


Role-Playing Activities: Essential Tools for Enhancing English Proficiency to Thai Primary Students

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A B S T R A C T

This study looks at how well role-playing exercises improve English proficiency among Thai primary pupils, with an eye toward speaking abilities, self-confidence, and attitudes about English. Data were gathered by means of speaking tests both before and after running role-playing activities using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach. Students' speaking skills showed a notable improvement; the average proficiency score rose from 57.5 in Cycle 1 to 68.13 in Cycle 2. Furthermore, the proportion of students reaching the minimal speaking score of 65 changed from 50% in Cycle 1 to 81.25% in Cycle 2. These findings underline the need for using interactive teaching strategies, including role-playing, to close the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby improving English communication abilities among students.

Keywords: English proficiency, speaking skills, role-playing

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INTRODUCTION

English is the most extensively utilized global lingua franca and significantly impacts the lives of numerous individuals due to technological advancements and the information age in society. (Bihari Dash, 2022) English is universally acknowledged as the most prevalently spoken language worldwide, possessing a substantial global reach. Consequently, it is essential for students who finish their schooling to acquire a foundational understanding of English. Language study and training are tactics for improving pedagogical achievement and learning efficacy. Students need to possess high English proficiency to obtain substantial benefits for their personal and professional objectives. Mastery of writing, listening, reading, and speaking in English is regarded as an essential competency in the professional realm. This study emphasizes speaking while integrating all four skills (Irawan et al., 2020).

English is an essential component in improving educational standards and achieving English language proficiency goals (Kharisma et al., 2024). In Thailand, English is taught as a foreign language, similar to Indonesia, rather than as a second language. The majority of Thai individuals converse in either Basa Thai or Melayu on a regular basis. This resulted in a challenge, as most students are not proficient in English, necessitating the teacher to devise optimal strategies or resources for English instruction, particularly at the basic level. As a result, students primarily concentrate on grammar rules, vocabulary retention, and translation to achieve exam success, especially in technical and vocational education, where English language instruction is inadequate, potentially impeding marginalised and disadvantaged students (Isty et al., 2024). Consequently, the integration of English into the formal education system, especially at the basic level, is of utmost significance. A thorough

and rigorous introduction to English for primary school pupils is essential, since it aids in the learning process (Muhammadiyah & Utara, 2024). Thai primary pupils' inadequate exposure to English and language background causes them various difficulties acquiring the language. Students typically struggle with the structural differences between Thai and English, which can cause problems with pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary acquisition, as Thai is the most often used language in Thailand. Furthermore, English is usually taught in a formal classroom environment with fewer chances for real-life experience, depriving students of real-life communication opportunities. Their capacity to acquire fluency and confidence in English suffers even more from this little connection with native speakers. Furthermore, Thai conventional teaching approaches may stress grammar and word memorization above useful communication abilities. This exam-oriented strategy can reduce students' drive and encourage bad opinions about studying English. Many kids also suffer with self-confidence problems when speaking out of concern about making mistakes or being criticized by professors and peers. Active involvement in classroom debates might be discouraged by cultural elements, including the focus on hierarchy and respect. These difficulties thus seriously hinder Thai primary students' efficient acquisition of English.

The proficiency of non-native speakers, especially Thai primary pupils, in articulating English becomes a focus of academic investigation since English remains a global lingua franca across multiple fields (Hasibuan, 2020). Like numerous other countries, Thailand acknowledges the importance of English as a medium for global communication, commerce, and education. As a result, English language instruction is incorporated into the curriculum of Thai elementary schools (Hasibuan & Yusriati, 2019). Moreover, oral communication is essential for showcasing students' competencies (Wahyuni, Bina, 2021). This study primarily focuses on enhancing speaking skills, frequently seen as the most crucial component of attaining fluency in a foreign or second language. (Rita & Usman, 2023) Students are motivated to engage in English conversation and assume roles to gain diverse experiences, as though they participate in authentic English activities. When properly managed, the educational environment is a complex entity that enhances pupils' English-speaking ability, resulting in better communication skills and self-confidence. (Raruoalli Srinivas Rao, 2019) Reports assert that the acquisition of speaking skills is essential for individuals learning English, as it enhances professional prospects, improves organizational operations, fosters self-confidence, increases employment opportunities, facilitates public speaking, enables participation in interviews, contributes to debates and group discussions, and allows for effective presentations.

