary world by using the function of language to share with others, in other words, building a good relationship with others (Bromley, et.al., 2015).

For learning and building experience, language is used until it is a recognition process that students can explore classification and solve. problems until they understand and create knowledge by themselves from learning. Bromley, et.al (2015) said that the use of the language should be consistent, that is to take into account the appropriateness of the person who is being discussed together, time and place in the conversation rather than a strictness of language accuracy according to many linguistic principles. To conclude, in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), the aims of speaking for communication are to negotiate to create a good relationship between the

speakers and listeners to show the need for expressing thoughts, feelings and emotions; for learning and having experience; and for determining the behavior of those who speak and what the purpose involved in that communication.

To be more specific, teaching speaking for communication aims to achieve learning effectiveness and objectives so that the students will learn easily. Teachers must have knowledge and understanding about English language teaching for communication in order to achieve the most teaching efficiency. Brown (2018) mentioned several language teaching principles for communication as below:

- 1) The goal of teaching focuses on all the components of communication skills and is not limited within the framework of language or grammar content.
- 2) Language techniques have been designed to be well-applied by the students to use the language according to its practicality.
- 3) Maneuverability and accuracy are the principles that subject to communication techniques.
- 4) Students must use language to understand and create within the familiar context and also through practice.

Meanwhile, Nunan (2016) discussed the principles of teaching to communicate are:

- Realizing the differences in the context of learning between the second language and foreign languages.
- For students to practice both maneuverability and accuracy.
- Giving speech opportunities for students into practice speaking using groups and dual work.
- Designing workloads related to meaningful speaking.
- Organizing learning activities that link students to practice both in a communication for social life and communication for specific needs.

In teaching speaking for effective communication, learning management is needed based on the age of the students. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to study and understand the components of speaking proposed by several scholars such as including 'vocabulary composition' (York, 2016) which explained that students need to learn the basic vocabulary used for things, symptoms, verbs and feelings and what they want to say in order to be accurate, including the development of the ability to speak in a sentence in the form of rules of language used in appropriate communication; having skills in organizing ideas and communicating, that is the ability to communicate to others to understand what they want to convey.

To summarize, communication has to take into account two main elements: lexical and linguistic, with elements in the type of language genre knowledge, discourse knowledge, and practical. and speech condition. Teachers should manage learning to be reinforced, various elements according to the actual situation around the students. Native speakers are generally unaware of the patterns of words used in their communication, but are more concerned with what they want to say or express.

Language learning is behavioral learning. In the early stages, learning a language for communication is learned by force; reinforced and by the reactions around the learners.

In middle school, teaching language for communication aims to provide students with competence and language skills for communication according to their ages and potentials. Teachers are responsible for encouraging students to express themselves in language to develop speaking skills and to create a positive attitude towards learning skills. Many scholars have identified learners' level of speaking proficiency according to knowledge in different fields as follows:

- *Cognitive proficiency level* is defined by Schickedanz & York (2016) as a competence in vocabulary. At this stage, the students understand the principles and rules of grammar or language structure linguistic, vocabulary knowledge of speaking principles, and the ability to use linguistic structures to convey meaning in speech. In addition, students must learn the vocabulary to be used for speaking, the actions and feelings they want to express or what they want to say, the correctness of their speech. or the suitability of the sentences and language to develop speech management and expressive communication skills.
- *Social proficiency level*, according to Richards, et al (2014) is a measure of a student's ability to choose a language, word, and sentence structure. The selection of communication information is appropriate for the social context and the group of people who wish to communicate. The use of various language functions such as requests, apologies, thank you, etc., as well as knowledge of the language and understanding of different content such as storytelling, reporting, interviews and conversation. The teachers should teach English as a second language; preparing students to have the knowledge and expressive skills in communicating in diverse social contexts is a requirement for students to know and recognize the importance of language for communication. In summary, the level of communicative proficiency refers to the identification of communicative and social competence, knowledge of a wide range of languages, including the ability to use language appropriate to the context of society and group, people who want to communicate as well as the knowledge and ability to communicate according to the principles of speaking and expressing good attitudes towards language learning.

The aim of communicative speaking is to enable students to use language, especially to convey meaning. The use of language correctly and appropriate to the situation and social conditions. Therefore, in teaching English for communication, the students should be provided with all activities to practice their communication suitable with their grades (ages) and ability. Besides, the students should be given learning activities that can improve their motivation to communicate and study naturally in which they are able to create context or content related to the learning.

