

Enhancing the Quality of Role Play Activities:

A Simple Step to Create a Lively Environment in the Classroom

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要 旨

近年 ESL/EFL の教室では、生徒のスピーキング能力を育成することを目的としたコミュニカティブ・ベース活動の一つとして、ロールプレイが広く実施されている。これらの活動は、日常生活で起こる状況をシミュレートすることに基づいて行われるものである。ロールプレイのようなコミュニカティブ・アクティビティに生き生きとしたより現実的な雰囲気を作り出し、その質を向上させる要因のひとつとして「感情」がある。言語において感情は本質的な部分であり、言語から切り離すことはできないものであり、ロールプレイの実践において感情を取り入れることで、より生き生きとした現実的な雰囲気が加えられ学習が促進されることが考えられる。本研究では、ロールプレイ活動において EFL 学習者に感情表現を促すことが、語彙の習得及び英語学習において影響を与え得る心理言語学的な要素 (Willingness to Communicate, self-confidence, self-efficacy) にどのような影響を与えるかをアンケート調査に基づいて調査¹する。

キーワード：ロールプレイアクティビティ, 第二言語としての英語/外国語としての英語, 英語教授法, 心理言語学, 自発的にコミュニケーションを行う意思, 自信, 自己効力感, モチベーション

1 Introduction

In these days, the role play activities are widely implemented in ESL/EFL classrooms as a one of the communicative-based activities aiming to foster students' speaking abilities based on the simulation of situations that might occur in our daily lives. According to Brown (2001), "role play minimally involves (a) giving a role to one or more members of a group and (b) assigning an objective or purpose that participants must accomplish" (p. 183).

The theoretical pros of this activity can be:
Role play is very important in teaching English because it gives students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. In addition, it also allows students to be creative and to put themselves in another person's place for a while (Dorathy and Mahalakshmi, 2011, p. 2).

Whereas these theoretical benefits of role play activities are considered to be effective for improving learners' speaking abilities in ESL/EFL classrooms, in reality, when they are actually implemented in classroom, creating an ideal environment for having role plays can be challenging for both teachers and learners, especially for those students who have lower self-confidence and self-esteem in their English proficiency. In that case, teachers will be required to simplify the tasks for role plays. However, the quality of role plays would be limited by the simplification of the tasks and contents to be taught to those learners, which might result in as less active attitudes and lower motivation toward learning and lower degrees in self-efficacy rates of the students. Besides, even for learners of intermediate level proficiency, there is a tendency that students put too much concentration on simple memorization of the role play scripts rather than on practicing communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles with lively use of the language, which should be respected as one of the fundamental aspects of communicative approach. In order to avoid this, one factor that can create a lively and more realistic atmosphere for communicative activities and improve the quality of role plays might be emotion, since it is considered that emotion is an essential part of a language and cannot be detached from the language. It is assumed that integrating emotion into role play would be able to create a lively atmosphere as communication practice simulating social context and different social roles connotes the authentic use of language and therefore it would facilitate students creating a lively

and more realistic atmosphere in their role play practices.

2 Literature Review for Factors Affecting Role Plays and the role of emotion in ESL/EFL

As for the benefits of role play activities, there have been numbers of research conducted to measure the effectiveness of the teaching approach in fostering students' ESL/EFL language abilities. These researches have shown that role plays not only enhance the general language abilities such as expanding vocabulary and grammatical expressions, but also promote an understanding of the customs and norms of English-speaking countries in addition to fostering students' critical thinking skills and improving their motivation. Among the factors influencing their language learning experience, willingness to communicate, self-confidence, and self-efficacy play pivotal roles. This literature review explores the existing research on these key factors and their interaction with role play as a pedagogical tool in ESL/EFL contexts as well as clarifying how emotions can affect language learning in terms of enhancing learners' motivation.

