



THE EFFECTS OF ROLE-PLAY GAMES ON YOUNG LEARNERS' GRAMMAR LEARNING: A CASE STUDY AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN VIETNAM

Thuy Thu Thi Du,
Huan Buu Nguyenⁱ
Can Tho University,
Vietnam

Abstract:

Research into the effects of role-play games has indicated their role in facilitating young learners' grammar learning. However, an intriguing concern is how to implement this method of teaching English grammar within the Vietnamese context. Little research has examined the effects of integrating role-play games into grammar lessons and explored learners' perceptions of this instructional approach in Vietnam. The current study therefore aims at investigating this area of interest. A quasi-experimental design was employed to explore the effects of role-play games on young learners' grammar learning. The participants were 72 fifth-graders from a public primary school in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Data collected in this study include pre-and post-tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative analysis reveals that young learners in the treatment group made progress in their grammar learning compared with those in the control group. The findings reveal that role-play games influenced young learners' grammar learning and these learners perceived the effects of role-play games on their grammar learning. Pedagogical implications for teachers and school administrators are made.

Keywords: role-play games, young learners, grammar learning

1. Introduction

Several studies have highlighted the significance of role-play in language teaching, emphasizing that it provides students with opportunities to interact and engage in learning within various real-life contexts (Bygate, 1987; Harmer, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2001). These authors provide insights into communicative language teaching and learner engagement, which supports the use of role-play as an effective learning tool.

ⁱ Correspondence: email nbhuan@ctu.edu.vn, nbhuan@gmail.com

In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has introduced the National Foreign Languages Project (VNFLP). This project places a strong demand on teachers to enhance the quality of foreign language education at all levels to meet the specific requirements of learners, especially in terms of their ability to communicate and interact in English (MoET, 2008). However, the predominant approach to instruction in Vietnam relies mainly on traditional lecture methods (Nguyen, 2013) or the memorization of information (Park, 2000) and thus, resulting in the inadequate development of grammar learning among students. One way to enhance students' grammar learning is the implementation of role-play games, helping students develop an understanding of grammar rules and raising their awareness of how grammar is applied in real-life situations (Grant & Mistry, 2010; Siska, 2017). However, using role-play games to facilitate grammar learning remains scarce in Vietnam primary school contexts. This research, therefore, aims to examine the effects of role-play games on young learners' grammar learning to fill the gap in this field.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- What are the effects of incorporating role-play games into young learners' grammar learning? and
- How do young learners perceive the use of role-play games in grammar lessons?

2. Literature review

The following section reviews the literature on the key concepts: grammar learning, young learners, role-play games, and their interplay relevant to this study.

2.1 Grammar learning

There are several perspectives on grammar learning in the literature. Cobbett (1984) asserts that grammar is associated with what makes words meaningful in sentences. Similarly, Ur (1996) defines grammar as the arrangement of words to create accurate sentences. This implies that grammar encompasses the rules that form meaningful units within a language (Ur, 1996). In addition, Thornbury (1999) defines grammar as a description of the rules for forming sentences, including an account of the meanings that these forms convey. In the same vein, Larsen-Freeman (2001) states that grammar is a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints. According to Richards and Schmidt (2014), grammar refers to the structure of a language and how words and phrases are combined to form sentences.

Harmer (2008) claims that teaching grammar to learners is essential as it enables them to move beyond producing language elements and use grammar to express functional language. By understanding how words are combined in a sentence, students can achieve the intended meaning (Harmer, 2001). According to Richards and Schmidt (2014), grammar is an important aspect of learning English as learners who do not have a good understanding of grammar may struggle to construct coherent sentences. Likewise, Larsen-Freeman (2001) emphasizes the significance of grammar in the field of

English teaching and learning. It is crucial to offer learners opportunities to practice grammar within authentic and real-life contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2001).

Taking these perspectives together, grammar plays a significant role in the process of assembling language units to create meaningful sentences.

2.2 Young learners

There are several definitions of the term 'young learners.' Scott and Ytreberg (1990) define young learners as children aged five to ten or eleven. While Phillips (1993) describes them as children between the ages of five or six to eleven or twelve, Reilly and Ward (1997) propose another viewpoint, stating that children who have not yet begun reading by the ages of three to six are classified as very young learners. The term 'young learner' is also defined as an individual between the ages of five and twelve (Cameron, 2001; McKay, 2006; Shin & Crandall, 2014). For the purposes of this study, young learners are defined as ones from the age of five up to nine years old.

