
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of Using Role Play as a Drama-Based Pedagogical Strategy on Turkish Adult Learners' Speaking Quality

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of role-play as a drama-based pedagogical strategy on the speaking proficiency of Turkish adult learners enrolled in the preparatory program at Biruni University. The participants in this study were 64 EFL learners aged 18 to 22. The current study investigated how role play influences learners' fluency and confidence during speaking tasks and compared the effectiveness of drama-based strategies with traditional pedagogical approaches, such as the teacher-centred model. A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was employed, with two groups: an experimental group that participated in drama-based role-play activities and a control group that received conventional speaking exercises. To evaluate speaking quality, both pre- and post-tests were assessed using an adapted version of the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, focusing on four key criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. Data collection tools included pre-test and post-test, semi-structured interviews, and an observation checklist. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired and independent t-tests to measure developments in speaking performance. Qualitative data from classroom observations and interviews were subjected to thematic analysis to gain insights into learners' confidence, engagement, and attitudes toward the role-play method.

KEYWORDS

Role Play, Drama-Based Pedagogy, Speaking Proficiency, Mixed-Methods Research, Language Assessment

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, learning English in Türkiye has started to play a significant role in shaping social life. According to Doğançay-Aktuna (1998), learning English has become increasingly important as a lingua franca in Türkiye, underscoring its expanding role in social and professional fields. In other words, English has become a crucial language of communication; therefore, students are eager to learn it and interact with non-Turkish peers. In language learning, the essential element that paves the way for effective communication, deep cultural comprehension, and individual fluency is precise, accurate pronunciation. People need to acquire a second language easily to communicate effectively in English by using the necessary tools, such as exposure to authentic input and engaging in role-plays and discussions.

To address the problem of a lack of meaningful communication in English, this study focused on developing speaking proficiency among Turkish adult students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Many adult learners of English encounter several issues during the learning process, such as confidence and fluency in speaking, as well as in real-life communication, due to traditional teaching methods that focus solely on grammar and textbooks (Ulas, 2008). To overcome this problem, this study explored a new teaching strategy that utilized role-play as a drama-based pedagogical strategy to help students communicate authentically and confidently. Role-play engages students in real-world discussions and conversations, fosters their language use, helps them express their ideas and emotions and develops their lexis.

The current study concentrated on role-play as a drama-based pedagogical strategy. This study involved learners' imaginative and interactive situations to observe students' development. These factors provided active participation, emotional language

expression, and language use in real-life situations, which were not found in traditional grammar EFL classes. (Nguyen and Do, 2017). This strategy was not only a classroom activity or task but also an organized, learner-centred method that focused on the learner and was applied over time to support language development.

English language communication is commonly recognized as the ability to communicate effectively and fluently in the globalized world nowadays. Speaking proficiency often remains the most challenging skill to acquire, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts, such as Türkiye (Çelik, 2013). Cultivating the dynamic, spontaneous use of language required in real-world communicative situations may be hindered by traditional pedagogical approaches, which often emphasize rote learning and grammatical accuracy. Drama-based teaching methods, particularly role-play, have garnered increasing attention as practical strategies to promote speaking fluency, confidence, and communicative competence in EFL contexts, in response to these limitations (Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Maley & Duff, 2005).

The instructions of the role-play strategy measured the speaking quality of Turkish adult learners. Learners' speaking quality was a sophisticated problem that involved learners' accuracy, fluency, confidence, coherence, and pronunciation (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The mentioned elements demonstrate how effectively learners can use spoken English in their communication and engagement with drama role-play activities.

Findings of current research show that role-play methods play an essential role in learners' communication. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) stated that individual fluency, cultural integration, comprehension, and communication are significantly affected by pronunciation. Enabling active participation in conversations is crucial for clear expression and understanding, thereby enhancing genuine communication with native speakers and fostering cultural and social awareness. Confidence and fluency are enhanced by proficient pronunciation, which promotes self-esteem in speaking the language. On the other hand, learners of the language still encounter common challenges such as accent influence, stress, foreign sounds, complex sound clusters, minimal pairs, intonation patterns, absence of feedback, and self-consciousness (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011). However, commitment and focused practice are required to overcome these challenges and markedly enhance language proficiency in general.

