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The Effect of Role-Play on Promoting Functional Use of L2 in Low-immersion EFL Context of Iranian High school Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the impact of role-play on Promoting Functional Use of L2 in Low-immersion EFL Context of Iranian High school Learners. Role-play was supposed to have a great impact on the understanding and producing linguistic functions and speech acts. Among all the functions introduced by Halliday (1985), three were utilized in this research. Heuristic function which deals with the use of language to ask for information about things, informative function dealing with the use of language to inform about external things, and the Interactional function which has to do with the use of language to interact socially with others. About 100 students, 60 females and 40 males high school students, were asked to participate in this research. Having assigned them into two groups of control and experimental ones, pre-test and posttest were run. In order to evaluate the results, ANCOVA test was administered. The results showed that gender had no significant effect on role-playing the Halliday's functions. Furthermore, it was statistically proved that role-play would lead to a better production of speech acts, especially the three functions utilized in this study. Besides, Implementing Role-play could affect and enhance the scores of Iranian EFL learners. This study would have been a great help to teachers to run their classes more efficiently and proficiently.

Introduction and Purpose

Studying role-play from the children's perspective provided insights not simply into the activity and its generic characteristics, but also into important aspects of how young children make sense of early school experience , of 'becoming a pupil', and of navigating classroom rules and routines, relationship with both peer and adults were central to this. Regular and sustained observation enable us to see children negotiate shared experience and interests, and interact with each other in ways that were not possible in other classroom activities. The children deliberately use role-play opportunities to be with friends and sustain their peer culture. In this sense, role-play offered a positive conduit for children to be together in informal and relaxed situation where they could exercise their social, linguistic and imaginative capacities.

Role-play is regarded as especially significant in the work of Vygotsky for whom play meant role play (Hannikanen, 1995). Sociocultural perspectives emphasize the role of social interaction in the transformation of interpersonal to intrapersonal functioning (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is, therefore, the result of the individual's active participation and involvement in situated social practices, and not simply the result of knowledge transmission from this perspective, socially interactive ways of working are viewed as creating highly effective learning situations. Therefore, the social construction of knowledge takes place through joint activity where children are guided by adults or more competent peers (Rogoff, 1990, p. 56). These ideas are contained within what is, arguably, Vygotsky's most immediately accessible and useful concepts for educators, the so-called zone of proximal development (ZPD).Vygotsky described the ZPD as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (1978, p. 86). For Vygotsky, the play-developing relationship can be compared to the instruction-development relationship. (Vygotsky,1978, p. 99).

The study may be significant for the following reasons like role play activities which provide the spoken language practice that is vital for all language learning and role play activities that can provide the teachers with the opportunity to take their students out of the class room for a ' test run ' of real world language use. In addition, role play activities allow students to become someone else for part of the lesson, and thereby to leave behind inhibition and worries. Furthermore, role play activities involve an element of play that provides an enjoyable contrast to the course book exercises and helps to develop rapport between students.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. Does implementing role-play models improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian male EFL learners?
2. Does implementing role-play models improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian female EFL learners?
3. Does implementing role-play models aimed at the production of correct *Halliday's functions*, differ in male and female Iranian EFL learners?
4. Does Role-play on promoting functional use of L2 affect the scores of Iranian EFL learners?

The null hypotheses for the questions which are quantitative in nature are as follows:

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1-Implementing role-play models do not improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian male EFL learners.

2-Implementing role-play models do not improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian female EFL learners.

3-Implementing role-play models aimed at the production of correct Halliday's functions does not differ in male and female Iranian EFL learners?

4-Implementing Role-play on promoting functional use of L2 does not affect the scores of Iranian EFL learners.

Role play activities

Morales (2003) holds that role-play activities have been a part of language teaching for many years. They are popular with teachers and students alike for several important reasons.

* They provide the spoken language practice that is vital for all language learning.

* They provide us with the opportunity to take our students out of the classroom for a 'test run' of real world language use.