English is vital, particularly for communication. (Putra et al., 2023) It serves as the global lingua franca, facilitating communication among nations and their populations as they adapt to the rapid pace of change. English encourages the development of certain countries, helping them achieve comparable prosperity. It also serves as a crucial medium for disseminating culture and fostering a positive identity for the country within the global community. As a participant in ASEAN's economic, security, social, and cultural cooperation, Thailand recognizes the necessity of advancing its national education, especially in English. Therefore, teaching English to Thai students becomes a primary objective, and they are equipped to use English information daily. In this nation, English is mandated as a subject with the expectation that students are ready to compete with graduates from other countries across several global sectors. (Zaitun & Wanyawa, 2023) Language learning encompasses the acquisition of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, specifically in English. Speaking is deemed the most crucial for students to acquire of the four abilities, enabling them to communicate effectively in both written and oral environments.

Proficient English enables pupils to communicate information effectively while expressing thoughts and meanings. (John et al., 2021) offer a range of speaking elements: Initially, language acquisition is essential; pupils need to learn words to identify objects, as

reliance on gestures is insufficient. Secondly, proficient speaking skills necessitate that students understand the objective of their discourse, whether it aims to convey information for action (transactional function) or to foster interpersonal relationships, which includes an understanding of cultural nuances and social contexts (interpersonal function). Consequently, students employ language expressions that align with social hierarchies, values, and behaviours that constitute social norms. Thirdly, there is an advancement in syntactical speech and language conventions, referred to as syntactic development. Fourthly, the articulation of emotions is essential. Lastly, practical communication skills encompass positive social interactions with others. (Idham et al., 2022) that speaking skills are regarded as the most challenging competency for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to master. Students frequently encounter difficulties studying English due to multiple circumstances. (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021) note numerous scholars identify impediments that hinder learners from speaking English, including insufficient motivation, lack of student interest, limited vocabulary, and ineffective teaching methods. (Ork et al., 2024) also assert that apprehension is a factor that hinders students from developing English-speaking skills. Consequently, educators must cultivate an environment conducive to fostering student motivation for class participation.

Instructing English speaking is arduous. Educators utilize suitable strategies and techniques to help pupils develop speaking skills, including knowledge, comprehension, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency (Negara, 2021). An effective strategy in the instructional process yields favourable consequences by enhancing students' abilities and proficiency. Opportunities for Thai students to use English for communication in real-life contexts are restricted. The final aspect is the attitudes of Thai EFL students towards studying the English language. Extensive research indicates that most Thai EFL students exhibit negative motivation towards learning English, attributed to classroom activities and a lack of self-confidence stemming from inadequate language proficiency (Tipmontree & Tasanameelarp, 2020). To enhance students' speaking skills, educators employ suitable teaching methods that facilitate active student participation in learning, increasing their motivation and self-confidence in using English in real-world contexts. (Bhowmik, 2015) underscores the significance of the English language as a global lingua franca that non-native speakers should proficiently acquire. (Roengrit et al., 2023) Indicates that Thai students rank 97th out of 111 nations in English proficiency, making Thailand the second-lowest country in ASEAN in 2022. This discovery suggests that the techniques used in English schools are insufficient. Based on the researcher's own experiences, Thai students exhibit a deficiency in both knowledge and confidence regarding effective communication in English, particularly in speaking skills. Therefore, it is imperative to establish suitable activities for classroom implementation.

