



An Improvement of Speaking Ability through Communicative Role Play for Grade Nine Learners

การพัฒนาความสามารถในการพูดผ่านการสื่อสารโดยใช้บทบาทสมมุติ สำหรับนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3

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Abstract

Speaking ability is the most difficult skill for Thai learners to attain in the EFL context. This study exploited communicative role play as a means to provide learners exposure to the use of English. The objectives of the study were to investigate whether 1) communicative role play can improve learners' speaking ability, 2) to examine the learning retention of learners when communicative role play is used, and 3) to investigate the learners' perceptions toward the use of communicative role play. The subjects were 35 grade nine learners studying English in the second semester of the academic year 2009 at Samliem Municipal School. Ten research instruments were pretest and posttest, retention test, lesson plan, performance checklist, teacher's journal, learner self-assessment, vocabulary CD, portfolio, questionnaire and audio-video recording. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS to find t-test. The findings demonstrated that the t-test revealed a statistically significant main effect ($P < .001$) indicating that there was a significant difference between the means of the pretest and posttest. The learning retention result illustrated that there was a significant difference between that of the posttest and the retention test ($P < .001$). Finally the learners had positive perceptions of communicative role play after its implementation in their classroom because they enjoyed their learning and expanded their English knowledge and speaking ability.

บทคัดย่อ

ความสามารถในการพูดเป็นทักษะที่ยากที่สุดสำหรับนักเรียนไทยที่จะบรรลุผลสำเร็จในบริบทที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ งานวิจัยนี้ใช้การสื่อสารโดยใช้บทบาทสมมุติเป็นเครื่องมือให้นักเรียนได้อยู่ในสถานการณ์ที่ต้องใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ งานวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อพัฒนาความสามารถในการพูด ตรวจสอบความคงทนในการเรียนรู้ และศึกษาความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนต่อการสื่อสารโดยใช้บทบาทสมมุติ กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้เป็นนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 ภาคเรียนที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2552 จำนวน 35 คน โรงเรียนเทศบาลสามเหลี่ยม เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย ประกอบด้วย แบบทดสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน แบบทดสอบความคงทน แผนการจัดการเรียนรู้ แบบสังเกตของครู แบบบันทึก

Keyword: Communicative Role Play

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ของครู แบบประเมินตนเองของนักเรียน ซีดีคำศัพท์ แฟ้มสะสมผลงาน แบบสอบถาม และการบันทึกเสียงและวิดีโอ สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลคือการทดสอบค่าที (t-test) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผลการทดสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน แตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .001 ส่วนผลการทดสอบความคงทนของการเรียนรู้ พบว่าแตกต่างกับ ผลการทดสอบหลังเรียนอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ .001 นักเรียนมีความคิดเห็นที่ดีเพราะสนุกในการเรียนรู้และ มีความรู้ทางภาษาอังกฤษต่อการสื่อสารโดยใช้บทสนทนาเพิ่มขึ้น

Introduction

Proficiency in English can be a significant tool for people to use to accomplish their goals. Today, English is the primary language used to share advanced technology and information and for businesses to present their products to global customers. Knowledge of English plays a vital role in gaining new knowledge, experience, and careers. English even plays an essential and major role in Thai politics, economics, and society in general; Thailand's citizens must increase proficiency in English communication in order to continue building its prosperity and strength as a global nation (Ministry of Education, 2002). Clearly, the dominance of English continues to expand rapidly throughout both our current and future world.

In the Thai school system, English is a required subject in the school curriculum. The school of concern for this study is Samliem Municipal School - a public school under the supervision of Khon Kaen Municipality. A large number of its grade nine learners have low proficiency scores in English. According to teacher interviews, the most difficult part of learning English is in acquiring the ability to speak. The teacher indicated that learners do not have enough exposure to English and thus cannot speak fluently and correctly. They also cannot pronounce many words. Additionally, they are too shy to speak in front of the class. Due to the problems identified by the teacher, it is important to study how learners can improve their English speaking abilities.

Having the ability to speak English is dramatically beneficial, but merely learning English grammar is not enough to become proficient in the language. Language learners should be given frequent opportunities to practice speaking in order to improve their speaking skill. The present study investigates a technique called communicative role play, considered by many to be an effective way to help increase the speaking ability of language learners (Magos & Politi, 2008; Intaraphol, 2006; Alwahibee, 2004; Burudpakdee, 2004; Ketbantoeng, 1998; Krisanalom, 1998). Based on these studies, communicative role play was deemed an appropriate approach to use in studying improving speaking ability in grade nine learners. The present study researched whether or not learners can use communicative role play to significantly improve their speaking abilities, whether communicative role play can help language learners retain what they have learned, and the learners' perceptions toward the application of communicative role play in the classroom were positive or not.