2.2.1 Characteristics of young learners in language learning

Young learners between the ages of seven and twelve can develop an awareness of their learning process (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). They have the ability to follow a story, make predictions about its progression, and pose questions about the content (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Additionally, Reilly and Ward (1997) note that young learners in this age range can actively assume character roles. Young learners of this age group are known for their energetic and physically active nature, often being drawn to games and entertaining activities (Reilly & Ward, 1997). Therefore, teachers are encouraged to harness the dynamic energy of these learners when designing activities to facilitate effective learning (McKay, 2006; Shin & Crandall, 2014).

In addition, young learners in this age group possess shorter attention spans, sometimes as little as 10 to 15 minutes, and are easily distracted by their peers (McKay, 2006; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Shin & Crandall, 2014). Young learners enjoy communicating with others and have a strong interest in collaborating and engaging in games with their peers (McKay, 2006; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; Shin & Crandall, 2014). Shin and Crandall (2014) assert that it is essential for teachers to establish classroom activities that provide abundant opportunities for young learners to actively engage. Additionally, Shin and Crandall (2014) emphasize that these activities should be designed to reflect real-life communication scenarios and be appropriate for the learners' developmental stage.

2.3 Role-play games

Games provide learners with opportunities to use the language in real-life situations, bringing a connection between classroom learning and language use in the real world (Celce-Murcia, 1979). Langran and Purcell (1994) suggest that games can assist learners to use language in practical contexts, motivate them to practice independently and boost their confidence. Additionally, games can create an emotional experience for students,

eliciting feelings of joy, amusement, suspense, and excitement, which can enhance the learning environment (Langran & Purcell, 1994).

Role-play is defined by Cohen and colleagues (1989) as engagement in simulated social situations to communicate ideas that influence real-life interactions. Brown (2000) defines role-play as a process that involves assigning roles to one or more individuals in a group and providing them with a specific objective or purpose to achieve. Cook (2013) suggests that through role-play, students can practice tasks such as asking for directions or interacting with officials in a foreign language environment, thus preparing them for similar encounters they may encounter outside the classroom. In other words, role-play is considered one of the activities that enable students to practice the target language and engage in interactions with others (Blatner, 2009; Livingstone, 1983; Revathy & Ravindran, 2016; Ulas, 2008). As a matter of fact, role-play activities allow students to engage in real-world language use (Nguyen & Do, 2017).

2.4 Interplay between role-play games and grammar learning

Role-play offers learners the opportunity to apply their newly acquired language skills to real-life situations (Johnson & Morrow, 1982). These role plays create a setting that resembles normal communication conditions, allowing students to practice and develop their language learning (Johnson & Morrow, 1982). According to Omaggio (1986), situational role-plays offer valuable opportunities for genuine and authentic language exchanges. In line with this, Rivers (1989) highlights the significance of role-plays in language learning as they enable students to connect with language through authentic teaching materials. Doughty and Williams (1998) suggest that incorporating grammar instruction within communicative tasks provides an integrated approach where students can simultaneously focus on the form or structure of grammar, its meaning, and its function in practical language use.

Ladousse (2004) indicates that role-play serves as a valuable tool for fostering motivation in the classroom. In this case, role-play offers a relaxing and flexible environment that motivates students to engage in grammar learning. By assuming different roles and engaging in language practice for various purposes in realistic scenarios (Ladousse, 2004), this role-play activity can enhance students' awareness of appropriate language use beyond the classroom context.

Several studies have addressed the effects of role-play games on English language learning (Grant & Mistry, 2010; Seif, 2017; Siska, 2017; Tran, 2016).

A study conducted by Grant and Mistry (2010) explored the effectiveness of role-play activities in enhancing the learning experience of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in different contexts. Observations were used to examine the impact of role-play on EAL pupils, with results indicating that these activities can be highly beneficial. The results showed that role-play provided a relaxing environment for EAL students to practice grammar and vocabulary.

Seif (2017) investigated the comparative impacts of scripted and unscripted role-plays on the grammar achievement of intermediate female English as a Foreign Language

(EFL) learners. Sixty participants were selected from a larger group of 100 based on their performance on the Preliminary English Test (PET). Grammar pre-and post-tests were conducted to assess their grammar knowledge. The results indicated that using scripted role-plays was more effective in improving grammar achievement. Furthermore, a comparison of pretest and posttest performance demonstrates that using role-plays improved students' grammar achievement.