Role-playing activities are effective methods for enhancing communicative language instruction. According to (Henisah et al., 2023) role-playing is an excellent preparatory approach for practising the language in conversation. (Ruslan, 2020) characterizes role-playing as the spontaneous manifestation of an individual's reactions to others in a specific context, where participants either possess prior knowledge of the subject matter or acquire the information beforehand to articulate it within an exercise framework. (Arum Putri Rahayu, 2022) defines role-playing as an activity where learners receive predetermined roles and scenarios, facilitating the exchange of information or enacting fictitious roles, which serves as the primary focus in communicative English instruction. Role-playing simulation is a pedagogical technique endorsed by numerous educators that enhances students' language proficiency, helping them overcome challenges related to communicative competence through exercises rooted in authentic scenarios and communication (Ishak & Abdul Aziz, 2022). This technique is a practical pedagogical approach for educators to improve students' speaking proficiency and build self-confidence in communicating in English with their

teachers and peers. This technique requires students to apply their linguistic knowledge to address realistic tasks assigned by teachers while fostering their interpersonal skills for effective collaboration in group work, a crucial competency of the 21st century. Consequently, role-playing simulation effectively addresses students' English communication skills challenges (Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2021).

Role-playing exercises can be motivational due to their engaging and interesting nature for learners. It seamlessly blends language skills and assists pupils who have not previously encountered such incentive. This significantly influences the classroom atmosphere and dynamics, enabling pupils to recognise prevalent English errors. Role-playing provides pupils with excellent chances for communication, even with restricted vocabulary. Role-playing fosters pupils' communication and self-expression with confidence (Zulfa et al., 2024). Role-playing has emerged as a dynamic pedagogical approach that promotes language acquisition and improves speaking abilities (Nhan, 2024). Successful role play enables students to enhance their interpersonal interactions, refine their speaking abilities across many contexts, and cultivate social skills from a foundational level. Role play is a communicative method that enhances fluency in language learners, fosters classroom interaction, and boosts motivation (Them & Thao, 2022).

This study will examine role-playing simulations' impact on enhancing students' English speaking skills and their attitudes and self-confidence in speaking English within corporate environments. Role-playing simulations offer a promising educational method to improve pupils' speaking abilities. This study evaluates the efficacy of role-playing simulations in enhancing Thai students' English speaking skills and their attitudes and self-confidence in utilizing the language in practical situations. By employing tailored educational methodologies, students can be empowered to communicate proficiently in English, equipping them for the challenges of a globalized society.

Role-playing

Role-play has many forms and is utilized in formal education for decades, leading to a growing curiosity for more complex and engaging gamified learning experiences. The role-playing teaching method serves as a valuable and essential approach to the learning process for primary school children. In role-playing, children assume specific roles or characters and enact them in various situations or contexts. (Daniastuti, 2018) Role-play sessions vary from structured guided dialogues to spontaneous dramatic exercises, including straightforward rehearsed performances and more intricate simulated situations. The author emphasizes a wide range of role-play activities. This speaking task is constrained and facilitated by prearranged prompts, such as dialogues, while role-playing becomes an activity where students improvise instead of depending on rehearsed dialogue.

In educational terminology, role-play is an instructional method where learners assume the responsibilities of various character roles within established, often realistic, settings (Daulay et al., 2022). Role-playing in education is a documented pedagogical approach used across several contexts and disciplines, including early childhood education, computing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, law, and outdoor education (Shapiro & Leopold, 2012). By assigning students certain situations and roles within a scenario, they engage with the subject at cognitive, emotional, and behavioural levels. Numerous educational advantages of employing role-play in the classroom, either in conjunction with or as a substitute for other methodologies, include heightened student engagement and interest, language acquisition (Farrelly & Sinwongsuwat, 2021), knowledge retention, and creativity enhancement (Hidayati & Pardjono, 2018). Additional advantages include improvements in social skills and empathy and promoting self-reflection and awareness of social contexts (Kilgour et al., 2015).

Role-playing is recognized as a powerful pedagogical tool that promotes active learning and enhances communicative competence (Khamouja et al., 2023). It allows students to practice language in realistic contexts, improving their confidence and fluency. This method aids language acquisition and fosters social skills necessary for effective collaboration (Tipmontree, 2015). The advantages of role-play are associated with the interplay of several aspects within its parameters. Educational role-play creates a safe atmosphere that allows participants to enhance their skills while assuming a designated role (Moreno-Guerrero et al., 2020). This virtual environment enables students to investigate the causality of their activities in a nearly authentic scenario without actual repercussions.

