



## EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE-PLAYING METHODS IN DEVELOPING EFL FRESHMEN'S ENGLISH-SPEAKING ABILITY AT CAN THO COLLEGE, VIETNAM

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### **Abstract:**

Nowadays, the application of role-play in teaching language has widely been used in Vietnam and the world. This study aims to find out the impact of role-play on learners' speaking performance. Participants were 81 English major students in their first year at Can Tho College. This empirical study followed a two-group pre-test and post-test design. Two instruments used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data were the questionnaire and speaking tests. Results show that there is a significant difference in speakers' speaking performance between the two groups. Speakers in the experimental group outperformed the controlled group in speaking tests.

**Keywords:** EFL students, role-play, speaking ability, Can Tho College

### **1. Introduction**

The teaching content of lecturers cannot only be knowledge, but through it, it forms in students the ability to acquire and process information to solve diverse situations in cognition and life activities. It is the teaching method by organizing the teaching process with the lecturer's activities is one of the students' self-study activities. Notifying and providing available information is no longer the main function of the lecturer, but instead, the main function is to create operational situations so that when implemented, students will have a change both in knowledge and thinking operations are tools to acquire that knowledge.

Krebt (2017) believes that using role-playing in teaching is to help learners participate in simulated social situations to illustrate real-life roles and contexts. Regarding psychological aspects, Maier (2002) and Rao & Stupans (2012) observe that role-playing facilitated learning has been shown to be effective in achieving results in three main areas of learning: emotions, cognition, and behavior.

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In the general context, English teaching at colleges and universities in Can Tho City, the Mekong Delta regions, South of Vietnam, still has some problems stemming from the uneven quality of English input, and some students are still timid, not actively participating in learning. Some students are aware of the importance of English in their future jobs, but some learn to cope and study to pass the subject. Therefore, the mission of colleges and universities is to teach students how to learn with the ideal goal of education is to create the ability to learn and teach how to learn, not what to teach.

The implementation of innovative teaching methods needs to be carried out in the direction of pedagogical integration, whose core idea is to develop capacity, meaning knowing how to use content and adaptive response skills in different situations. meaningful variety of situations. Being aware of the above issues, the author chose the research topic "Effectiveness of Role-Playing Methods in Developing EFL Freshmen's English-Speaking Ability at Can Tho College" to find out an effective method for learning English-speaking skills and practical experiences while using this method in teaching and learning English in the classroom.

## 2. Literature review

Shankar et al. (2012) believe that role-playing when learning a language is essential because perhaps we are all actors when we speak a foreign language. Learning to role-play makes learners accustomed to expressing what they want to say in front of others. Therefore, role play is a popular strategy to help learners get acquainted with new social environments. The authors also point out that "*role playing in the early stages of learning a foreign language also makes learners familiar with many situations that they may encounter in the future.*" Krebt (2017) believes that role-playing is participating in simulated social situations to illustrate roles and contexts oriented to real life. And about the psychological aspect Maier (2002); Rao & Stupans (2012) commented that role-playing is an approach to facilitating learning that has been shown to be effective in achieving learning outcomes in three key learning areas: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. consciousness and behavior.

After ten weeks of conducting research to learn about the effectiveness of role-playing activities, Graves (2008) concluded that role-playing is truly beneficial and should be used in the classroom. Graves also believes that applying role-playing to the classroom brings faster results than traditional learning. Another study conducted by Citraningtyas & Purnawan (2016) showed that after three times of applying role-playing activities to the English-speaking classroom, they believed that students' speaking skills improved significantly, and the students, who also appeared to be creative, focused, and interested in speaking activities.

However, studies also note some psychological barriers that some learners may encounter when applying role-playing methods. According to Mustapha et al. (2010) research, learners' fear or anxiety is related to factors such as poor grasp of the target language (English), lack of practice, and feeling insecure when practicing a language. The

above study also noted that anxiety is one of the factors that reduce target language acquisition in learners.

Russell & Shepherd (2010) suggest that teachers need to apply simulations of preparatory activities that need to be done before role-playing to overcome learners' psychological insecurity. Role-playing is an activity that helps learners overcome feelings of nervousness and anxiety when practicing language, especially low-level learners. Role-playing helps learners speak expressively in a certain situation and thus makes them more aware of stress and intonation in speech.