Communication activities provide opportunities for the students to build good relationships between students-students and students-teachers. It is also a learning

activity that focuses on the use of language. Learners have the opportunity to use the knowledge gained from language learning in real situations. It also shows the ability to use language for communication. Teaching and learning activities for communication have the main goals for students to use language in various situations correctly and appropriately. Many scholars have provided examples of activities to practice speaking English for communication, and Harmer & Richards (2008) put 'Role-playing' as one of speaking practices in which the students assume themselves in a certain situation and make them build communication/dialogue related to their role in that created situation.

Role-playing provides a situation that is closely related to reality with the aim of allowing students to use the language to communicate the roles they are assigned to in order to make them more joyful in learning. Teachers may involve the students in defining conversations and their roles such as by asking: "Who will play and what will you say?", and 'what to say' is determined by the teacher or the students can be asked to think a topic for themselves with the teacher help to verifying the correctness of the language. Role-playing is, therefore, an activity that encourages students to use their language skills and is important in practicing speaking English, as well as being able to apply them in real life. Role-play teaching is a teaching technique by using fictitious roles from a situation that is close to reality with the aim of enabling students to use language to communicate their roles and then play those roles. The students may be given dialogue and individual roles defined by who the students will act and how they will speak.

Role play is an activity where the students are assigned a role to use the target language that is close to the real situation. It is a great activity for students to practice using the language in the classroom before applying it in the workplace. In fact, the students are assigned the role of another person in a variety of social contexts, the roles students encounter in their daily lives, where the teacher provides information in the performance. According to Nunan (2016), Role-play is an activity in which students perform roles in the various social contexts they encounter in their daily life. Harmer (2016) stated that role-play is the natural expression of the individual towards others in a fictitious situation; is an activity in which the performer or participant knows the content or topic to be used in speaking for communication practices. Revell (2012) said, Role-play discusses the role of students assigned to act as other people in different situations. It is an activity that promotes speaking skills by learning to express their thoughts or other feelings by using speech to convey meaning.

Richards, et.al (2014) described the aims of role-play teaching are including:

- 1) Allowing students to be flexible in a variety of new situations; resulting in students' ability to practice using the language more correctly.
- 2) Helping to create a good atmosphere that is conducive to learning because it will make the students to have fun and feel relaxed while learning.
- 3) Training students to work together assertively by expressing their feelings, and practice problem solving.

- 4) Developing students' conversational skills and is also an opportunity for them to practice using the language in the communication situations they have learned.
- 5) Developing students' conversational skills and is also an opportunity for them to practice using the language in the communication situations they have learned.

Further, Richards, et.al (2014), discussed the steps of teaching by using role-playing technique as follows:

- a. Preparatory, is a vocabulary review stage for students to apply their knowledge; connected to the content of real-world knowledge and the context of the role-play specified, interpreting the problem or introducing the problem clearly, opening the issue, explaining the roles of teachers and students, presenting situations and roles.
- b. Actors' selection, is a stage where teachers and students describe the character's characteristics, analyzing the chapter, students set the scene, choose an actor but still do not create a dialogue yet.
- c. Demonstration, is stage to extract knowledge as a model step, i.e. getting involved in interpersonal relationships. It is an introduction and pull. Each stage of knowledge comes out and teaches the functions of the language required for each stage.
- d. Practice and review, is a stage to help and train students by using conversation cards provided for roles or providing language for practice and other assistance.
- e. Acting, is a stage the actors act according to the roles received and observing the behaviors expressed.
- f. Discussion and evaluation, is a stage where teachers and students discuss key issues, knowledge, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors expressed by those who summarize the learning received, possibly including the correctness of language used to assess students' learning outcomes. Bug fixes for better understanding and improvements in future performances.

Having discussed how important English speaking skill in order to build effective communication, the researchers found that most of the students, especially 7th graders of Songserm Wittaya School, Thailand, still found difficulties to acquire that skill due to various factors including lack of English exposure from the environment, lack of confidence to practice the language at school or in daily life, limited English knowledge, and even inappropriate and ineffectiveness of teaching techniques applied by the teachers. Speaking skill needs partner to talk to or to practice. It is obviously difficult to ask the students to use English with the teachers since they do not have enough confidence and feel that the teachers are much more superiors than them. Therefore, the students should be given time and space to practice their speaking skills with their classmates such as 'Role-playing'. Role-playing activities are one of the ways to develop more successful communicative language teaching, in which Littlewood (2014) said that role-playing creates a good preparation technique to practice language in communication Likewise, Revell (2012) defined Role-playing as the spontaneous expression of an individual's

response to others in a given situation where role-play is an activity in which the participants, either the actor knows what the content or topic is about, or will need to know the information first to express it in an exercise format. In addition, Richards (2014) described role-playing as an activity in which learners are assigned roles and situations that pre-prepared or exchanging information or roles that are given as the main role play in a teaching and learning activity in communicative English that emphasizes teaching using roles that are fictitious.