Heathcote and Bolton were among the first to promote the integration of drama into first-language (L1) classrooms during language education. Later, they inspired other teachers to utilize drama-based methods in their classes. Eventually, educators of second language (L2) learners widely adopted these techniques in their classrooms (Bang, 2003). Miccoli (2003) explained that the movement of communicative language teaching during the 1980s and 1990s played a significant role in encouraging both educators and learners to explore drama-based instruction.

Throughout this time, influential educators such as Duff and Maley (1982), Smith (1984), and Ladousse (1987) began publishing practical teaching resources based on their classroom practices. During the 1990s, the literature expanded to encompass topics focusing on the cultural dimensions of language through drama (Byram & Fleming, 1998), applying drama techniques (Kao & O'Neill, 1998), integrating drama activities in the classroom environment (Whiteson, 1996), and providing pedagogical assistance (Woodward, 1997). In the 21st century, the field expanded further to include drama games suitable for students of all ages (Farmer, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Hillyard, 2016), as well as other research areas, such as digital storytelling and global guidance on process drama (Winston, 2012).

Several studies have investigated the impact of drama-based activities on the speaking skills of L2 students in diverse global contexts. In Brazil, Miccoli (2003) observed 47 university students and noted significant improvement in their oral skills, especially in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, after four months of drama-based lessons. In South Korea, according to Coleman (2005), learners became more self-confident, fluent, and accurate in their pronunciation after using role play, stage movements, and improvisation. Moreover, Cho (2015) conducted a semi-scripted role-play experiment and found it valuable for improving communication skills among tourism students. In Greece, Magos and Politi (2008) reported that role-play was effective in teaching a second language to adult immigrants, especially when the content aligned with learners' background knowledge and interests.

Janudom and Wasanasomithi (2009) from Thailand discovered that incorporating drama and questioning techniques enhanced speaking abilities and significantly influenced students' attitudes. Furthermore, Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep (2013) found, based on a study of 80 students, that the combination of cooperative learning techniques and drama-based role-play enhanced motivation, speaking abilities, and self-confidence. In Australia, Gill (2013) found that drama-based lessons conducted over three months with 10 university students resulted in noticeable improvements in speaking performance.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is becoming increasingly essential in Türkiye, as the country continues to internationalize its education system and labour market. The supported method for enhancing speaking skills in adult EFL learners is role-play, which represents a pedagogically sound and empirically grounded approach. Through careful implementation and ongoing evaluation, role-playing can transform the language classroom into a dynamic and engaging space. According to Çetinkaya (2019), speaking is still a focus in language learning, attracting significant attention from researchers.

The primary purpose of the current study is to examine the impact of role-play, a drama-based pedagogical strategy, on the quality of speaking among Turkish adult learners in an English as a foreign language (EFL) environment. Precisely, it determines whether role-play integration with speaking instruction can lead to noticeable improvements in learners' speaking performance, alongside other elements such as logical language use, pronunciation, fluency, and coherence.

There is an immense importance placed on English communication and language instruction in Türkiye. However, many adult learners are struggling with English speaking and communicating confidently, especially in real-life situations. The traditional language-teaching approach focuses on grammar exercises rather than on speaking interactions. For example, the traditional approach based on grammar teaching seems to rely on memorizing sentences or vocabulary, grammar drills, and teacher-centred lessons. These elements somehow neglect learners' emotional and social dimensions of language use, leaving learners grammatically perfect but anxious and incoherent when speaking.

3. Research Questions

The research questions focus on the effectiveness of role-play as a drama-based pedagogical method for developing speaking skills among adult learners of English as a foreign language in Türkiye. The following research questions have been employed to examine the impact on fluency, self-confidence, and overall speaking quality.

This study explores to what extent using role play as a drama-based pedagogical strategy improves the speaking fluency of Turkish adult learners.

Also, it explores to what extent role play enhances the confidence of Turkish adult learners during speaking activities.

And finally, it examines the use of role play as a drama-based pedagogical strategy, more effective than a rigid, teacher-centred model in fostering learner autonomy and emotional engagement to improve Turkish learners' speaking quality.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction

Developing speaking skills is always regarded as a challenging aspect of language learning, particularly in ELT environments where learners have few opportunities for real-life communication. According to Brown (2004), speaking is an interactive process that includes the production, processing, and reception of speech. (Çelik, 2019) states that speaking skills in Türkiye are underdeveloped due to a focus on grammar and exam preparation. This highlights the serious need for innovative, modern teaching methods that promote natural, meaningful speaking practice.