In recent years in Vietnam, the trend of teaching innovation in the direction of developing skills for learners to handle problems that arise in life and work rather than providing knowledge is becoming increasingly popular. In that context, the role-playing method has shown many advantages and positivity in teaching, and is also being applied to teaching in many different subjects in educational institutions. Therefore, many studies have been carried out to analyze and learn the advantages of using role-playing methods in teaching.

A study on the evaluation of first-year English majors on the role-playing method was conducted at Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT) (Vu Tram Anh, 2019). Instructors apply role-playing activities in speaking skills class. Role-playing in research is conducted according to real situations that occur in everyday life based on the topics learned in the program. The action research method was used and the results obtained from two classroom observations as well as two questionnaire surveys showed that nearly half of the students in the class did not agree with the application of the input methods; this is in contrast to most of the classes that the research author has taught. Also, from the results obtained from the research, the main reason why a large number of students do not want to participate in role-playing activities is due to the lack of balance in student levels.

Tran Thi Tuye Oanh (2017) studied the case at Ho Chi Minh City University of Literature on techniques for students to role-play in English class. Research results show that students became more interested and confident after a seven-week internship through role-playing activities, and their speaking skills also improved. Nguyen Thi Tan (2017) said that role-playing helped students act naturally in real situations and gradually they overcame the barrier of speaking English.

Another study on role-playing applications to guide the practice of practical English content in the English communication module was conducted at Ho Chi Minh City Personnel Academy (Nguyen Thi Loc Uyen, 2021). Students are guided to practice communicative English modules 1, 2, 3, 4 with the English File textbook, version 3 of Oxford Publishing. The English File textbook and the textbook's website have provided an extremely favorable foundation for applying role-playing as an active teaching and learning activity, bringing an interesting learning experience to students in English. Practical English content. Research results show that when participating in role-playing activities, students are exposed to language placed in meaningful situations (such as asking for directions and giving directions), so students practice purposefully with a

proactive mindset. According to research, the application of role-playing to guide the practice of practical English content helps students have the opportunity to cooperate, work in groups, and reveal language skills through practicing using language in real situations.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1 Research objectives**

The study attempted to find out the effectiveness of using role-playing methods in developing first-year students' English-speaking ability and increasing students' interest in learning.

#### **3.2. Research questions**

The study tried to answer the following questions:

To what extent does the effectiveness of role-playing methods in developing EFL freshmen's English-speaking ability at Can Tho College?

#### **3.3 Participants**

The 81 students (first-year or freshmen) were randomly divided into two classes by the school and the author randomly selected one class as the experimental group and one class as the control group. The independent group design was chosen to research the topic because it is suitable for experimental time and two different groups receiving different impacts operate independently. Both control and experimental groups were given pre-and post-tests. After the experimental teaching process, the scores between the two tests will be compared to prove whether the applied experimental activity was effective or not.

#### **3.4 Research instruments**

This research includes three tools as follows:

- 1) a survey of students' opinions on their English abilities and the use of role-playing methods in class by lecturers;
- 2) pre-test and post-tests;
- 3) interviews with students about the role-playing methods they joined.

##### **3.4.1. Research procedures with role-play methods**

This study was carried out at Can Tho College during 16 weeks of the 2022-2023 school year. The pre-test was conducted at the beginning of semester II and the post-test was conducted near the end of the semester. The research process includes experimental teaching, measurement, and data collection (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1:** Research procedures with role-play methods

| Time        | Research activities                     | Groups   |
|-------------|---|--|
| Week 1      | - Survey of teachers' opinions          |  |
| Weeks later | - Pre-test<br>- Teaching experiments    | - 2 groups, control and experimental<br>- Experimental group |
| Last week   | - Post-test<br>- Student opinion survey | - 2 groups, control and experimental<br>- Experimental group |

### 3.4.2 Before the experiment: it was designing and consulting with experts about surveys and pre- and post-impact tests

#### A. Designing pre-and post-tests

The method of using equivalent question forms is applied to design pre- and post-tests. The test is designed based on the Level 2 speaking specification of the 6-level foreign language competency framework for Vietnam (Issued together with Circular No. 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT dated January 24, 2014 of the Vietnamese Minister Ministry of Education and Training).