A mixed-method study was conducted by Tran (2016) to explore EFL students' and teachers' perspectives on the use of role-play in teaching English in the Vietnamese context. Quantitative data were collected from the questionnaires of 30 EFL teachers and 120 students at junior high schools, and qualitative data from the interviews with five teachers and seven students selected among the participants. The findings from the study show that the participating teachers strongly agreed that role-plays could benefit teaching English, as they provide students with effective means to practice grammar structures. The study suggested that future studies are needed to focus on other aspects of grammar through role-play activities.

Another study conducted by Siska (2017) examined the effectiveness of role-play as a communicative approach to grammar learning in EFL classrooms. The study employed a mixed-methods approach which involved 60 EFL learners. The findings revealed that role-play activities led to a deeper understanding of grammar rules and increased awareness of grammar usage in real-life contexts. The study emphasized the positive attitudes displayed by students during the grammar learning process using role-play. It provided implications for EFL instructors to integrate such activities for effective grammar instruction and language learning development.

While a plethora of research has explored the effects of using role-play in language teaching, little research has been carried out to examine the use of role-play games in grammar learning within the context of primary schools in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. This study, therefore, aims to uncover this area of interest in relation to young learners' grammar learning in the Vietnamese context where English is taught as a foreign language.

3. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was employed to investigate the effects of using role-play games on young learners' grammar learning. This approach was considered appropriate as it combines both quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting data (Fraenkel et al., 2012). While quantitative data allow for drawing general conclusions about the entire population, qualitative data offer a detailed comprehension of the initial quantitative data and complement the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2012).

Participants in this study were 72 fifth-graders from a public primary school in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The participant selection was based on convenience sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2012) as it allows for approaching participants accessible at schools within the local area and facilitates data analysis at the later stages.

The data collection for the study included pre-and post-tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The tests were developed based on the Matrix of English Testing Grade 5 which was designed and set by the Department of Education and Training experts. The items in the pre-test and post-test followed the curriculum of the Grade 5 English Textbook published by the Ministry of Education and Training. Participants in the experimental group had to complete 30 sessions within thirteen weeks of the semester with role-play games designed by the researcher and assessed by her supervisor.

Quantitative data in this study were collected using questionnaires to investigate young learners' perceptions of the use of role-playing games in grammar lessons. The questionnaire comprised two sections with thirty items, regardless of the first section related to participants' personal information (name, gender, age, and class). Section Two of the questionnaire including thirty items was categorized into three clusters, namely Young learners' perceptions of role-play games (Adapted from studies of Sobhani and Bagheri (2014) and Bendo and Erbas (2019)), learners' perceptions of the effect of role-play games on their grammar learning (adapted from studies of Sobhani and Bagheri (2014) and Bendo and Erbas (2019)), and learners' interest in role-play games (Adapted from studies of Bendo and Erbas (2019) and Jamaatthuddin and Or-Kan (2021)). The participants were asked to give their opinions on the statements based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), and 5 (Strongly agree). To complement the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants to obtain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of the use of role-play games in grammar learning.

To ensure the instruments' content validity and clarity, the questionnaire items and interview questions were submitted to the supervisor for evaluation. Subsequently, the pilot questionnaire and test were conducted to avoid ambiguity in the questions posed to the young learners participating in the study. This process aimed to enhance the reliability of the data collection (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The questionnaire administered to 20 young learners was found to have a Cronbach's alpha of .81, indicating a high level of reliability. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 20. The reliability of the test was .81, indicating that the internal reliability coefficient of the test was satisfactory. Regarding the interview data, they were transcribed and translated from Vietnamese to English. They were then examined and analyzed using thematic analysis, as noted by Boyatzis (1998).