B. Theoretical Foundations of Role Play in Language Teaching

Role-play is considered one of the crucial language-learning strategies, grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. In role-play, students operate within the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), enabling them to engage in scaffolded performance and guided activities that facilitate language acquisition. Furthermore, Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis reinforces drama-based approaches by highlighting the value of comprehensible input in low-stress, relaxed environments, where role-play can begin.

C. Development of Drama in Language Education

Heathcote and Bolton were the first to promote the integration of drama into first-language (L1) classrooms in language education. Later, they inspired other teachers to utilize drama-based methods in their classes. Eventually, educators of second language (L2) learners widely adopted these techniques in their classrooms (Dodson, 2000). Schewe (2013) showed that the movement of communicative language teaching during the 1980s and 1990s played an important role in fostering educators and learners in exploring drama-based instruction.

Throughout this time, influential educators such as Duff and Maley (1982), Smith (1984), Wessel (1987), and Ladousse (1987) began publishing practical teaching resources based on their classroom practices. During the 1990s, the literature expanded to encompass topics focusing on the cultural dimensions of language through drama (Byram & Fleming, 1998), applying drama techniques (Kao & O'Neill, 1998), integrating drama activities in the classroom environment (Whiteson, 1996), and providing pedagogical assistance (Woodward, 1997). In the 21st century, the field expanded further to include drama games suitable for students of all ages (Farmer, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Hillyard, 2016), as well as research on digital storytelling and global guidance for process drama (Winston, 2012).

D. Practical Studies on Drama and Speaking Proficiency

Several studies have investigated how drama-based activities influence L2 students' speaking skills in diverse global contexts. In Brazil, Miccoli (2003) observed 47 university students and noted significant improvement in their oral skills, especially in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, after four months of drama-based lessons. In South Korea, according to Coleman (2005), learners became more self-confident, fluent, and accurate in their pronunciation after using role play, stage movements, and improvisation. Moreover, Cho (2015) conducted semi-scripted role-play and found it valuable for improving communication skills among tourism students. In Greece, Magos and Politi (2008) reported that role-play was effective in teaching a second language to adult immigrants, especially when the content aligned with learners' background knowledge and interests. In

Thailand, Janudom and Wasanasomithi (2009) found that incorporating drama and questioning techniques foster speaking abilities and positively influence students' attitudes. Furthermore, Sirisrimangkorn and Suwanthep (2013) demonstrated, with 80 students, that the combination of cooperative learning techniques and drama-based role-play enhanced motivation, speaking abilities, and self-confidence. In Australia, Gill (2013) found that drama-based lessons over three months among 10 university students led to noticeable improvements in speaking performance.

E. Pedagogical Advantages of Drama in L2 Speaking

There are numerous pedagogical advantages to employing drama to improve speaking skills in second-language learners' environments. According to Ronke (2005), these advantages can be divided into many phases in order of importance. Firstly, grab the students' attention to have precise intonation and pronunciation, speed up practice of speech attributes like pitch and rhythm, focus on the use of speech organs and prosodic parts via physical activity, present engaging and fun replacements to systematic tools, and decrease nervousness and anxiety by creating an encouraging, peer-friendly environment. According to Burlinska (2016), drama improves the students' fluency by allowing them to perform social roles in real-life situations. Dailey (2009) stated that drama activities, along with communication and interaction, foster learners' participation in the classroom, help them build more self-confidence among their peers, and encourage natural language use, turning traditional classrooms into productive oral practice areas.

5. Methodology

The current study employed a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods among learners, which examined two groups. An experimental group received a drama-based strategy in their lessons, utilizing role-play. In contrast, the control group participated in traditional speaking tasks, such as peer discussions, group dialogues, and textbook exercises. The quantitative aspect included pre- and post-test speaking proficiency measures to determine how the drama-based role-play process affects students' speaking performance. In contrast, the qualitative element comprised semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. After that, students were interviewed to reveal their opinions on drama-based role-play education. Thematic analysis was utilized in this study to analyze qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. Finally, the classroom observations checklist was employed to track students' participation, fluency, and engagement.

5.1. Participants

The study was conducted at the Foreign Language Department, Biruni University. Students were enrolled in different majors where the instruction language is English. The participants were 64 students, aged 18-22 years. The experimental group consisted of 32 students, and the control group contained 32 students.