2.1 Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is a crucial factor affecting language acquisition. Research by MacIntyre and Charos (1996) highlights that "Willingness to Communicate is strongly associated with language use in a second language context" (p. 542). Learners who are more willing to engage in communication activities, such as role play scenarios, are likely to develop their language skills more effectively. According to Yashima (2002), "Willingness to Communicate is a key predictor of language achievement. When learners are motivated and willing to engage in communication, they are more likely to overcome language barriers and make progress in their language skills" (Yashima, 2002, p. 268). Besides, Yashima (2002) explains the effectiveness of role play activities and its relationship with willingness to communicate as "Role-play activities can be particularly effective in increasing learners' willingness to communicate. These activities offer a structured and supportive platform for learners to engage in interactive language use, which can reduce anxiety and promote a positive attitude towards communication." (Yashima, 2002, p. 271). As Yashima (2002) mentions, role play activities can promote a positive attitude toward communication.

As for the relationships between role plays and willingness to communicate, Dörnyei, & Kormos (2000) clarifies how individual factors (like personality, anxiety, and motivation) and social variables (like group dynamics) influence oral task performance. It claims that in relation to willingness to communicate (WTC), if learners feel confident and supported during role plays (a favorable social variable), their WTC might increase. On the other hand, if a learner feels anxiety or lacks motivation (individual variables), their performance in a role play might decline, potentially affecting their WTC. Therefore, it is feasible that WTC is one of the variables that measures the effectiveness of role play activities.

2.2 Self-confidence

Engaging in role plays allows ESL/EFL students to practice speaking in a low-stakes environment, which can help increase their confidence in using the language. This is because they are not being judged solely on linguistic accuracy but also on their ability to perform and interact in a given context. Salies (1995) shows how role plays can boost learners' self-confidence. "It boosts self-confidence because it gives students an instant evidence of success, fosters retention, and stimulates involvement in a risk-free environment" (Salies, 1995, p. 12). It can be considered that through the successful experience to use English in role plays, learners would be able to elaborate their self-confidence with regard to their language ability. It is also remarkable that learners can practice their target language in a risk-free environment where they can simulate conversations based on authentic scenarios. When students practice these situations in a classroom, they often feel more prepared and confident to face similar situations outside the classroom. However, not every student might feel the same boost in confidence from role plays. Individual differences like personality, prior experiences, and anxiety levels can play a significant role in how effective role plays are in enhancing self-confidence.

2.3 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy beliefs impact learners' willingness to engage in challenging language tasks, such as role play. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully accomplish a particular task, based on their own evaluation of their skills (Bandura, 2006). Pajares (1996) argued that "Self-efficacy beliefs influence the choices learners make, their effort expenditure, and their persistence in the face of difficulties"

(p. 82). In the context of ESL/EFL role play, learners with higher self-efficacy may approach these activities with greater determination and effectiveness.

As for the relationship between role plays and self-efficacy, it can be considered that role plays offer learners the opportunity to simulate real-life scenarios in a controlled environment. As learners successfully navigate these scenarios, their confidence in their English-speaking abilities can increase. This is because they've witnessed tangible evidence of their own competence. This direct experience can bolster self-efficacy. Besides, engaging in role plays can diminish the fear of making mistakes. As learners practice speaking English without severe repercussions for errors, they may become more willing to take risks in their language use. This environment can reduce language anxiety and in turn, can further enhance self-efficacy.

Whereas role plays may enhance learners' self-efficacy if the scenarios of role plays are well-designed in order to simulate the authentic use of language with supportive environment by teachers, there is also an aspect that teachers should consider as Alam and Nirma (2021) suggests that "teachers have to help students experience success such as encourage students in delivering a speech and give them daily problem-solving successes, provide feedback on their effort, peer modeling, and support students affirmations" (p. 160).

In overall, role play activities are widely used in ESL/EFL classrooms to enhance language proficiency and role plays can be a platform for learners to exhibit their self-efficacy, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate in a safe and structured environment. In other words, these elements (WTC, self-confidence, and self-efficacy) can serve as parameters to measure how effective the content of the role play activities would be.