4. Findings

4.1 Findings from the tests

A *Descriptive Statistics Test* was conducted to observe the test scores of the pre-and post-tests within the two groups. Then, an *Independent-Samples t-Test* was administered to check whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores of young

learners' learning between the two groups before and after the intervention. Finally, a *Paired Sample t-Test* was run to investigate whether young learners in each group made progress in grammar learning after the study.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistic of the two groups before and after the study

Conditions	Tests	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Control	Pre-	36	5.00	10.00	7.61	1.38
	Post-	36	6.00	10.00	8.53	.97
Experimental	Pre-	36	5.00	10.00	7.33	1.39
	Post-	36	5.00	10.00	8.94	1.33

Table 4.1 shows the pre-test mean scores of young learners' grammar learning of the control group ($M_{preCon} = 7.33$) and that of the experimental group ($M_{preEx} = 7.61$) before the study. These mean scores were observed to be at a high level on the ten-degree scale. The mean score of the post-test of the two groups ($M_{postCon} = 8.53$, $M_{postEx} = 8.94$) was higher compared with that of the pretest. This indicates that young learners' grammar learning in the two groups is different after the intervention.

Table 4.2: Independent Samples t-Test of the two groups before the study

Variable	Group	N	t	df	Mean	Sig. (2 tailed)	MD
Pretest	Control	36	.85	70	7.33	.398	-.28
	Experimental	36			7.61		

Table 4.2 shows the pretest mean scores of young learners' grammar learning between the control and experimental groups ($M_{preCon} = 7.33$, $M_{preEx} = 7.61$). The result reveals no difference between the participants of the two groups before the study as confirmed by the *Independent Samples t-Test* results ($t=.85$, $df=70$, $p=.398$). It can be concluded that young learners of the two groups started the study with a similar level of grammar learning.

Table 4.3: Independent Samples t-Test of the two groups after the study

Variable	Group	N	t	df	Mean	Sig. (2 tailed)	MD
Posttest	Control	36	1.52	70	8.53	.13	.42
	Experimental	36			8.94		

Table 4.3 shows a slight difference in mean scores between the control and experimental groups after the study. Specifically, the mean scores of grammar learning in the experimental group ($M_{postEx} = 8.94$) were higher than that of the participants in the control group ($M_{postCon} = 8.53$). However, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two study groups ($t= 1.52$, $df=70$, $p=.13$). Therefore, it can be inferred that the level of the two groups' grammar learning was almost the same after the study.

Table 4.4: Paired Sample t-Test (pre- and post-test)

Variable	Pretest	Posttest	The difference of pretest and posttest					
	Mean	Mean	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig
Control	7.33	8.53	36	-.92	1.86	-2.96	35	.005
Experimental	7.61	8.94	36	-1.19	.29	-4.09	35	.000

Table 4.4 indicates that there was a slight change in the mean scores of young learners' grammar learning in the control group before and after the study. The mean score of the posttest of the control group ($M_{postCon}=8.53$) was observed to be higher than that of the pretest ($M_{preCon}=7.33$). There was a statistical difference between the pretest and posttest scores ($t = -2.96, df= 35, p= .005$). It is observed that young learners' grammar learning in the control group has improved.

Table 4.4 shows that the mean scores of young learners' grammar learning in the experimental group after the study ($M_{postEx} = 8.94$) were higher than before the study ($M_{preEx} = 7.61$). In addition, a statistical difference in young learners' grammar learning was found between pre-and post-tests ($t= -4.09, df= 35, p= .000$). Thus, this result indicates that using role-play games influenced young learners' grammar learning.

4.2 Findings from the questionnaires

Section Two of the questionnaire with thirty items presents young learners' perceptions of the use of role-playing games in grammar learning. These items are divided into three clusters: young learners' perceptions of the use, its effectiveness, and their interests.

A *Descriptive Statistic test* was run to examine the mean score of young learners' perceptions of the use of role-play games in their L2 grammar. Table 4.5 shows the result of the test.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of young learners' perceptions of role play games

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Young learners' perceptions of the use of role-play games	36	3,1	4,3	3,81	,26

Table 4.5 shows that the overall mean score of young learners' perceptions of the use of role-play games in their grammar learning was at a high level ($M = 3.81, SD = .26$). A *One-Sample t-Test* was run to examine whether there was a difference between the mean score ($M = 3.81$) and the test value ($M=4.0$). Table 4.5 indicates that there was a difference ($t = -4.42, df = .35, p = .00$). Thus, it can be concluded that young learners perceived the use of role-play games in their grammar learning at a high level.

Table 4.6: One-Sample t-Test of young learners' perceptions

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Mean	-4,418	35	,000	-,18981	-,2770	-,1026

In Cluster One, eight items were presented to participants to obtain responses on their perceptions of role-play games in grammar learning. Table 4.7 indicates the results of young learners' responses to this cluster.