5.2. Instrumentations

Four lesson plans were included in the instruments using different drama-based role-play activities, in addition to pre-test, post-test, and interviews. Drama lesson plans were adapted from Davies (1990), see Appendix 1. There were different activities in the four-stage lesson plans, such as brainstorming ideas, reading dialogues, pair and group work, and playing different roles based on real-life situations.

5.3. Data Collection

A structured sequence was followed to evaluate the efficiency of drama-based role-playing in improving the speaking skills of A2-level Turkish adult students. The present research employs three stages: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention stages.

In the pre-intervention stage, a speaking proficiency pre-test was administered to both experimental and control groups, as demonstrated by the Biruni University speaking assessment. This test served as a model to evaluate students' initial speaking abilities. The pre-test was assessed using IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, which contain four measurement criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. Pre-test scores were rated on a 5-point scale, where 1 = "Poor" and 5 = "Excellent."

The intervention stage consisted of four drama-based lessons provided to the experimental group, which utilized role-play activities adapted from Davies (1990). These lessons included various activities, such as brainstorming, pair work, and group work, reading dialogues, and simulating real-life situations. Meanwhile, the control group followed traditional speaking tasks, such as group dialogue, peer discussion, and textbook-based speaking exercises. An observation checklist was utilized for classroom observations throughout this stage. The aim was to track students' engagement, participation, and fluency.

In the post-intervention stage, the instructional period was completed; hence, all participants took a post-test similar in structure to the pre-test. It was designed to determine the changes in speaking proficiency. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with students from the experimental group to gather more insights into their attitudes, participation, and experiences with drama-based role-play.

The study was conducted over a period of 4 weeks. In week one, the pre-intervention stage took place. Additionally, a speaking pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups to determine baseline performance. From week two to week five, the intervention stage was constructed. During this period, the experimental group participated in four drama-based role-play lessons (one per week) that included activities such as dialogue reading, pair and group work, and real-world scenario-based activities. However, the control group continued with traditional activities, such as topic-based speaking tasks and textbook-based dialogues. In week six, the intervention stage was carried out. In this stage, all participants took the post-test, similar to the pre-test in structure and topic. Furthermore, semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with the experimental group to gain deeper insight into their engagement with role-play activities, attitudes, and experiences with this modern student-centred EFL language learning.

5.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests to detect within-group differences and independent-samples t-tests to compare performance between the experimental and control groups.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes related to learner engagement, self-confidence, and attitudes toward drama-based instruction. Observation checklist data were descriptively analyzed to reinforce the qualitative findings and provide triangulation.

6. Results and Discussion

At the beginning, the researcher examined the learning progress and speaking performance of the experimental group through drama-based activities. She assessed the students' speaking development before and after the four-week English course by applying a pre-test and post-test. Table 1 shows a noticeable improvement in learners' final scores.

Table 1: The outcome of the experimental group

Category	Test	M (SE)	Ranking each category improvement	F value
Fluency and Coherence	Pre-Test	3.44	4	3.750
	Post-Test	4.32		
Lexical Resource	Pre-Test	3.72	2	
	Post-Test	3.84		
Pronunciation	Pre-Test	2.68	3	
	Post-Test	3.72		
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Pre-Test	2.52	1	
	Post-Test	4.08		

(SE) Standard error of mean, (SD) Standard Deviation, ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Table 1 shows the pre-test and post-test speaking performance of the experimental group (N = 25) across four main speaking categories: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Pronunciation, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. The results represent the total development across three of four speaking classifications after using the instructional intervention. The Grammatical Range and Accuracy category showed the most significant improvement, with mean scores rising from 2.52 in the pre-test to 4.08 in the post-test, ranking it first in terms of improvement in speaking skills. This reflects a significant development in the learners' grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Lexical Resource demonstrates a significant improvement, rising from 3.72 in the pre-test to 3.84 in the post-test, ranking second among the other categories. This development shows improved fluency, speech clarity, and pronunciation. On the other hand, Pronunciation ranks third among the categories, from 2.68 in the pre-test to 3.72 in the post-test, while Fluency and Coherence rank fourth, from 3.44 in the pre-test to 4.32 in the post-test. Therefore, the results suggest that Pronunciation and Fluency and Coherence may require more instructional attention. This study aims to investigate the effects of drama-based activities and role-play on English-speaking quality for English learners as a foreign language. The students in the experiment showed a significant improvement in speaking skills compared to the control group, as indicated by the pre-test and post-test results. The drama-based activities were among the essential reasons for this improvement, as they provided students with a comfortable educational environment. The students spoke fluently during the drama activities without feeling afraid or shy because the focus was on the activity itself, not on the students. This made them think they were not being tested and helped them avoid mistakes. As an observer, I noticed that the students of the experimental group had become more confident while speaking English. They started using longer sentences compared to the