Types of Role-Play

There are three categories of role play: fully scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted. Every phrase is predetermined in a written role play, and each student needs to understand or memorize their role (Romadhona et al., 2023). This type involves explaining the model conversation in the designated textbook, with the main objective of making each linguistic element meaningful and memorable. (Toding et al., 2021) assert that this role play is suitable for low-level students who are unfamiliar with the context of semi-scripted scenarios. The second role play includes a model dialogue with some omitted words, and students fill in the blanks with contextually appropriate terms. Students modify the primary discourse in a specific way and initiate their dialogue.

This sort of role-play refers to semi-controlled, as the instructor or designated textbook provides linguistic input; nevertheless, students select resources based on a framework that offers scenarios to create a real-life context. This style suits students with upper-beginner to intermediate proficiency levels, who are familiar with fundamental procedures and aspire to engage in more advanced tasks, as semi-scripted role-play becomes less regimented and controlled. In the third role-play category, students receive keywords for dialogues, information, contexts, and objectives in less regulated and structured tasks. In this format, students create brief conversations based on the keywords, while materials or contexts merely fill in gaps. They classify this style of role play as non-scripted and contend that it offers significant opportunities to apply tactics in specific scenarios. (Aimen, 2024) asserts that children develop their opinions and thoughts, articulate language commensurate with their proficiency, and engage in specific settings according to their comprehension. Non-scripted role-play benefits middle to upper-level pupils, allowing for free and structured interaction, often necessitating specialized abilities such as problem-solving.

Importance of English Proficiency

The necessity for English proficiency is underscored by its role in global communication, commerce, and education (Bihari Dash, 2022). Mastery of speaking, along with other skills like writing and listening, is crucial for effective communication (Irawan et al., 2020). In Thailand, where English education is part of the curriculum, improving speaking skills is paramount due to its relevance in professional settings (Hasibuan & Yusriati, 2019). The significance of English proficiency in educational institutions enhances students' employment prospects and facilitates their integration into society (Aimen, 2024). A recent study indicates that fluent English speakers are more inclined to cultivate emotional intelligence, enhancing their life prospects and work opportunities. In an educational institution, the acquisition of spoken English is as crucial as written English, as the latter is abundant in exemplification. The pedagogy helps students practice the construction of sentences in the target language while learning written models. To develop proficient spoken English skills, students immerse themselves in pronouncing English sound.

METHOD

The research design will adopt a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, conducted in collaboration with the sixth-grade English instructor during the 2023/2024 academic year. This collaboration will focus on identifying and addressing the research problem, strategizing the action, implementing the research, monitoring, and analyzing the findings. The study will follow the four-step model proposed by (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), beginning with the planning phase. In this phase, the researcher will develop a strategy to improve students' speaking abilities, as many struggle to articulate their ideas clearly and effectively. To address this issue, role-play will be employed as a teaching method to enhance students' vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency.

The acting phase will involve implementing the role-play method in the classroom and collecting data on students' academic performance and speaking proficiency. In the observation phase, the researcher will assess whether students have met the predetermined success criteria based on the collected data. If students fail to achieve the desired outcomes, the reflecting phase will involve modifying the approach and proceeding to a second cycle to refine the intervention. This iterative process will continue until significant improvements in students' speaking skills are observed.

The participants of this study will consist of 20 sixth-grade students from Anuban Obom School, Satun, Thailand. These students will be selected for evaluation and analysis of their verbal competencies before and after engaging in role-playing exercises. The role-playing activities will be conducted throughout the 2023/2024 academic year, with designated sessions integrated into the English curriculum. To assess students' speaking proficiency, the study will utilize a rubric-based evaluation tool measuring pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar. The success criterion will be defined as at least 70% of students achieving a minimum speaking score of 65 on the assessment rubric.

The data analysis will focus on evaluating students' progress through two cycles. In Cycle 1, the mean speaking proficiency score was 57.5, with only 50% of students meeting the success threshold of 65. Observations indicated that students spent more time composing their dialogues than practicing role-playing, leading to insufficient rehearsal. In Cycle 2, the average speaking proficiency score improved to 68.13, with 81.25% of students reaching the minimum required score. This result demonstrated a significant improvement in students' speaking proficiency compared to Cycle 1, highlighting the effectiveness of the role-playing intervention.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study's data are systematically arranged in a table manner to display the results of the speech assessments over two cycles.