Table 4.7: Percentages of young learners' understanding of role-play in grammar learning

Items	SD & D		N		SA & A	
	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)
1. I think role-play games in class facilitate the grammar-learning process of the English language.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100
2. My teacher of English often organizes role-play games when teaching grammar in class.	31	86,2	4	11,1	1	2,8
3. I think the use of role-play games is time-consuming.	25	69,4	5	13,9	6	16,7
4. I think role-play games make lessons more interesting.	1	2,8	0	0.0	35	97,3
5. I think role-play games are simple to organize in the English classroom.	0	0.0	3	8,3	33	91,7
6. I am too shy to speak English in front of my classmates, even in role-play games sessions.	3	8,3	0	0	33	91,7
7. When we play role-play games, my classmates make a lot of noise.	0	0.0	3	8,3	33	91,7
8. I am not aware of the purposes of role-play games.	24	66,7	2	5,6	10	27,8

Note: SD & D = Strongly disagree & disagree; N = Neutral; SA & A = Strongly agree & agree

Table 4.7 shows that all of the learners (100%) agreed that role-play games in class facilitated the grammar learning process of the English language (n=36). Over 97% of the young learners (n=35) agreed that role-play games made lessons more interesting. Moreover, 91,7 % of the learners agreed that role-play games were simple to organize in the English classroom (n=33). However, 91,7 % of the learners (n=33) affirmed that they were too shy to speak English in front of their classmates, even in role-play games sessions. 91,7 % of the young learners (n=33) indicated that when they played role-play games, their classmates made a lot of noise. 31 of 36 young learners (86,2%) agreed that their teacher of English did not often organize role-play games when teaching grammar in their class. 69,4% of the learners (n=25) disagreed that playing role-play games was time-consuming. Almost two-thirds of the learners (66,7%) reported that they were aware of the purposes of role-play games (n=24).

Learners' perceptions of the effect of role-play games on their grammar learning are presented in Cluster Two (items 9-22), as shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Young learners' perceptions of the effect of role-play games

Items	SD & D		N		SA & A	
	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)
9. When my teacher used role-play games, I learned English grammar better.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100
10. I like to join role-play games just for fun not to learn English.	22	61,1	7	19,4	7	19,4
11. I like my teacher to use role-play games for practicing new English grammar points.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100

Thuy Thu Thi Du, Huan Buu Nguyen
 THE EFFECTS OF ROLE-PLAY GAMES ON YOUNG LEARNERS'
 GRAMMAR LEARNING: A CASE STUDY AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN VIETNAM

12. When I play role-play games, I can practice English grammar more.	0	0,0	0	0,0	36	100
13. When the teacher gives marks for the role-play games, I become more excited to play.	0	0,0	0	0,0	36	100
14. I like to play role-play games during the lessons, not at the end of that.	22	61,1	8	22,2	6	16,7
15. Sometimes a large number of young learners in my class face problems in practicing role-play games.	2	5,6	6	16,7	28	77,8
16. I prefer my teacher to conduct role-play games other than educational games in my class.	0	0,0	3	8,3	33	91,7
17. I like to play role-play games when I am tired and can not listen to the lessons.	3	8,3	0	0,0	33	91,7
18. Some scenarios in the role-play games are not practical enough for me to play.	24	66,7	3	8,3	9	25
19. Role-play games affect positively obtaining English grammar points.	3	8,3	0	0,0	33	91,7
20. I think role-play games are an effective English learning tool.	0	0,0	0	0,0	36	100
21. Grammar can be remembered more effectively through role-play games.	0	0,0	3	8,3	33	91,7
22. Using role-play games to teach grammar often makes me lose focus on the lesson.	32	88,9	3	8,3	1	2,8

Note: SD & D = Strongly disagree & disagree; N = Neutral; SA & A = Strongly agree & agree.