Referring to the background above, in this research, the researchers were interested to propose 'Role-playing' as one technique in teaching 7th grade students to improve their speaking skills for communication, since speaking skill is an important skill to teach and learn. The communication itself will not occur if the interlocutor is unable to engage in the conversation because speaking skills convey thoughts, understandings and feelings in the use of language. Thus, students' lack of speaking ability will cause obstacles in communication. At this point, teacher's technique in teaching speaking skill should be obviously taken into account. Thus, this research work aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Role-playing in English speaking class of 7th grade students of Songserm Wittaya School, Thailand, in building English communication. It is expected that the findings of this study would give positive contribution to both English educators and learners, especially those in high school level, and particularly to Thailand people to gain insight on how Role-playing can be effectively applied in English speaking classes.

METHOD

This research applied quantitative method with experimental research design. Oberiri (2017) summarized that quantitative study aimed to discuss a problem by using numbers in data collection and analysis through statistical computation. Creswell (2012) stated that: "an experimental design is the traditional approach to conducting quantitative research." In this sense, it can be said that in order to accomplish quantitative research, an experimental design is needed.

Additionally, this experimental research used One-group 'pre-test and post-test', as Nunan & Bailey (2016) argued that one-group of pre-test and post-test experimental design has the purpose to compare research subjects' achievement/skill before and after the research experiment. In this research work, the researcher will compare students' speaking skill before and after the experiment through the results of their pre-test and post-test. In short, the design of this research was as follows:

Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Y1	X	Y2

Diagram 1. Research design

Research Participants

One class of 7th graders composing 30 students were selected as the sample of this study out of three classes through Cluster Sampling. Cluster is a technique of sampling placing the population into groups called as clusters. These groups, in this research, referred to the classes of grade 7. These 7th graders were registered in summer semester, academic year 2022/2023.

Instruments

In collecting the data, both pre and post-tests of short speaking performance were administered to these students. Pre-test was given before the treatment, in which the students were asked to use English talking about “What they want to be when they grow-up?”. The speaking was required to be performed in around 2 minutes. As well as the pre-test, the post-test was also demanded the students to perform around 2 minutes English speech and the topic was about “What career they want to choose and why?”. This test was carried out after the 6 meetings of offline treatment were accomplished.

In the treatment, the researchers introduced the students with Role-play technique. Besides, the researchers also gave them examples on how to build one dialogue with several roles related to certain situations. Along the experiment, the students were also assigned in-pairs to act out several various roles. In doing this, the researchers also fed the students with a number of vocabularies to use in preparing dialogue. Besides, the students were also taught on how to utilize English dictionary to search any words they needed to compose sentences in their dialogue.

Data analysis

Muhson (2017) opined that data analysis cannot be ignored in the process of a research since it will determine the results of the research process. There were two steps taken in analyzing the data, namely: calculating students’ scores in the pre-test and post-test based on the rubric of speaking, and then inputting the results into statistical analysis.

(i) **Speaking scoring rubric**

In assessing students’ speaking performances both in the pre-test and post-test, the researchers referred to scoring rubric of speaking as in Table 1 below:

Table 3.2 Oral Test Scoring Rubric

No	Aspect	Description of Indicator	Score
1	Pronunciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">frequently make mistakes in pronunciation, still can be understood by native speakers, mostly used to deal with foreigners in order to attempt to speak his language	5
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">accent is understandable even though often quite brokenerrors never impede with understanding and rarely bother the native speaker.	4

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quite rare in pronunciation error can be fully accepted by educated native speakers 	3 2 1
2	Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> frequently made mistake in grammars, but still can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak his language are usually able to construct the sentences quite accurately in elementary level, but having no complete or confident control of the grammar good at controlling the grammar. Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversation on practical, social, and professional topics. able to use the language accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Errors in grammar are quite rare equivalent to that of an educated native speaker 	5 4 3 2 1
3	Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> using insufficient vocabularies to express something but for the needs of elementary levels having adequate vocabulary to express himself simply with some circumlocutions having the ability to use the language with adequate broad vocabulary to participate effectively in all occasions of conversations both most formal and informal with various topics having ability to understand and participate in any conversation within the range of his experience with a high degree of precision of vocabulary able to speak in all levels sufficiently accepted by educated native speakers in all its features including breadth of vocabulary and idioms, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references 	5 4 3 2 1
4	Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> having no specific fluency description. Just referring to other four language areas to determine the level of fluency. able to handle the speech with confidence but not in social interactions such as introductions, having conversations about updated events, as well as work, family and autobiographical information. able to discuss on particular interests with sufficient competence, and rarely dive for words having the ability to speak with the language fluently on all levels, mostly for normally professional needs. Able to 	5 4 3