Specifically, for Level 2 speaking level, English learners can maintain quite fluently simple descriptions of an object of interest by listing ideas, participating in a conversation, expressing opinions, and pointing to familiar topics and research fields. In particular, learners can accurately use commonly used simple sentence forms in familiar situations, use vocabulary from familiar topics and a few unfamiliar topics to express and present opinions with clear and understandable sounds despite mistakes, and with effort to emphasize words despite many mistakes. Learners can also use simple phrases and sentences to speak at length using simple connecting words.

#### B. Marking systems

Both pre- and post-tests are intended to test the English-speaking skills of students in both the control and experimental groups, so the criterion-referenced measures of skills are used with assessment criteria adapted from the oral test document accompanying the book *Let's talk 1* by Metre (2012) as follows: (1) communication; (2) interaction; (3) fluency; (4) accuracy; and (5) pronunciation.

There are a total of 8 questions designed for the pre- and post-tests. All of these questions are similar in form, content, difficulty, and response time. After students answer the question, the lecturer can ask them some additional questions related to the question they just presented. The content of the questions in the test has the same topic as the lessons in the *Let's talk 1* and *Q: Skills for Success 1* textbooks. (Sarah Lynn, Jaimie Scanlon, Meg Brooks, Jenni Currie Santamaria, and Lawrence Lawson, Oxford University Press, 2000)

#### C. Test procedures

For both the pre-test and post-tests, students worked independently while being tested. Each student chose 1 question out of 8 questions in the test. Students had about 5 minutes to prepare their presentation. Next was the lecturer's question-asking session for the

students. Students listened to the lecturer's questions and answers. Testing time for each student was 5-8 minutes.

#### **D. Marking criteria**

The scoring methods for both the pre- and post-tests were exactly the same. Students were evaluated by instructors on their English-speaking ability based on 5 criteria: communication, interaction, fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Each criterion was scored from 0 to 2 depending on the speaking ability of each student and the final score were combined by the lecturer from the above 5 criteria. For this scoring method, students had a maximum score of 10 points.

#### **3.4.3 Experimental procedures**

It is using role-playing method in teaching English-speaking and comparing oral test results with the control group to determine the effectiveness in developing students' English-speaking skills.

#### **3.4.4 Post experimental procedures**

##### **A. The results of the post-test**

In the week near the end of semester 2, post-tests for both control and experimental groups were conducted. The purpose of this test was to verify whether students' English-speaking ability increases after studying with the role-playing method.

##### **B. Results of student interviews about the effectiveness of role-playing methods**

Silverman (2005) points out that using qualitative research methods actively supports providing knowledge about the researched problem in depth, especially issues in the social field. However, due to time and scope limitations, this topic only focuses on interviewing a group of students (n=6) studying Intermediate Communication Skills 1 Course with role-playing method at Can Tho College, Can Tho City.

After being designed, the interview questions received comments from two experts to ensure the questionnaire was clear, easy to understand, met the research objectives of the topic and focused on the research problem.

Six interviews were conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews. In order to create convenience and comfort for students participating in interviews, Vietnamese language was used. To ensure the confidentiality of research participants, pseudonyms were established for 06 students. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using the thematic analysis method (Charmaz, 2004). Specifically, the data are classified into three topic groups: (1) The impact of role-playing on improving English communication ability; (2) The impact of role-playing on creating opportunities for authentic and intentional communication; and (3) The impact of role-playing on developing confidence and teamwork ability while speaking English.

## 4. Findings and discussion

### 4.1 Experimental results – analysis and evaluation

#### 4.1.1 Pre and post-test results

The purpose of these two tests is to verify whether students' English-speaking ability has increased or not after learning with the role-playing methods. First, the Independent-Samples *t*-Test calculation was used to verify whether the speaking ability of students in both the control and experimental groups was equivalent before using the role-playing method to teach the experimental group. After that, the Paired-Samples *t*- Test was used to continue to verify whether the English-speaking ability of students in the experimental group was higher than that of students in the control group. In addition, the author also tested the development of English-speaking ability of each group from pre and post-tests.