Table 1. Result of Students Speaking Assessments

Assessment Phase	Mean Speaking Proficiency Score	Percentage of Students Achieving Score of 65
Preliminary Study	50.63	N/A
Cycle 1	57.5	50%
Cycle 2	68.13	81.25%

In Cycle 1, the mean speaking proficiency score was 57.5, with only 50% of students attaining the minimum score of 65, indicating that the initial implementation of role-playing was not sufficiently effective. However, in Cycle 2, the mean score increased to 68.13, and the percentage of students meeting the success criterion rose significantly to 81.25%, demonstrating the effectiveness of the revised role-playing activities in enhancing students' speaking proficiency.

The outcome of the speaking assessment in Cycle 1 indicated that the average score of the students' speaking proficiency was 57.5, with 50% of students achieving a score of 65. The standard mean score (M=65) indicates that the objective of having 70% of students score 65 (E = 70%) in Cycle 1 of this research was not met. The data indicates that Cycle 1 was unsuccessful. The results of the speaking exam conducted through role play in Cycle 2 indicate that the students' speaking proficiency improved compared to Cycle 1. During cycle 1, the students independently created dialogues for the role play. The pupils concentrated on their writing, resulting in diminished time for practicing role play. Cycle 1 proved ineffective, prompting the teacher and researcher to modify role play in the classroom. During cycle 1, the students independently created dialogues for the role play. The pupils concentrated on their writing, resulting in diminished time for practicing role play. The teacher instructed the pupils on the new language utilized in their role-play and its pronunciation. In cycle 2, the students' spoken proficiency was enhanced. The average student's speaking proficiency score was 68.13, with 81.25% of pupils attaining a minimal speaking score. Role-play enhances students' verbal proficiency.

Discussion

The results demonstrate a significant enhancement in students speaking proficiency from cycle 1 to cycle 2, underscoring the beneficial effect of role-playing activities on the development of English speaking skills. The rise in the average score and the proportion of students achieving the success criteria indicates that the modification to the teaching methodology were effective in enhancing students communication skills. Consequently, the reason for this issue was studied. During the initial cycle, the educator and the researcher lacked comprehensive preparation for the role play. The kids were instructed to create dialogues for their role-play, resulting in their concentration on writing rather than performing. They had limited time to rehearse their role-play. Furthermore, the children lacked sufficient vocabulary, resulting in challenges in constructing coherent and grammatically correct statements. Consequently, the actions in the second cycle required enhancement through increased practice. They expanded their vocabulary concerning the expression of daily tasks and formulated effective dialogues for their role-play.

Verbal communication serves multiple purposes beyond just discussion in everyday life. Brown (2004) asserted that speaking is a productive talent that can be directly and experimentally examined. The observations are influenced by the fluency, correctness, and effectiveness of a test taker's listening skills, which inevitably undermines the reliability and efficacy of an oral production exam. Brown and Yule (2001) assert that pupils must possess proficiency in English fluency, pronunciation standards, and an understanding of foreign vocabulary and grammatical structures. The teacher's objective in instructing speaking was to empower students to utilize the language for communication, emphasizing fluency and precision in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. The remark above clarifies that speaking ability in this research refers to the capacity to articulate one's ideas orally, encompassing fluency and precision in pronunciation and vocabulary.

CONCLUSIONS

This study findings indicate that role-playing activities markedly improve speaking abilities and motivation in Thai primary pupils learning English. The mean speaking proficiency score rose from 57.5 in cycle 1 to 68.13 in cycle 2, demonstrating that role-playing effectively involves students in practical language application, enabling them to practice and enhance their speaking skills in a conducive atmosphere. The proportion of students attaining the minimal speaking score increased from 50% to 81.25%, underscoring the efficiency of role-playing in enhancing motivation and promoting active engagement. This interactive pedagogical approach not only connects theoretical knowledge with practical applications but also equips students to communicate proficiently in English, preparing them for future academic and professional endeavours. The incorporation and role-playing in English language training is an effective method that improves language proficiency and student engagement, resulting in a more productive and pleasurable educational experiences.

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