Research Questions

1. Can communicative role play improve learners' speaking ability?
2. Can learners retain their speaking ability when communicative role play is used?
3. What are the learners' perceptions toward the use of communicative role play?



Research Objectives

1. To investigate whether communicative role play can improve learners' speaking ability.
2. To examine the learning retention of learners when communicative role play is used.
3. To investigate the learners' perceptions toward the use of communicative role play.

Research methodology

The research design was based on a one group pretest posttest design. The time interval to assess learning retention was two weeks after the posttest (Luksadao et al., 2008; Manotam & Prasertsaluay, 2007; Paramee, 2006).

Population and Subjects

The population was grade nine learners in Samliem Municipal School in Khon Kaen. They were studying English in the second semester of the academic year 2009. There were four (4) sections: 3/1, 3/2, 3/3, and 3/4, consisting of one-hundred and fifteen (115) learners. The subjects were randomly selected by using cluster random sampling technique. The subjects chosen were learners in 3/1 section. Altogether there were thirty-five (35) grade nine learners in this section.

Research instruments

There were ten research instruments: pretest and posttest, retention test, lesson plan, performance checklist, teacher's journal, learner self-assessment, audio-video recording, vocabulary CD, portfolio, and questionnaire. To verify that the research instruments were valid and reliable, they were tried out in a similarly sized classroom at a different school. After the tried-out period, it was found that role play had the potential to improve learners' speaking ability. The research instruments were modified for the suitable use in the actual training. The Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 was employed, and it showed the reliability of the test was 0.75.

Research procedure

1. The pretest was undertaken with the subjects.
2. The treatment was introduced and taught.
3. The posttest was conducted after the application of treatment.
4. The retention test was employed to recheck on learning retention.

The research procedure is shown below:

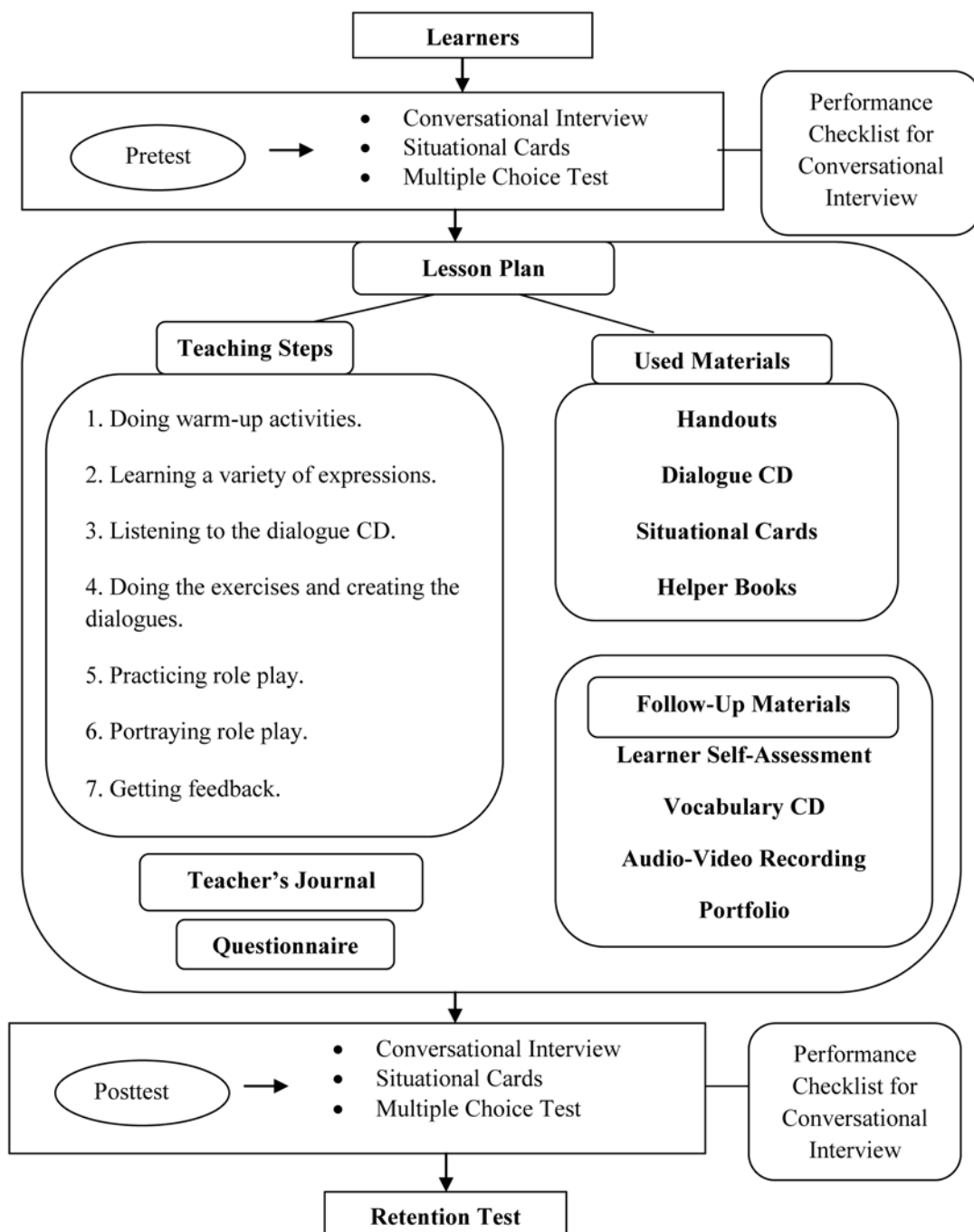


Figure 1 The research procedure

Results

The results of the study are presented according to the research questions.

Research question no. 1: Can communicative role play improve learners' speaking ability?

The t-test revealed a statistically significant main effect ($P < .001$) indicating that there was a significant difference between the means of the two tests, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The differences between the learners' pretest and posttest scores

Test	\bar{X}	S.D.	t-test
Pretest	15.46	3.973	20.34***
Posttest	31.46	5.232	

*** $p < .001$

The data from the other research instruments (teacher's journal, audio-video recording, portfolio, vocabulary CD, and learner self-assessment) demonstrated that there was an improvement in the learners' speaking ability. In terms of language form, the learners made errors on articles, word order, possessives, vocabulary, and adding unnecessary verbs. In addition, the vocabulary CD enlarged their vocabulary while at the same time improving their pronunciation and accents. Regarding learner self-assessment, "making suggestions" was the most difficult of the eight language functions (Greeting and introducing, Making apologies, Offering invitations, Making requests, Asking permission, Giving suggestions, Asking for information, and Using the imperative form) found in the school curriculum. More than half of the learners did not have a good understanding of this lesson. But, a majority of the learners demonstrated understanding of the other seven language functions.

Thus, it was clear that the application of communicative role play had a considerable influence in improving learners' speaking ability.

Research question no. 2: Can learners retain their speaking ability when communicative role play is used?

The retention test result illustrated that there was a significant difference between the means of the posttest and the retention test ($P < .001$), though it was only a slight decrease. With no further

language use in non-host language environment or EFL context, learners tend to gradually lose their learned knowledge.

Research question no. 3: What are the learners' perceptions toward the use of communicative role play?

The learners were given a questionnaire after they completed all the lessons. The mean score from all the questions was 3.70 (with 5 being the highest possible score) and the standard deviation was 0.71. This outcome can be interpreted that these grade nine learners had positive perceptions toward the use of communicative role play. The result with the highest mean score was about role play making them enjoy English speaking ($\bar{X} = 4.08$). The result with the lowest mean score was for shyness still occurring when participating in role play ($\bar{X} = 3.11$). That is, role play made the learners enjoy speaking English, but did not do as much to alleviate their shyness. Confidence was boosted even though shyness still occurred.

Conclusions

This study focused on the improvement of English speaking ability through communicative role play for grade nine learners. It also concerned the learning retention following the application of communicative role play. Finally it examined the learners' perceptions toward the use of communicative role play. The results from all three



objectives confirmed that communicative role play is an effective tool for improving learners' speaking ability. These grade nine learners were satisfied with this kind of teaching. They enjoyed learning with role play. They clearly improved their speaking ability through the implementation of communicative role play. The learning retention of these learners decreased on account of several factors: the context of English as a foreign language, L1 or mother tongue influence, and forgetting. The learners had positive perceptions about communicative role play as well. Thus, it is worthwhile teaching English using communicative role play.

Discussions

This part discusses the results of the study along with the related research reviewed. The discussions are based on the improvement of learners' speaking ability through communicative role play, their learning retention, and their perceptions toward the role play activities.