#### 4.1.2 Results of the pre-test of the two experimental and control groups

To verify the difference between the average scores of the two control and experimental groups from pre-test, the Descriptive Statistics test is used. The analysis results are shown in Table 4.1 as follows:

**Table 4.1:** Descriptive statistics of the mean values of the two groups from pre-test

|                    | N  | Min  | Max  | Mean | SD   |
|--------------------|----|------|------|------|------|
| Control Group      | 43 | 5.00 | 9.00 | 7.13 | .989 |
| Experimental Group | 38 | 4.00 | 9.00 | 7.28 | 1.01 |

Results from Table 4.1 show that the average value of the experimental group ( $M = 7.28$ ) is higher than the control group ( $M = 7.13$ ). The lowest average value of the two groups is different, the experimental group only has a value of 4.00 while the control group has a value of 5.00. In addition, there was no difference between the highest mean value of the two groups with a mean value of 9.00. The standard deviation of the experimental group ( $SD = 1.01$ ) was higher than that of the control group ( $SD = .989$ ).

The Independent-Samples *t*-Test was used to once again verify whether the English-speaking ability of students in both the control and experimental groups was equivalent from pre-test. The results of this calculation are shown in Table 4.2:

**Table 4.2:** Independent *t*-Test of two groups from pre-test

|                    | t    | Sig. (2-tailed) | SD   | Std. Error Difference |
|--------------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------------------|
| Control Group      | 1.82 | .061            | .215 | .069                  |
| Experimental Group | 1.82 | .061            | .188 | .069                  |

Results from Table 4.2 show that there was no significant difference in the English-speaking ability of the two groups before the lecturer used the role-playing method ( $p = .061 > 0.05$ ). From there, it is concluded that the two groups are considered equivalent in English speaking ability.

### 4.1.3 Results of the post-test of the two experimental and control groups

To verify the difference in the mean value of the two groups after the tests Descriptive Statistics test is first used. The results are shown in Table 4.3 as follows:

**Table 4.3:** Descriptive statistics of the mean values of the two groups from post-test

|                    | N  | Min  | Max  | Mean | SD   |
|--------------------|----|------|------|------|------|
| Control Group      | 43 | 5.00 | 9.00 | 7.37 | 1.23 |
| Experimental Group | 38 | 5.00 | 9.00 | 8.36 | .997 |

The results from Table 4.3 show that the mean values of the two groups increased, but the growth of the two groups was different. After the experimental teaching process, the average value of the experimental group ( $M = 8.36$ ) was higher than the control group ( $M = 7.37$ ). The lowest average value of the control group and experimental group is 5.00. Similarly, there was no difference between the highest mean value of the two groups with a mean value of 9.00. The standard deviation of the control group ( $SD = 1.23$ ) was higher than that of the experimental group ( $SD = .997$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that using the role-playing method was effective.

To confirm the above results, the Independent-Samples *t*-Test continues to be performed. Table 4.4 presents the results of this calculation as follows:

**Table 4.4:** Independent t-test of two groups after impact

|                    | t     | Sig. (2-tailed) | SD   | Std. Error Difference |
|--------------------|-------|-----------------|------|-----------------------|
| Control Group      | -3.52 | .001            | .219 | -.057                 |
| Experimental Group | -4.86 | .001            | .178 | .057                  |

As proven from the above tests, the English-speaking results of the two groups from pre-tests were equivalent. After the tests, checking the difference in the mean value of the two groups gave *t*-Test results ( $p = .001$ ). This means that the difference in average scores between the experimental and control groups is very meaningful, that is, the difference between the average value of the experimental group and the average value of the control group is not random. However, it is due to the impact of using role-playing methods.

In summary, the results from the tests show that the influence of using role-playing methods on the learning outcomes of the experimental group is large. So, the objectives of the topic "Effectiveness of role-playing methods in developing EFL freshmen's English-speaking ability at Can Tho College" has been verified.