* They allow students to become someone else for part of the lesson, and thereby to leave behind their inhibitions and worries.

* They involve an element of play that provides an enjoyable contrast to the course book exercises and helps to develop rapport between students.

Participants, Instrumentation, procedure, and the design

The 100 male and female students who served as subjects for this study were senior high school student from Valliassr girls high school and Shohadae soltanieh boys high school in Zanjan district. In order to select the subjects, a total of 160 students were randomly selected from six classes. Their ages ranged between 16 and 18. In order to make sure that these three classes were homogeneous with regard to their English proficiency, a placement test was administered. The questions were selected from among the standard provincial and national high school questions. As many as 100 students whose scores ranged from 17 to 20 were ultimately selected to be included in this research. Since the study was gender-based, 60 female and 40 male students were eventually selected. The female students were divided randomly into two groups, 30 in the control group and 30 in experimental group, the case is the same for the male students. The 40 male students were randomly divided into two groups; 20 in the control group and other 20 students in the experimental group. Having homogenized and placed the subjects in two control and experimental groups, a pre-test was administered to all the four groups (two control and two experimental groups). This test was designed to elicit a comprehensive range of examinees' language function abilities in an efficient manner. Three unseen conversation tests were used. The tests included a teacher-made conversation text randomly selected from the texts included in the third grade high school textbook. Each test included three functions out of seven functions stated by Halliday- Heuristic, informative and interactional ones. The students were required to produce these functions in each conversation text based on the information obtained from the conversation text. To guarantee the appropriateness of the tests, three university professors were consulted, and they confirmed the appropriacy of the texts selected. After the treatment process, a parallel test was conducted as post-test to evaluate any plausible improvement among the groups.

The following steps were taken:

This study was conducted for a period of three months (12 weeks) in an environment where students received English classes (speaking section) two hours each week, all of the three speaking passages were introduced to both of the groups.

One of the passages was taught to the experimental group through "ditto" processes, in the following way:

1) An audience member volunteers to be the narrator.

2) The narrator (or the teacher) chooses the actors to play the roles.

3) The narrator tells a story.

4) When the narrator has finished the story, the audience shouts ditto!

5) The performers prepare the stage and perform the story

6) During the performance, three functions, that are, heuristic, informative, and interactional are taught to the learners.

7) When the performers have finished their presentation, the teacher will ask the experimental group members for the role they played and the function they learned.

The process followed for the control groups was the traditional method of teaching speaking without including role-play and function practices to indicate the effect of the two different methods of instruction on the students and role playing on promoting functional use of L2 achievement. The test scores obtained after treatment of the two groups both among the girls and boys were compared as posttest. The data was analyzed using SPPS software.

The teaching method utilized for the control group was based on the explanation and directions that existed in the textbook. The researcher focused on the placement test, speaking skill, and pronunciation using traditional method and grammatical points. The functions were not taught to the students in this group through role-play. The instruction of the selected texts was implemented for the experimental group through performance, discussion and sharing of ideas through role-play; student went on imaginative journeys as they rehearsed for the given functions studied in the research. The design that was employed in this research was quasi-experimental design:

Table 1. Representation of the research design.

group	Placement test	treatment	Posttest
control	T1		T2
experimental	T1	X	T2

Descriptive Statistics

Personal data of Respondents

This section presents the personal data of 100 students who participated in the current study. The profile covers the gender, pretest, posttest. The findings showed that there were more females students (60%) than male (40%). Fifty percent of the students were placed in control group and the other ones in experimental group.

Table 2. Pretest scores of students based on Group

Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Experimental	10.5000	50	2.196
Control	10.1000	50	2.573
Total	10.6000	100	2.388

Table 2 shows that overall pretest score is 10.3 (STD=2.3). Experimental group received higher mean (10.5) with, (STD=2.19) than the control group (10.1) with (STD=2.5).