short ones they used at the beginning. Role-play played a significant role, serving as a foundation for encouraging students to participate in activities and complete their missions easily, without fear or shyness. Moreover, the drama-based activities allowed the students to focus on meaning and communication rather than grammar alone. This had a positive effect on fluency and speaking activity, leading us to conclude that drama-based activities support the educational mechanism, with more activities when students were in an academic setting.

In the next stage, the researcher observed the students' drama-based speaking performance using a Likert-scale observation survey.

Table 2: Ranking of Observation Items

No	Statement	N		R		S		O		Aa	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	The student actively participates in drama and role-play activities.	0	0	5	20	7	28	7	28	6	24
4	The student interacts effectively with peers during role-play activities	0	0	3	12	8	32	8	32	6	24
5	The student uses appropriate body language and facial expressions.	0	0	5	20	8	32	9	36	3	12
2	The student shows confidence while speaking during role-play.	0	0	6	24	9	36	8	32	2	8
3	The student uses spontaneous and natural language during drama tasks.	0	0	6	24	8	32	10	40	1	4

Note: Aa = *almost always*; O = *often*; S = *sometimes*; R = *rarely*; N = *never*; f = *frequency*; % = *percentage*

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of learners' behaviours observed during drama-based and role-playing activities, across five categories: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and almost always. The table illustrates levels of participation, interaction, confidence, language use, and non-verbal communication within the context of drama-based teaching. The results generally indicate a positive trend in student performance, with no responses in the "never" category recorded across all items. Regarding active participation in drama activities, most students demonstrated "sometimes" or "often" participation, with a significant proportion participating "almost always," indicating the effectiveness of drama activities in enhancing learner engagement. Peer interaction also showed a high level, with more than half of the students registering responses in the "often" and "almost always" categories, reflecting the role of role-playing in developing collaborative communication. Regarding the use of body language and facial expressions, this item achieved high scores in the "often" category, indicating that drama contributes to the development of nonverbal communication skills. As for confidence during speech and the use of spontaneous language, the results showed significant improvement, although some responses remained in the "sometimes" category. Overall, the results confirm the positive impact of role-playing strategies on learners' speaking skills.

7. Conclusion

This study investigates the effect of role-play, a drama-based pedagogical strategy, on Turkish adult learners' speaking quality in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The study's findings provide convincing evidence that role-play is an effective instructional strategy for improving learners' speaking performance, particularly in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, interactional competence, and overall communicative confidence. One of the key strengths of role-play as a drama-based technique lies in its ability to simulate real-life situations learners are likely to encounter outside the classroom. By engaging in scenarios such as introductions, daily routines, problem-solving situations, and professional interactions, learners were able to connect classroom learning with real-world communication. Moreover, peer interaction and cooperative learning are encouraged by the collaborative nature of role-play. Learners worked together to construct dialogues, negotiate roles, and support one another during performances. This social interaction aligns with socio-cultural theories of language learning, which emphasize the role of interaction and meaningful communication in language development. For adult learners preparing for academic, professional, or social communication in English, such outcomes are particularly valuable.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that role-play, as a drama-based pedagogical technique, has a significant and positive effect on the speaking quality of Turkish adult learners. By providing authentic, interactive, and emotionally supportive learning experiences, role-play enhances both linguistic performance and affective engagement. The findings reinforce the value of drama-based pedagogy as a practical and innovative approach to speaking instruction in EFL contexts. In the final analysis, incorporating role-play into language classrooms not only improves learners' speaking skills but also empowers them with the confidence, competence, and communicative ability necessary to function effectively in an increasingly globalized world.

Further Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies recommend expanding this research by involving larger and more diverse samples across different proficiency levels and educational contexts to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of role-playing on speaking development and learning retention. Moreover, future studies might compare role-playing with other dramatic techniques or technology-assisted role-playing to determine their relative effectiveness. A more in-depth examination of learner attitudes, anxiety levels, and motivation using qualitative tools would provide richer insights. Finally, focusing on teacher training and implementation challenges will contribute to the more effective integration of role-playing into EFL curricula.

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