Table 4.8 indicates that all learners (100%) agreed that when their teacher used role-play games, they learned English grammar better. Likewise, 100 % of the learners (n=36) would like their teacher to use role-play games for practicing new English grammar points. 100 % is the percentage of learners who agreed that when they played role-play games, they could practice English grammar more. 100% of the learners agreed that they became more excited to play role-play games when the teacher gave them marks and all of them thought role-play games were an effective English learning tool. 33 young learners (91,7%) preferred their teacher to conduct role-play games other than educational games in their class. 91,7% is the percentage of the learners who agreed that they liked to play role-play games when they were tired and could not listen to the lessons (n=33). 91,7% of the learners agreed that role-play games affected positively obtaining English grammar and that they could remember grammar points more effectively through role-play games (n=33). While 88,9 % of the learners disagreed that using role-play games to teach grammar often made them lose focus on the lesson (n=32). 77,8% of the learners agreed that sometimes a large number of young learners in their class faced problems in practicing role-play games (n=28). Almost two-thirds of the young learners (66,7%) reported that some scenarios in the role-play games were practical enough for them to play (n=24). 61,1 % of the young learners disagreed that they joined role-play games just for fun not to learn English (n=22). 61,1% is the percentage of the young learners who liked to play role-play games during the lessons, not at the end of that.

In Cluster Three, eight items were presented to participants to obtain their responses on their interest in role-play games in grammar learning. Table 4.9 illustrates the results of young learners' responses to this cluster.

Table 4.9: Young learners' interest in role-play games

Items	SD & D		N		SA & A	
	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)
23. I think role-play games serve as a part of my English class.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100
24. I feel comfortable with the idea of employing role-play games as practicing English grammar tools.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100
25. I like my teacher to compare my performance in role-play games with the others.	3	8,3	0	0.0	33	91,7
26. I believe that after the experiment I will still implement role-play games in my current or future English grammar learning.	0	0.0	3	8,3	33	91,7
27. I enjoy role-play games because it is practical.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100
28. Role-play games are a useful way to keep me interested in learning English grammar.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100
29. I like my teacher to give us more time to play role-play games.	0	0.0	0	0.0	36	100
30. I do not like role-play games because they cannot help me learn anything more than I have already known.	27	75	5	13,9	4	11,1

Note: SD & D = Strongly disagree & disagree; N = Neutral; SA & A = Strongly agree & agree.

Table 4.9 indicates that all young learners (100%) agreed that role-play games served as a part of their English class and that they felt comfortable when practicing English grammar through role-play games (100%). 100% of the young learners (n=36) enjoyed role-play games because it was practical and agreed that role-play games were a useful way to keep them interested in learning English grammar. Also, all young learners would like the teacher to give them more time to play role-play games (100%). 91,7% of the young learners believed that after the experiment they would still implement role-play games in their current or future English grammar learning (n=33). Moreover, during practicing role-play games, 91,7% of the young learners preferred the teacher to compare their performance with the others (n=33). Only 13,9% (n=5) of the young learners asserted that they did not like role-play games because they could not help them learn anything more than they had already known.

4.3 Findings from the interviews

The interview data reveal participants' perceptions of the use of role-play games in grammar lessons. Five themes are identified as young learners' enjoyment, role-play effectiveness, challenges, suggestions, and interests in role-play games.

a. Young learners' perceptions in relation to enjoyment

When asked about their views of the role-play games implemented during the study, six interviewed young learners answered that they enjoyed learning grammar lessons through role-play games in the production stage because these games were fun and interesting. The two extracts below illustrate their views.

"I enjoy role-play games very much because it is very exciting and fun. For example, when playing a role of a waiter, I act like a real waiter and then take orders from the customers." (Interviewee 1, interview extract)

"I think role-play games are very strange and interesting for me. I like playing role-play games in the English lessons because the games were very exciting and fun. I really like learning and playing at the same time." (Interviewee 3, interview extract)

b. Young learners' perceptions in relation to role-play effectiveness

Five of the six participants reported that learning grammar structures using role-playing games created good opportunities for them to practice and revise the grammar points they had learned. The two extracts below are examples that illustrate their views:

"The games help me to learn structures better because I have a chance to repeat them many times." (Interviewee 2, interview extract)

"Playing games means studying the grammar points twice a lesson therefore, I can learn the new grammar points very fast and remember them longer." (Interviewee 6, interview extract)

c. Challenges in role-play games

The six participants reported challenges as time management, the adequacy of feedback from friends, and workload distribution among group members. Examples of these views are presented below.