		participate in any conversation with a high degree of fluency. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> having completely fluent speech that is fully accepted by educated native speakers. 	2 1
5	Compre-hension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> having very limited language experience, only able to understand simple questions and statements if delivered with slower speech, repetition, or paraphrase. able to catch the gist of most conversations of non-technical subjects (i.e., topics that require no specialized knowledge). comprehension is quite complete at a normal rate of speech. Able to understand any conversation within the range of his experience. his comprehension is equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. 	5 4 3 2 1

Adopted and Modified from: Brown, 2004 (406-407)

The performance of the students based on the rubric above was then assessed according to the assessment criteria in the following Table 2:

Table 2. Speaking Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria	
Score	Qualification
16-20 points	Very good
13-15 points	Good
10-12 points	Fair
Less than 10 points	Need improvement

(ii) Statistical Analysis

Since the sample of this research consists of one group with pre and post-tests design, the appropriate statistical formula used was 'Paired-sample t-test'. This statistic aims to compare two results; students' speaking pre-test and students' speaking post-test. The formula of this statistical analysis is as follows:

$$t = \frac{\sum D}{\sqrt{\frac{n \sum D^2 - (\sum D)^2}{n-1}}}$$

$\sum D$ = The sum of post-test and pre-test

$\sum D^2$ = The sum of post-test and pre-test squared

N = number of students

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical data analysis resulted two findings in order to answer 2 research questions as follows:

1. Is Role-playing an effective technique to improve students' speaking skills to build communication?

The analysis of students' speaking achievements in the pre- and post-tests revealed that the highest score reached by the students in the pre-test was 13 and the lowest one was 8. Meanwhile, in the post test, the students hit the highest score of 19 and the lowest score of 15. The statistical computation of those results in the significance level of 0.5 (5%) resulted mean score, standard deviation (SD), mean difference score (D) and test value (t-test) as presented in below Table 3:

Table 3. Statistical Analysis of Students' Speaking achievement

Test	Mean	S.D.	D	t	Df	Sig
Pre-test	10.50	1.64	6.9	-28.14	29	0.00
Post-test	17.07	1.17				

From Table 3 above, it was found that the mean scores of students' speaking skills for communication using role-playing activities of the sample after learning were higher than before, with the mean score after learning was 17.07 points (S.D. = 1.17), while the mean (mean) of the score before learning was equal to 10.50 points (S.D. = 1.64) and the mean difference (D) was equal to 6.9 points, the t-statistic was -28.14. English for Communication Using Role Activities Assuming that the sample after learning was higher than before learning at the statistical significance level of .05. These results confirmed that 'Role-playing' was an effective technique to improve students' speaking skills for communication in which students' speaking achievement in the post-test outperformed their pre-rest (17.07 > 10.50).

2. How effective is Role-playing in improving students' speaking skills for communication?

Based on the findings of statistical analysis, the t score value for paired- sample table was 28.14, and the significance (2-tailed) was $0.00 < \alpha$ (0.05). If the significance score is less than $\alpha = 0.05$, it can be inferred that the difference is significant so that H_0 and H_1 accepted. Referring to these results, hence, this research concluded that Role playing used as instructional technique was effective in improving speaking skills of 7th grade students of Songserm Wittaya School, Thailand.

CONCLUSION

This research had the purposes to explore the effectiveness of Role-playing to be used as a technique in teaching and learning speaking skills to build communication and the extent to which it was effective. Thus, this research was guided by two research questions: 1) Is Role playing effective in improving 7th graders of Songserm Wittaya School, Thailand's speaking skills to build communication, and 2) How effective is this technique in improving students' speaking skills for communication?

A statistical analysis of Paired-sample t-test with pre- and post-tests research design showed two findings, i.e.: 1) Role-playing was effective to improve 7th graders' speaking skills for communication seen from the results of students' speaking test where the average score obtained by the students in the post-test was higher than that in the pre-test ($17.01 > 10.50$). 2) The effectiveness of Role-playing technique was indicated by the score value for paired-sample table was 28.14 and the significance (2-tailed) was $0.00 < \alpha$ (0.05). Since the significance score is less than $\alpha = 0.05$, the difference of students' speaking performance in the pre and post-test said to be significant.

To conclude, the two results of the data analysis confirmed that this research rejected null hypothesis and accepted alternative hypothesis.

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