### 4.1.4 Test results of each group

Finally, the Paired-Samples *t*-Test was used to verify whether there was any difference in the average value of the pre- and post- tests of each group.

The results are shown in Table 4.5 below.



**Table 4.5:** Independent t-test of two groups from pre-and post-tests

| Group              | Test      | N  | M    | MD    | t     | df | Sig.<br>(2 tailed) |
|--------------------|-----------|----|------|-------|-------|----|--------------------|
| Control Group      | Pre-test  | 43 | 7.13 | -.135 | -3,52 | 42 | .000               |
|                    | Post-test |    | 7.37 |       |       |    |                    |
| Experimental Group | Pre-test  | 38 | 7.28 | -.260 | -4.86 | 37 | .000               |
|                    | Post-test |    | 8.36 |       |       |    |                    |

Results from Table 4.5 showed that there was a change in English-speaking ability in the control group with an average value of  $M = 7.13$  for the pre-test and an average value of  $M = 7.37$  for the post-test. The standard mean difference ( $MD = -.135$ ) of the two tests is not statistically significant ( $t = -3.521$ ,  $df = 42$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is not much development in the English-speaking ability of students in the control group from pre-and post-tests.

However, the average values of the two tests of the experimental group were different. The speaking ability of the experimental group from post-test ( $M = 8.3684$ ) increased significantly compared to that from pre-test ( $M = 7.28$ ). The above results also show that the difference between the two average values of the two pre- and post-tests of the experimental group ( $MD = -.260$ ) is very statistically significant ( $t = -4.86$ ,  $df = 37$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In other words, the experimental group had a significant improvement in their English-speaking ability after being influenced by the lecturer's use of the role-playing method.

## 4.2 Findings from student interviews

Regarding the positive effects of role-playing methods that students perceive, research results show that role-playing methods bring many valuable benefits to students.

### 4.2.1. Role-playing method helps students improve their English communication skills

The results showed that all students ( $n = 6$ ) thought that the role-playing methods helped them enhance their communication skills. To illustrate this result, a student shared:

*"This is a very useful learning activity, helping me improve my ability to communicate and handle situations flexibly."* (Student 3)

Sharing the same opinion, some other students voiced,

*"Role-playing activities help me improve my English-speaking and communication skills. When I practice, I can speak English longer, use more connecting words and use less "um", "ah" hesitation when communicating more realistically."* (Student 4)

*"I'm very happy, remember the lesson right in class, the teacher can correct grammar and pronunciation errors for me."* (Student 2).

Similarly, Student 6 said:

*"Role-playing activities help me practice and remember some words after studying",  
"Role-playing is very interesting, helps me improve my communication skills and use  
English effectively".*

#### **4.2.2 Role-playing method helps students have the opportunity to communicate truly and purposefully**

The research results also show that the majority of students think that the role-playing method creates many communication situations for students.

*"I understand lessons better through role-playing situations. At the same time, it helps me be more proactive in many situations when handling",*

and

*"Role-playing helps me have a practice environment" (Student 1)*

The role-playing method is said to facilitate students' purposeful communication and can improve specialized foreign language skills. Student 3 said:

*"This method can be practically immersive, helping to better understand real-life situations."*

These results are also consistent with the study of Mustapha et al. (2010). In addition, Students 2 and 3 also mentioned other advantages such as:

*"This task helps improve English pronunciation."*

*"It helps increase the effectiveness of the lesson, increase my vocabulary, corrects pronunciation in English, train pronunciation and processing skills in situational management."*

*"And it helps students improve their English, make the class exciting, and increase communication skills".*

#### **4.2.3 Role-playing method helps students develop confidence and improve teamwork ability**

The results also show that students are more confident when learning with role-playing activities. From students' ideas, they admit that when role-playing with friends, they receive feedback from their friends and have more fun, and this helps them to be less shy and timid.