Table 3.Posttest scores of students based on gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Boy	10.3583	40	1.57507
Girl	10.5056	60	1.64161
Total	10.4467	100	1.60891

Table 3 sho   TD=1.6). Girls received higher mean (10.5, STD=1.64) than the boys (87.26, std =1.57)

Table 4.Posttest scores of students based on group

x	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Experimental	11.0800	50	1.605
Control	9.8133	50	1.353
Total	10.4467	100	1.608

Table 5 shows that overall Posttest score is 10.44 (STD=1.61). Experimental group received higher mean (11.08, STD=1.61) than the control group (9.81, STD=1.35).

Inferential Statistics

Null Hypothesis 1:

Implementing role-play models do not improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian male EFL learners.

Table 5.Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Posttest	.108	40	.200*	.980	40	.701

The test statistics are shown in the table. Here two tests for normality are run. For dataset small than 2000 elements, the Shapiro-Wilk test is used. In this case, since we have only 40 elements, the Shapiro-Wilk test is used. The p-value is. 701. We can reject the alternative hypothesis and conclude that the data comes from a normal distribution.

Table 6. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.883	1	38	.353

The Levene test is not significant (p = .353) and shows that the assumption of equal variances in the groups seems to be met.

Table 7.Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	32.150a	3	10.717	5.972	.002	17.916	.935
Intercept	9.382	1	9.382	5.228	.028	5.228	.605
Group	11.753	1	11.753	6.549	.015	6.549	.702
Pretest	.182	1	.182	.102	.752	.102	.061
Group * Pretest	13.013	1	13.013	7.251	.011	7.251	.746
Error	64.602	36	1.795				
Total	4388.556	40					
Corrected Total	96.753	39					

This analysis is done to check the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes, not to test the main hypothesis. The factor (Group) and covariate (pretest) do not interact (p>.746), so the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes has been met. Another conclusion is that the dependent variable is not influenced by independent variable (F=6.54; sig. =.01). P-value is less than 0.05, then we can say that the differences are significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Null Hypothesis 2

Implementing role-play models does not improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian female EFL learners.

Table 8.Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Posttest	.125	60	.021	.974	60	.222

The Shapiro-Wilk test is used to determining the normality. In this case, since we have only 60 elements, the Shapiro-Wilk test is used. The p-value is .222. We can reject the alternative hypothesis and conclude that the data comes from a normal distribution.

Table 9 .Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.128	1	58	.722

The Levene test is not significant (p = .722) and shows that the assumption of equal variances in the groups seems to be met.

Table 10.Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	337.102a	3	112.367	21.038	.000
Intercept	294.883	1	294.883	55.209	.000
Group * Pretest	18.728	1	18.728	3.506	.523
Group	71.354	1	71.354	13.359	.001
Pretest	7.644	1	7.644	1.431	.237
Error	299.110	56	5.341		
Total	7073.917	60			
Corrected Total	636.212	59			

This analysis is done to check the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes, not to test the main hypothesis. The factor (Group) and covariate (pretest) do not interact (p> (.07), so the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes has been met. Another conclusion is that the dependent variable is not influenced by independent variable (F13.35; p<.001). P-value is less than 0.05, then we can say that the differences are significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected

Hypothesis 3

Implementing role-play models aimed at the production of correct Halliday's functions, do not differ in male and female Iranian EFL learners.

Table 11.Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	23.389a	3	7.796	1.000	.396
Intercept	319.023	1	319.023	40.916	.000
Pre_test	11.029	1	11.029	1.415	.237
Gender	2.011	1	2.011	.258	.613
Gender * Pre_test	3.141	1	3.141	.403	.527
Error	748.517	96	7.797		
Total	11350.028	100			
Corrected Total	771.905	99			

This analysis is done to check the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes, not to test the main hypothesis. The factor (Gender) and covariate (pretest) do not interact (p> (.527), so the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes has been met. Another conclusion is that the dependent variable is not influenced by independent variable (F=.258; p>.613). P-value is not less than 0.05, then we can say that the differences are not significant and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Table 12.Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Posttest	.082	100	.095	.986	100	.397

The test statistics are shown in table 12. Here two tests for normality are run. For dataset small than 2000 elements, the Shapiro-Wilk test is used. In this case, since we have only 100 elements, the Shapiro-Wilk test is used. The p-value is .397. We can reject the alternative hypothesis and conclude that the data comes from a normal distribution.