1. The results obtained indicate that using communicative role play can help learners learn to use the eight language functions as mentioned previously. This finding was in agreement with the studies from several authorities (Magos & Politi, 2008; Intaraphol, 2006; Alwahibee, 2004; Burudpakdee, 2004; Ketbantoeng, 1998; Krisanalom, 1998). They discovered that the implementation of role play influenced learners to improve speaking abilities. Communicative role play not only brought about the improvement in speaking ability but also the enjoyment in learning. Many authorities, such as Tauber and Mester (2007), believe role play is a vivid and enriching instructional tool which is valuable in enhancing the learning experience. The result of the present study supports this belief. Additionally, self-confidence can be increased by

using role play (Tauber and Mester, 2007). The learners in this study not only improved their speaking skill through communicative role play, but also became more confident in their communication skills. Communicative role play gives the feeling of reality in the classroom because it uses situations learners might expect to face in the outside world. The learners have the opportunity to practice English in various kinds of situations (Livingstone, 1983). Communicative role play can help the learners apply their knowledge of grammar, expressions, and vocabulary in real communication. This helps solve the same old problem of learners having knowledge about a language but an inability to communicate effectively.

2. As for learning retention, the results revealed that two weeks after the posttest the learners were not able to fully make use of what they had learned previously. That is, the learning retention of grade nine learners slightly decreased. This study showed a similar result to the learning retention study conducted by Chiramane (2006) in which the learning retention of the experimental group significantly decreased. This revealed that the learners had less chance to practice when they went back to their normal class. In the same manner, the study conducted by Terad, Pornsima, and Sripairoj (2008) exhibited that learning retention of English structure by both the experimental and control groups decreased. Forgetting can be a significant obstruction to language retention.

One main factor that obviously creates a decrease in learning retention of speaking skill is the EFL context. Thailand, where English is rarely spoken, seems to not be a convenient place to find opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom. In other words, Thai learners have less abundant opportunities to use real language



in daily lives; as a result, the learners' learning retention decreases.

The second main factor is that L1 influence or mother tongue influence has a significant impact on the use of the target language. The structure of English is not the same as the structure of Thai. To state just a few of the many examples, the Thai language does not use articles, does not have plurals, and does not conjugate verbs. Some grade nine learners forgot to add articles and plural markers. Additionally, the learners showed a strong influence of their L1 (Thai) in word choice.

The last factor that decreases learning retention is forgetting. Forgetting occurs with everyone. People trying to memorize words will surely remember some. Nonetheless, information may be lost soon after memorization (Coon & Mitterer, 2008). Forgetting is associated with retrieval failure theory. Ormrod (2006: 214) states: "One reason we forget is an inability to retrieve." Likewise, Cardwell et al. (2003: 24) says: "Forgetting occurs because the correct retrieval cues are not available. We are all familiar with the feeling that we know something, but just cannot bring it to mind." To put in another way, people still have knowledge in long-term memory, but they sometimes cannot access it.

All in all, these factors can be regarded as crucial constituents that affect learning retention of speaking in Thailand.

3. The results from the questionnaire data illustrate that the application of role play brought about positive results. That is, the learners' English ability improved and they were satisfied with this kind of teaching. The average level of the questionnaire responses after comparing with the

assessment criteria was "good" (3.70). This finding was consistent with the study of many authorities (Magos & Politi, 2008; Intaraphol, 2006; Alwahibee, 2004; Burudpakdee, 2004; Ketbantoeng, 1998; Krisanalom, 1998). They found that the learners had positive perceptions about participating in role play. The present study used role play to stimulate learners to concentrate on language learning. Role play is associated with intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation contributes to people overcoming a learning difficulty (Raffani, 1996). Hamilton and Ghatala (1994) explain that learners activated by intrinsic motivation are willing to participate in an activity to show that they can dominate the circumstance. In short, it appears that motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, is an essential element to lead learners to increase their knowledge in English. The grade nine learners were motivated to study because they enjoyed it.

Recommendations

1. Further research about the use of communicative role play to improve English speaking should focus on teaching approaches which contribute to language skills entering long-term memory and/or help learners transfer their knowledge from short-term memory to long-term memory.

2. Further research about the use of communicative role play to improve English speaking should be done regarding strategic competence strategies (such as non-verbal behaviors) to use when communication breakdown occurs.

Acknowledgement

This study was financially supported by the Graduate School, Khon Kaen University in 2009.



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