"I do not have enough time to practice with my friends before going to the board and performing what we have prepared for the role-play games." (Interviewee 4, interview extract)

"It is fun to study in groups but sometimes I am lazy. I usually delay the assignment to another time, so my presentation is finished without much time investment." (Interviewee 5, interview extract)

"In my group, some were very active to play; there were still a few unenthusiastic members. They tried to pass the work to other members or depended on others' help." (Interviewee 6, interview extract)

d. Suggestions for role-play games in grammar learning

When asked about what young learners expected to make role-play games effective in their grammar lessons, they expected to have more time and workload division. For example:

"If possible, there should be about 15 to 20 minutes for role-play games in each lesson." (Interviewee 1, interview extract)

"I saw that which group has better young learners often won the game, so I would like the teacher to divide the group with the mixed-ability young learners." (Interviewee 4, interview extract)

5. Discussion

This section discusses the key findings of the study in relation to relevant studies to answer the two research questions.

5.1 The effects of using role-play games on young learners' grammar learning

Analysis from the tests reveal that role-play games had positive effects on young learners' grammar learning. Before the study, the initial level of grammar' learning in both groups was similar. After the study, the level of young learners between the two groups had a significant difference which supports the conclusion that the use of role-play games could facilitate young learners' grammar learning. The findings from this study align with those in previous studies (Seif, 2017; Siska, 2017). These authors found that role-play activities facilitated a deeper understanding of grammar rules and increased young learners' awareness of grammar usage in real-life situations. This role-play activity allows young learners to take on different roles and practice using language in realistic scenarios for different purposes (Siska, 2017). Through this activity, young learners can develop a deeper understanding of how language should be used appropriately outside the classroom (Tran, 2016). Moreover, implementing role-plays proved to be an effective method for enhancing young learners' grammar achievement (Seif, 2017). In the current study, the improvement in learners' grammar learning shown in the results of the tests advocates that role-play games facilitate grammar learning.

5.2 Young learners' perceptions of the use of role-play games in L2 grammar lessons

The findings from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews reveal that the participating young learners perceived the use of role-play games in grammar learning as beneficial. In particular, their interests in and preferences for the use of role-play games in grammar lessons were shown in the questionnaire and interview data. The finding shows that young learners enjoyed role-play games in grammar lessons because role-play games made the lessons more engaging and fun. These findings build on a study by Grant and Mistry (2010) who affirm that role-play provided a relaxing environment for young learners to practice grammar and vocabulary. The finding from the current study is in line with a study by Tran (2016) in which the study participants acknowledged that role-plays offer an effective means for young learners to practice grammar structures. Tran (2016)'s study emphasized the positive attitudes exhibited by young learners during the grammar learning process using role-play.

It is important to highlight that creating a stress-free learning environment could have a positive impact on reducing anxiety in English learning and fostering increased self-confidence among learners (Samimy & Rardin, 1994). This can be attributed to the fact that young learners were willing to express themselves and engaged in learning particularly in areas such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication. Piazzoli (2011) suggests that stepping into someone else's shoes helps language learners overcome their inhibitions when using the target language. Furthermore, when using English within the context of assigned activities, young learners are less likely to receive negative feedback from others since their language production is associated with the character they portray (Piazzoli, 2011).

6. Conclusions

The findings of this study provide insights into the effects of using role-play games on young learners' grammar learning and enhance their perceptions of this type of instruction. Furthermore, the participating young learners had positive perceptions of the use of role-play games in grammar lessons. Awareness of learners' needs and preferences towards role-play games may provide teachers with opportunities to improve their teaching practices and young learners' grammar learning.

The findings of this study have pedagogical implications for both teachers and administrators. To foster dynamic, interactive, and meaningful learning experiences, it is essential to integrate a variety of role plays that mirror real-life situations into the curriculum and instructional methods. This inclusion enables young learners to take greater responsibility for their grammar learning and English language use. Teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development workshops or training courses incorporating research on integrating role-play games into grammar learning. This will enable them to optimize young learner learning outcomes by adapting instructional strategies to align with the unique interests and needs of their young learners.

Young learners are encouraged to have frequent practice with role-play games that they find grammar learning encouraging and motivating. They need to be involved in a variety of learning activities through role-play games in relation to their real-life situations so that they feel motivated to learn in a more active and relaxing environment.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Thuy Thu Thi Du is a teacher of English at a foreign language center, Can Tho, Vietnam. She is currently an MA student at Can Tho University. Her research interests include grammar learning and teaching, young learners, and innovative teaching approaches.

