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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITIES IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS OF B2-LEVEL ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Abstract. Speaking is a key aspect of communicative competence in English language learning. Even upper intermediate level learners have problems with spontaneous communication, fluency and responding appropriately to unfamiliar situations. This article reviews role-play activities as an approach to developing the speaking skills of B2-level English learners. Academic literature is reviewed to identify benefits of role-play (fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, interaction and communicative confidence), compares role-play with other language teaching methods and conditions for successful implementation. It shows that role-play can give meaningful opportunities for authentic communication when activities are carefully planned according to learners' needs and supported by feedback but effectiveness depends on task design, learner participation and quality of instruction.

Keywords: role-play, speaking skills, B2 level learners, communicative competence, English language teaching.

Introduction.

Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning English because it allows learners to communicate ideas and opinions, participate in social and academic interaction. At B2 level learners are expected to speak reasonably fluently and spontaneously but some may not be able to maintain conversations, respond quickly or use appropriate language in unfamiliar situations. Traditional speaking lessons often include grammar exercises, memorisation and answering teacher questions; while these activities can develop linguistic accuracy they don't provide enough opportunities for spontaneous communication. Teachers therefore need methods that link classroom learning with real life language use. Role-play is a communicative teaching technique where learners take particular roles and interact within an imagined situation (job interview, university discussion, customer-service conversation, debate about environmental issue etc.). Activities like this encourage learners to use English for communicative purposes rather than simply repeating memorised sentences. The purpose of this article is to see how effective role-play activities are in developing the speaking skills of B2 level English learners. Research question: To what extent can role-play activities support the development of fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and interactive communication among B2 level English learners? This article is based on a review of existing academic literature not an original classroom experiment.

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Theoretical Background and Literature Review. 2.1 The Importance of Speaking Skills. Speaking is not only producing grammatically correct sentences. Learners need to organise ideas, choose appropriate vocabulary, pronounce words correctly, respond to others and continue interaction. At B2 level learners should also be able to explain viewpoints, justify opinions and take part in discussions on different topics. A learner may know a lot of grammar but still hesitate when talking spontaneously. This means that speaking development needs situations where linguistic knowledge can be used in communication. Activities which foster interaction bridge the gap between knowing English and using it effectively. 2.2 Role-Play as Communicative Teaching Technique. Role-play is closely linked to CLT (meaningful interaction and practical use of language). As opposed to exercises that focus solely on linguistic forms role-play gives learners a purpose for communicating. Kaygısız and Akar (2025) carried out a systematic review of 32 peer-reviewed studies about role-playing in EFL and ESL contexts. Their review found benefits for language development (fluency, pronunciation and vocabulary learning), but also that structure and degree of learner agency in role-play activities are important. This implies that role-play can be useful but outcomes depend partly on how the activities are designed. Togimin and Jaafar (2020) studied role-play activities in an ESL classroom with nine university students; they found positive developments in fluency, comprehension, contextual language use and interactive communication. But because there were only nine participants it cannot be generalised to all learners (not even B2 level). Kumara Rao & Zakaria (2025) reviewed 25 studies on role-playing and communication skills. Benefits were found in speaking ability, context understanding and interaction but evidence was small (samples) and longitudinal research was not available so positive outcomes are encouraging but do not show that role-play is equally effective in every educational context. Do and Nguyen (2017) studied drama-based role-play activities in EFL context (accuracy, pronunciation, interaction) and learners' attitudes. Their work shows that speaking performance can be evaluated from several dimensions rather than grammatical accuracy alone. These studies together show a basis for considering role-play as a speaking-practice technique but much of the evidence is about particular groups of learners and more research needs to establish its effects on B2 level students. 2.3 Literature Matrix Author(s) and year Focus Relevance to the present article Do and Nguyen (2017) Drama based role-play and speaking performance Accuracy, pronunciation and interaction Togimin and Jaafar (2020) Role play in an ESL classroom Fluency and interactive communication Kumara Rao and Zakaria (2025) Systematic review of role playing and communication Benefits/limitations across studies Kaygısız and Akar (2025) Systematic review of 32 EFL/ESL studies Examines language outcomes and the role of task design. The literature sets the stage for our discussion but the studies vary in learner proficiency, context, research design and instructional conditions so their findings should be critically evaluated rather than as proof that every role-play activity produces the same results.

How Role-Play Can Develop B2 Speaking Skills. 3.1 Fluency Developing fluency means being able to express ideas in an appropriate flow of speech without too much hesitation. Role-play forces learners to respond to partners, continue conversations and express ideas under communicative conditions (e.g., students can simulate a discussion where they have to agree or disagree with a proposal and explain why). Tasks like this force them to produce language as a response to what another person says (not just recite prepared answers). Practice with different partners and scenarios over time may make learners more comfortable with spontaneous speech but memorising an entire dialogue reduces this benefit because students learn to rely on prepared language rather than respond

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flexibly. 3.2 Vocabulary expansion and accuracy Role-play can introduce vocabulary in context. In job interview learners practise qualifications, experience, strengths and career goals; in university discussion expressions for giving opinions, clarifying ideas and supporting arguments etc. Contextual practice links words and phrases to their communicative functions. Teachers can help this happen by giving useful expressions beforehand and asking learners to use them independently during the conversation. But role-play doesn't guarantee accurate grammar or a rich vocabulary either — learners also need explicit instruction, opportunities to notice mistakes and feedback that helps correct recurring errors. 3.3. Pronunciation and Interactive Communication. Pronunciation determines how easily a speaker can be understood. Role play gives learners practise with stress, intonation rhythm and pronunciation of words while they communicate meaning. Role play develops interactional competence too: Learners may have to ask follow-up questions; request clarification; interrupt politely; negotiate meaning or respond to unexpected information etc. These skills are particularly important at B2 level where successful communication is not just producing individual sentences. Teachers should focus on intelligibility rather than expecting learners to imitate a particular native-speaker accent. 3.4. Confidence and motivation Some learners don't speak because they are afraid of making mistakes or being judged by others. Role-play might be a less threatening context because students communicate through characters assigned to them and shared scenarios. For example, a learner who doesn't want to say his own opinion may feel more comfortable arguing from the point of view of an assigned character. Pair and small group activities can also give students more speaking time than whole class questioning. Not everybody likes role-play. Some will be nervous about performing in front of classmates so teachers need to provide supportive conditions (preparation time), alternatives (paired practice before performance etc).