Table 13.Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.903	1	98	.171

The Levene test is not significant (p = .171) and shows that the assumption of equal variances in the groups seems to be met.

Null Hypothesis 4

Implementing Role-play on promoting functional use of L2 does not affect the scores of Iranian EFL learners.

Table 14.Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	296.202[a]	3	98.734	19.925	.000
Intercept	421.608	1	421.608	85.083	.000
Pretest	7.967	1	7.967	1.608	.208
Group	90.766	1	90.766	18.317	.000
Group * Pretest	38.257	1	38.257	7.720	.007
Error	475.703	96	4.955		
Total	11350.028	100			
Corrected Total	771.905	99			

This analysis is done to check the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes, not to test the main hypothesis. The factor (Group) and covariate (pretest) interact (p< (.01), so the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes has not been met. Another conclusion is that the dependent variable is influenced by independent variable (F=18.31; p<.001). P-value is less than 0.05, then we can say that the differences are significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Table 15. Means of pre-test and post-test of both experimental and control groups.

group	Mean Pretest	Mean posttest	Mean differences
experimental	10.5000	11.0800	0.58
control	10.1000	9.8133	0.2867
total	10.3000	10.4467	0.1467

As shown in table 15, the mean score of the post-test for role-play group was (m=11.0800.), whereas the mean of pretest for role-play group was (m=10.5000).

Revealing that role-play in its general sense was found to be more effective than traditional method for Iranian EFL high school learners.

Conclusion and final thoughts

At the present time, the notion of role-playing model is theoretically attractive complex and demanding.

A successful implementation of this method requires a change in the field of students, head teachers, inspectors, policy-makers and parents about teaching and learning.

The present study investigated four null hypotheses:

The first null hypothesis claims that implementing role-play models does not improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian male EFL learners.

The conclusion is that the dependent variable is not influenced by independent variable, then we can say that the differences are significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected.

The second null hypothesis claims that implementing role-play models does not improve the production of correct Halliday's functions of Iranian female EFL learners.

The conclusion is that the dependent variable is not influenced by independent variable, then we can say that the differences are significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected.

The third null hypothesis claims that implementing role-play models aimed at the production of correct Halliday's functions does not differ in male and female Iranian EFL learners.

The conclusion is that the dependent variable is not influenced by independent variable, then we can say that the differences are not significant and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

The fourth null hypothesis claims that implementing role-play on promoting functional use of L2 does not affect the scores of Iranian EFL learners.

The conclusion is that the dependent variable is influenced by independent variable, then we can say that the differences are significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected.

In conclusion, EFL teachers can make use of role-play models through Halliday's functions instead of focusing solely on traditional methods.

The result of the independent t-test (t = (43) =4.08, p=.000<.05, R=.51) showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean score of posttest in experimental and control groups when they were taught through role-play models. Then we can say that the differences are significant and the null hypothesis can be rejected. The experimental group outperformed the control group as they received role-play models through the production of correct Halliday's functions.

Pedagogical implications

In the modern world, the importance of a new idea is only judged through its application. The present study was as attempt to investigate the significant effect of role-play models on Iranian EFL through the production of correct Halliday's function. The finding of the present study is to design conversation materials for Iranian high school learners. An advantage of role-play models is that role-playing seems to provide a sort of enjoyable environment for the learners to flourish. This leads to better attention in learning and stimulate them to participate in role-play activities, in role-play activities, students take a new identity and learn to produce Halliday functions.

The findings of this study recommend that the student as EFL learners use role-play models through producing correct Halliday functions. This method can be serviceable for Iranian EFL student in learning English at high schools in Iran.

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