Huan Buu Nguyen is Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam. His research interests include action research, teacher beliefs, teacher change, language learning, and ESP. He is now involved in writing teaching materials for ESP young learners at the university.

References

- Bendo, A., & Erbas, I. (2019). Teaching English through games. *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 5(3), 43-60.
- Blatner, A. (2009). *New approaches to role play in the communication classroom*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York: Longman
- Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking*. Oxford University Press.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Celce-Murcia, M., & McIntosh, L. (1979). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. New York: Ewburrry House.
- Cobbett, W. (1984). *A grammar of the English language in a series of letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (1989). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Cook, V. (2013). *Second language learning and language teaching*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Doughty, C., & Williams, J. (1998). Pedagogical choices in focus on form. *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition*, 3, 197-262.
- Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities.

- Grant, K., & Mistry, M. T. (2010). How does the use of role-play affect the learning of Year 4 children in a predominately EAL class? . *Education 3–13*, 38(2), 155-164.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). Harlow: Longman.
- Harmer, J. (2008). *How to teach English* (Vol. 62). Oxford University Press.
- Jamaatthuddin, N. M., & Or-Kan, S. (2021). An examination on the students' perceptions towards the effectiveness of using game-based learning in learning the English language for students in higher education. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(8), 1689– 1714.
- Johnson, K., & Morrow, K. (1982). *Communication in the classroom*. London: Longman
- Ladousse, G. P. (2004). *Role Play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Langran, J., & Purcell, S. (1994). *Language games and activity*. Great Britain: Bourney Press LTD.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2001). Teaching grammar. *Teaching English As A Second Or Foreign Language*, 3, 251-266.
- Livingstone, C. (1983). *Role play in language learning*. London: Longman.
- McKay, P. (2006). *Assessing young language learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MoET. (2008). *Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system from 2008 to 2020*. Hanoi, Vietnam.
- Nguyen, H. B. (2013). Beliefs about support for teacher change in English for Specific Purposes university classes. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics*, 19(2), 36-48.
- Nguyen, H. B., & Do, N. N. T. (2017). Students' attitudes towards drama-based role play in oral performance. *European Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 2(3), 30-48.
- Omaggio, A. C. (1986). *Teaching Language in Context. Proficiency-Orientated Instruction*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Park, C. C. (2000). Learning style preferences of Southeast Asian students. . *Urban Education*, 35(3), 245-268.
- Piazzoli, E. (2011). Process drama: The use of affective space to reduce language anxiety in the additional language learning classroom. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 16(4), 557-573.
- Phillips, S. (1993). *Young learners*. Bristol, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Reilly, V., & Ward, S. M. (1997). *Very young learners*. Oxford University Press.
- Revathy, M., & Ravindran, K. (2016). Enhancing Effective Speaking Skills through Role Play and Tongue Twisters. *Language in India*, 16(9).
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. W. (2014). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. Routledge.
- Rivers, W. M. (1989). *Communicating naturally in a second language. Theory and practice in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Samimy, K. K., & Rardin, J. P. (1994). Adult language learners' affective reactions to community language learning: A descriptive study. *Foreign Language Annals*, 27(3), 379-390.
- Scott, W., & Ytreberg, L. H. (1990). *Teaching English to children*. NY: Longman Inc.

- Seif, M. (2017). The comparative effect of unscripted and scripted role-play on EFL learners' grammar achievements. *International Journal of English and Education*, 6(1), 147-157.
- Shin, J. K., & Crandall, J. A. (2014). *Teaching young learners English: From theory to practice*. Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning.
- Siska, S. (2017). The consciousness of learning grammar communicatively through role play in EFL classroom. *Journal Polingua: Scientific Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Language Education*, 6(1), 1-7.
- Sobhani, M., & Bagheri, M. S. (2014). Attitudes toward the effectiveness of communicative and educational language games and fun activities in teaching and learning English. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(5), 1066-1072.
- Thornbury, S. (1999). *How to teach grammar*. Pearson Education Ltd.
- Tran, H. (2016). *EFL students' and teachers' perspectives on the use of role-play in teaching English in the Vietnamese context* [Doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University]. San Diego.
- Ulas, A. H. (2008). Effects of creative, educational drama activities on developing oral skills in primary school children. *American Journal of Applied Sciences*, 5(7), 876-880.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions, and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of English Language Teaching shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).