2.4 The role of emotion in ESL/EFL

In general, given the deeply intertwined nature of emotion and language learning, understanding and addressing the emotional aspects of ESL/EFL can lead to more effective teaching strategies and better learning outcomes. One factor regarding emotion in ESL/EFL that cannot be ignored is "Affective filter" by Krashen. According to Krashen (1981), "If the affective filter is 'up', no matter how beautifully the input is sequenced, no matter how meaningful and communicative the exercise is intended to be, little or no acquisition will take place" (p. 110). As for emotions that can be positive in ESL/EFL

acquisition, Fredrickson (1998) specifies four positive emotions, namely joy, interest, contentment, and love. These emotions are considered to create more lively atmosphere when integrated in role play practices.

In addition, another fact related to emotion and language is provided by Dewaele and Pavlenko (2001). They explored the relationship between emotion and language in L1 and L2 and found out that regardless of their level of language proficiency, many bilingual individuals choose to use their first language when conveying intense emotions. However, regarding the relationship between emotion and role plays, Boudreault (2010) explains how play acting can enable students to practice showing emotions in a safe environment. It claims “Drama gives an excellent method for studying human nature and working in harmony. The play acting provides the opportunity for a healthy release of emotion in a safe setting which can work to relieve the tension of learning in a second language” (p. 49).

Finally, it is evident that emotion is intricately linked with language acquisition. From Krashen’s insights on affective barriers to the natural tendency of bilinguals to express deep emotions in their first language, it’s evident that emotions play a significant role in learning English. Using drama and role play, as Boudreault suggests, helps students practice emotions in a supportive setting. As educators and researchers, it is imperative to integrate emotional understanding into pedagogical approaches.

3 Research Design

As shown in the previous section, emotions are pivotal in the language learning. When students engage in role play activities, it is assumed that by practicing English through role plays that emphasize showing emotions, students are provided a safe environment to explore the affective dimensions of language and such practices would amplify their “willingness to communicate,” bolster their self-confidence and enhance their self-efficacy as the fusion of linguistic content with emotional expression. This research explores the relationship between role play activities, emotions, and the resultant psychological impacts in the context of ESL/EFL classrooms and aim to offer a more understanding of the benefits and potential challenges of integrating emotion-rich role plays into teaching methodologies.

3.1 Research question

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, role play activities are widely recognized as effective methods for enhancing language skills. Integrating emotional elements into these activities has become an area of interest. The key question is: How does practicing emotional role plays affect EFL students' willingness to communicate, their self-confidence, and their belief in their own language abilities (self-efficacy)? The hypothesis is that by engaging students in role plays with emotional themes, we might not only improve their language skills but also boost their confidence and desire to communicate in English. This research aims to explore this relationship and understand the potential benefits of emotional role plays in the EFL context.

3.2 Participants and methodology

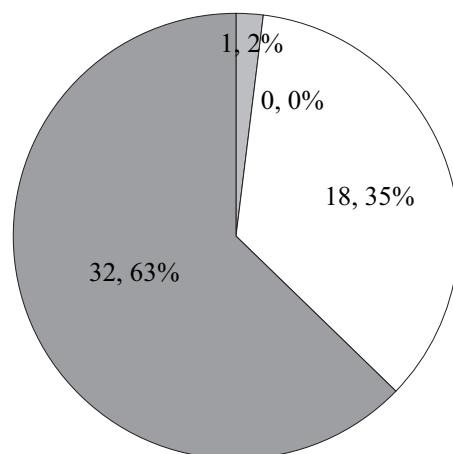
The study involved a total of 51 university students ranging from sophomore to senior years². Of these participants, the gender distribution was 29 males and 22 females. In terms of English proficiency, most participants fell within the intermediate range, with TOEIC scores ranging from 285 to 540. It should be noted that two students either did not remember their scores or had not taken the TOEIC.