Teaching Methodology: Who to teach, what to teach and how to teach. 4.1. Who to teach? B2 level English learners in upper-secondary education or university settings have an intermediate-to advanced range of vocabulary and grammar but may need more practice in spontaneous interaction, extended speaking and pragmatic language use too. The teacher needs to know who the students are (not assume all B2 students have the same difficulties) some need help with fluency others pronunciation, argumentation or turn-taking etc. 4.2. What to teach? Four main areas of instruction should be covered: Fluency (keep speech going, reduce unnecessary hesitation and develop ideas); Vocabulary and grammatical accuracy (choose expressions; construct sentences clearly); Pronunciation (use intelligible pronunciation stress intonation); Interactive communication (ask questions respond appropriately clarify meaning agree/disagree). These objectives need to be adapted to the abilities of the learners and linked to communicative outcomes of each lesson. 4.3. How to teach? A structured role play lesson can have five stages. Stage 1: Preparation. The teacher presents a realistic situation; explains the communicative goal and vocabulary/expressions used; reviews useful vocabulary and expressions. Stage 2: Planning. Students are given role cards with their identities, goals and other information (not complete dialogues). They prepare key ideas but are not asked to memorize complete dialogues. Stage 3: Role-play. Students work in pairs or small groups to complete task.

The teacher monitors participation and flags recurring language difficulties without interrupting communication unnecessarily.

Stage 4: Feedback. The teacher talks about strengths and weaknesses (fluency, accuracy, pronunciation and interaction). Peer feedback can also be used to reflect on performance.

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Stage 5: Repetition and reflection. Students repeat the task with a new partner or changed condition (or both). They then identify which expressions they used successfully and which skills need further practice.

This procedure combines communicative practice with explicit instruction and formative feedback.

Comparison with Other Teaching Methods Role-play is most useful when selected according to learning objective and combined with other teaching methods.

Communicative Language Teaching gives the broader principle of learning through meaningful interaction. Role-play applies that principle by giving students specific communicative goals and social roles.

Task-Based Language Teaching also emphasises completion of meaningful tasks. A role play in which students negotiate a solution to university problem can be task based activity as long as success is achieved by reaching an outcome (not just using target phrases).

Explicit instruction allows teachers to explain grammatical structures, model pronunciation and teach useful expressions directly (even though accuracy can develop this way explanation alone may not provide enough spontaneous speaking practice).

Role-play links these approaches together (preparation and language instruction with real interaction). But it shouldn't replace everything else in the classroom. Learners need a balanced programme of listening, vocabulary work, pronunciation work, explicit grammar instruction and different forms of speaking practice too.

Discussion. The reviewed literature suggests that role-play can be useful in speaking development because it offers opportunities to practise language in meaningful contexts (fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation and interactive communication) as well as allow learners to apply previously learned language.

However, several limitations need to be taken into account. First of all, role-play depends on the quality of the task. Too simple activities may not challenge B2 learners and too demanding tasks may make some students feel uncomfortable taking part. Scenarios should therefore match learners' proficiency level and encourage extended purposeful communication.

Second, participation may not be equal. Confident students might lead conversations whereas less confident learners speak very little. Pair rotation, roles defined clearly and individual speaking goals can all help with this problem.

Third, assessment should be explicit. Teachers can use a speaking rubric that measures fluency, vocabulary, grammar accuracy, pronunciation and interaction. Explicit assessment is more specific feedback and learners know what they are doing well.

Finally, the literature does not show that role-play is always better than other methods of teaching. Research from particular classrooms cannot be extrapolated to every B2 group. More studies with clear levels of proficiency, similar assessment procedures and longer observation periods would clarify whether role-play works for this group.

Practical Recommendations. Based on literature reviewed the following recommendations can be given to teachers working with B2 level learners:

Pick realistic and challenging scenarios for academic, professional and everyday communication. Set clear speaking objectives for each activity.

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Give useful vocabulary and functional expressions but don't ask students to learn complete dialogues.

Give learners enough time to prepare and practise in pairs or small groups.

Use formative feedback to address recurring language problems.

Have students repeat activities with different partners and changing communicative conditions.

Evaluate several aspects of speaking (not just grammatical correctness).

Tailor roles and task complexity to individual learners' needs.

These recommendations are proposed applications of the literature reviewed; they are not experimental outcomes of this article.

Conclusion. Role-play activities provide a promising way to develop the speaking skills of B2 level English learners: through simulated communicative situations learners practise fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and interactive communication as well as their ability to express ideas spontaneously.

The reviewed literature generally endorses the educational value of role-play in EFL and ESL contexts. However, its success relies on task design (not too difficult), learner support (not too little), equal participation and feedback (not too little). Role play should therefore be seen as part of a communicative teaching programme not as a substitute for other methods.

To the research question above, the literature suggests that role-play can support several important aspects of speaking development but whether it is effective for B2 level learners is a question which needs further targeted empirical investigation. Structured role-play plus explicit instruction and ongoing assessment are more likely to provide a balanced approach to speaking development than role-play alone.

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