*"It can help me practice speaking, improve speaking skills, and be more confident."*  
(Student 1)

The role-playing method is also considered an effective catalyst to help bond group members together. To illustrate, Student 4 stated:

*"This activity is very good and helpful, helping each other study together. The teacher guided me carefully, helping me have a better learning spirit, "and "it also helps me practice speaking English and working in groups", and "it supports me a lot in studying: increasing communication ability, increasing confidence, increasing the ability to speak English and help me have self-awareness when working in groups."*

In fact, role-playing methods can be integrated into lessons to create diversity, fun, and many opportunities to practice language. Forming habits and skills of cooperation and teamwork through close coordination of individuals with groups and the collective. Thereby, creating opportunities for individuals to learn and evaluate each other, thereby being able to draw lessons for themselves.

### **4.3 Discussion**

The results of pre- and post-tests of students in both control and experimental groups and student interviews are similar to the views of researchers on role-playing methods such as Rao & Stupans (2012), and Harmer (2012). Role-playing creates a richer variety of situations and speech acts than typical classroom activities. In addition, role-playing allows learning about cultural aspects associated with the language and creates excitement for learners. By assigning roles, all learners are guaranteed to participate in learning activities and have the opportunity to practice speaking. This method contributes to training boldness and confidence when standing in front of groups and crowds. The above results show that the role-playing method is suitable for supporting the foreign language learning program at Can Tho College, especially the role-playing method is suitable for cultivating students' English-speaking skills and is effective in developing students' speaking ability.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

The research has shown that using role-playing methods in teaching the subject "Intermediate Communication Skills Course One" in Can Tho College's curriculum is an appropriate and effective method to train communication skills for EFL students. In order to use the role-playing method to be truly effective, lecturers need to focus on researching and building role-playing situations suitable to their knowledge so that the role-playing method is most effective. Also, the role-playing method in teaching needs to be carried out according to the correct process, including determining training goals, determining

content and topics, building situations, organizing role-playing, discussion, and conclusion later. Role-playing and drawing lessons to achieve the highest efficiency. Research results have shown that, firstly, the role-playing method is effective in developing students' English-speaking abilities. And, secondly, the role-playing method increases students' interest in learning English in the hope of improving other English Skills-Listening, Reading, and Writing besides English Speaking through role-play tasks in the study.

### **5.2 Pedagogical implications**

In the current context of foreign language learning and teaching in Vietnam, especially English, building a positive learning environment outside the classroom for learners to use foreign languages in real-life situations is attracting the attention of educational managers, teachers, students, and the social community. A positive learning environment through real-life situations not only creates conditions for learners to practice language practice skills, and apply learned knowledge to real life, but also helps learners gradually improve their confident, active skills in learning and using foreign languages, especially English. This is a factor that greatly affects the level of proficiency and fluency in foreign language communication of learners. In addition, a positive learning environment through real-life situations also contributes to creating learners' learning styles and learning strategies to accelerate efficiency and quality not only in foreign language teaching and learning but also in teaching and learning. The use of language in all aspects and areas of life, helping learners express their own abilities and passions, thereby raising awareness and positive learning attitudes towards learning spoken foreign languages in general and English in particular.

Starting from the position, the role and importance of foreign language teaching in the spirit of Vietnam's 2020 Foreign Language Project, the topic "Effectiveness of role-playing methods in developing EFL freshmen's English-speaking ability at Can Tho College" is one of the efforts to build a learning environment and use foreign languages, creating conditions for the school, lecturers and students more conveniently when organizing English learning activities in class. With the purpose of helping lecturers organize integration activities with the spirit of innovation in foreign language education, making the implementation of activities convenient, flexible, creative, and suitable to the actual situation of the school, using role-playing method in teaching English is a differentiator, creating attractiveness and effectiveness, contributing to improving the quality of English teaching and learning at Can Tho College, Can Tho City, Vietnam.

### **5.3 Limitations and Recommendations**

Although the topic has achieved the research goals and objectives, there are still some limitations due to objective impacts, such as the research was only conducted with two English classes, so the sample size was not large. Therefore, the research author has some suggestions as follows: (1) This topic needs to be studied on a larger scale, more research time with a higher number of samples; (2) Role-playing method has also been

implemented by some schools in Can Tho City in English subjects in the curriculum, thus there is also a need for a study on this method for teaching some more English subjects Can Tho College.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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