For the methodology, the primary focus was on Role-play Presentation. Students were explicitly instructed to incorporate emotions into their role play presentations. To ensure emphasis on the emotional aspect, the teacher consistently encouraged students to express emotions during their presentations. Initially, students were provided with vocabulary and expressions input derived from their course textbook³. To accentuate the significance of emotional delivery, specific instructions were given to emphasize the emotions tied to certain expressions. It was crucial for students to not just comprehend these expressions but to internalize and express the emotions associated with them, as this was the core of the study. After this foundational phase, students were granted a period to prepare for their role play presentations. This time was essential for them to assimilate the vocabulary, practice the specified emotional expressions, and collaboratively refine their role play scenarios with peers. With ample preparation and a clear understanding of the expectations, students then delivered their role play presentations, incorporating the emotional aspects they had been trained on. Afterwards, to gather insights into the students' experiences and perceptions of this approach, questionnaires were administered⁴.

3.3 Results

A significant portion of the students demonstrated a positive inclination towards the application of expressions learned via role plays. Specifically, 98% of the participants indicated their eagerness to use these expressions, highlighting a strong willingness to communicate as shown in Figure 1. In terms of self-confidence, a substantial 80% of the students reported feeling confident in employing the expressions they learned through the role play activities as shown in Figure 2. Beyond confidence, the concept of self-efficacy—the belief in one’s ability to execute tasks in specific situations—also showed promising results. Remarkably, Figure 3 shows that 80% of the participants believe they can use the learned expressions correctly when the situation calls for it. This data underscores the effectiveness of role plays not only in fostering linguistic knowledge but also in bolstering students’ confidence and ensuring they feel competent in practical applications. However, these results do not provide any statistical significance that these results are solely attributed from emotion-rich role plays and it is considerable that other variables are concerned. Therefore, future research should conduct a comparative analysis of role plays with and without instructions for students to emphasize emotions.

Do you want to use the expressions that you learned through role plays?



- I don't want to use the expressions at all
- I don't I want to use the expressions so much
- I want to use the expressions somewhat
- I want to use the expressions

Figure 1: Ratio of the answers for “Willingness to Communicate”

Do you have a confidence for using the expressions learned through role plays?

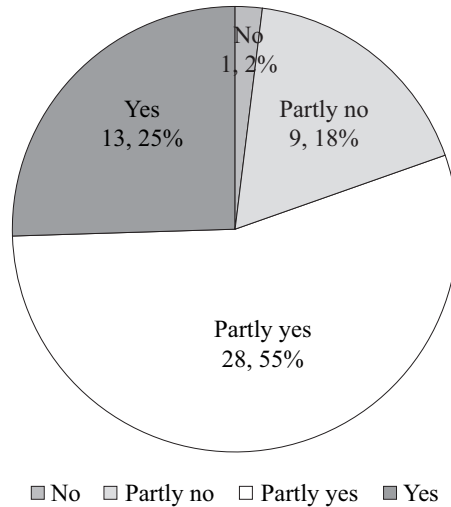


Figure 2: Ratio of the answers for “Self-confidence”

Do you feel that you can use the expressions learned through role plays correctly in the situation?

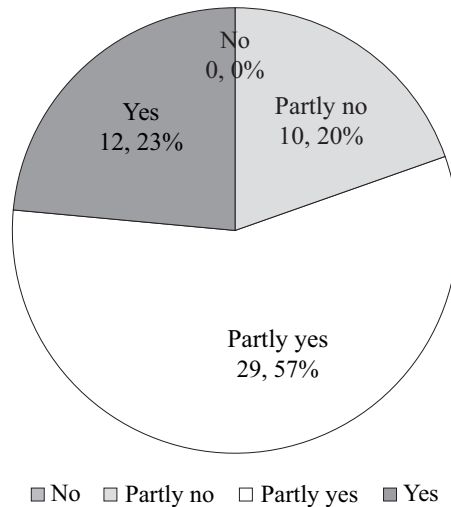


Figure 3: Ratio of the answers for “Self-efficacy”

Beside the results mentioned above, whether or not the students were able to fully show emotions during the role plays was asked in the questionnaire and the result shows that only 18% of students fully exhibited emotions in role plays, suggesting that merely instructing them to express emotions might be insufficient as shown in Figure 4. Considering the combined rate of responses for “No” and “Partly no,” and the fact that one-third of the students represents a significant portion, it is evident that teachers should offer more encouragement for improvements.

Whether or not participants exhibited emotions in role plays

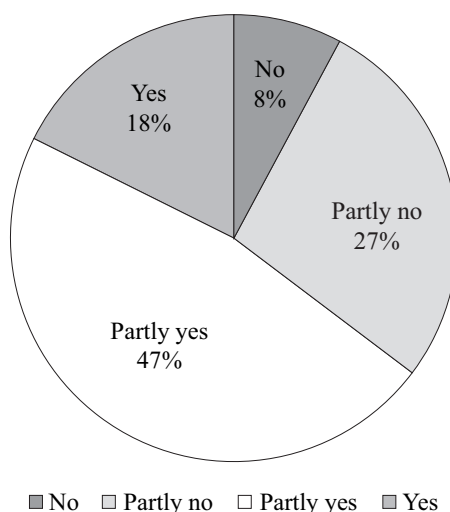


Figure 4: Whether or not students exhibited emotions in role plays

4 Conclusion

This study sought to explore the effects of integrating emotions into role play activities in an EFL context, particularly in terms of influencing students’ willingness to communicate, their self-confidence, and their self-efficacy⁵. The findings were largely positive, with the majority of students indicating a strong desire to utilize the expressions learned via role plays, showing elevated self-confidence and a robust sense of self-efficacy⁶. These results highlight the possible merits of incorporating emotional nuances into role play activities, suggesting they can amplify not just linguistic competencies but also bolster psychological facets pivotal to language learning.

However, one key observation warrants attention: despite explicit instructions, a significant percentage of students didn't fully imbue their role plays with emotional undertones. This points towards the need for teachers to adopt more persuasive methods or pedagogical adjustments to ensure the affective dimension is genuinely woven into role play performances⁷.

Furthermore, it is critical to interpret these findings within their limitations. The study does not conclusively assert that the observed outcomes are solely due to the emotional components of role plays. Multiple factors might have influenced these results, emphasizing the importance of further research. Comparative analyses, especially between role plays with and without emotional emphases, would offer sharper insights into the exact impact of emotions in this context. In overall, while emotions seem to be a potent element in the EFL role play matrix, a balanced and more nuanced approach, coupled with continued research, will be essential to measure the significance of the role of emotions in role plays.

Notes

- 1 This research serves as a pilot study, exploring the relationship between emotions and role plays. Its primary aim is to provide preliminary insights that might inform subsequent, more detailed studies. Therefore, this study does not delve into advanced statistical analyses such as multiple regressions or Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).
- 2 This study is based on a relatively small sample size (51 students) which might not be representative of a broader population. Besides, gender balance should be distributed in terms of gender perspectives.
- 3 For the textbook used in this class, refer to Michael P. Critchley (2007), *Encounters Abroad*, Nan'undo Co., Ltd.
- 4 The questionnaire was conducted anonymously utilizing the online platform for the class.
- 5 The study does not definitively state the observed benefits are strictly due to the emotional components of role plays and possibility exists that other external or internal factors influenced the positive outcomes.
- 6 While findings are positive, they suggest the need for a more detailed methodology. Continued and deeper research is recommended to fully measure the significance of emotions in role plays.
- 7 Regarding the teacher's instruction to encourage students to emphasize emotions during the role plays, the teacher solely provided verbal encouragement to emphasize the expressions learned from the textbook.

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