

Effect of Role-Playing on Pupils' Speaking Skills in Childhood Education in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract - This paper investigated the effect of role-playing on pupils' speaking skills in childhood education in Cross River State, Nigeria. The research design employed was a Pretest-Posttest control quasi-experimental design. The multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select 43 primary five pupils for the 2020–2021 sessions in two intact classes from two selected primary schools. The Speaking Ability Test (SAT), used as a Pretest (PRESAT) and Post-test (POSTSAT), was developed by the researcher and validated by experts. The reliability coefficient of the instrument obtained was determined using the Kuder-Richardson formula 20 (KR–20) after subjecting the tools to a trial test of 20 primary five pupils who are not part of the sample for the study but have relevant qualities as those in the study. The reliability coefficient was 0.80 obtained. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.5 level of significance. The Pretest was administered to subjects in both groups to determine their writing skills. The control group was taught speaking skills for three weeks using only the conventional method. The experimental group was also led to writing skills for three weeks with a role-play learning strategy. POSTSAT was administered to all the subjects at the end of the third week. The analytical results showed a substantial difference between students who learned speaking abilities through role-playing and those who knew them through traditional methods. The study also shows no significant difference between the performance scores of male and female pupils who were taught speaking skills using the role-play teaching method. It was therefore recommended, among others, that role-playing instructional practices be adopted in childhood education to improve the pupils' acquisition of speaking skills.

Keywords: Gender, Learning Strategy, Role-Play, Speaking Skills.

1. Introduction

Producing, receiving, and digesting information all play a part in the interactive process of meaning construction; that is, speaking structure and goal are determined by the

surroundings in which it occurs, including the participants, their shared experiences, the setting, and the speaking objectives, Brown(2014). It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is sometimes unpredictable. Speaking demands that students have linguistic competence, which includes knowing how to generate a variety of language features like grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary, as well as knowing the how, when, and why of language production (sociolinguistic competency). Speech has skills, structures, and conventions different from written language, Carter & McCarthy, (2015). A competent speaker utilizes this variety of skills and knowledge for a speech act to be successful.

The inability of the pupils to acquire basic speaking skills is one of the major problems in teaching and learning in primary schools. Many pupils struggle to learn and often fail to succeed in their education. The approaches and strategies for teaching and learning at the primary school level are ineffective. This has resulted in pupils' lack of learning skills readiness or foundational skills for developing learning attitudes, concepts and skills, lack of an oral-reading instructional programme that spells out objectives, contents, activities or strategies, instruments, and assessment techniques for developing the beginning of speaking skills, as well as pupils' lack of basic language skills that can help them read texts. The situation has not improved; pupils are no longer committed to learning and are not encouraged to do so.

On the other hand, they are wide-speaking pupils who could effectively communicate even though they may be weak in grammar and vocabulary. Teachers must pay much attention to enriching pupils' speaking. Effective learning strategies, tactics, or exercises that encourage speaking skills are necessary for teaching English as a foreign language. To overcome this situation, there was an effective way to teach speaking ability through various activities that can progress speaking knowledge.

Role-play is essential in teaching speaking because that allows pupils to practice communication in different social contexts and indifferent social roles. In addition, that will enable pupils to be active and put pupils in another person's

place for a while. The Role-play technique is a way to teach speaking by setting up the pupils in the situations in pairs of groups. This means putting two or more pupils together and giving them handout sheets, which they can read and study first; through the role-play technique, there are many advantages for pupils in the learning process. The pupils can be more motivated and challenged to communicate using English daily because they have to practice in the classroom. According to Brown and Yule (2014), speaking is an interactive method of creating meaning that includes information production, reception, and processing. Its structure and aim rely on the situation, including the participants, group experiences, physical development, and the speech's goal. Speaking demands that students not only be able to create certain language features, such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary, but also comprehend when, why, and how to do so.

Harmer (2009) states that combining extensive and intensive listening is necessary as it helps pupils improve their listening or speaking skills and get a better input of language when they are taught using the role-play method, Harmer (2009). It helps pupils develop values by modelling and using real-life examples. The employment of role-playing and simulation strategies supports the development of empathy, compassion, communication and other valuable social skills, Hartman (2015). Rogers and Evans (2008) provided three justifications for using role-plays in the classroom to hone speaking abilities, which are consistent with this. Most teachers who have utilized this strategy have observed that it (a) aids students in developing their ability to interact with others, (b) aids students in expanding their creativity and imagination, and (c) aids both teachers and students in reinforcing learning. In the beginning, pupils at the elementary level felt afraid of speaking in class, but everything changed after using role-plays with them.

Role-playing allows students to act out and make sense of real-life situations, develops listening and speaking skills, builds team members' confidence, which can help them in their day-to-day roles, and encourages students to express their ideas and feelings in a relaxed environment created by them, claims Ashok (2015). With the primary goal of determining whether role-play activities aid in developing students' speaking skills in ELT classrooms, Kusnierek, AnnaLeszno, and Poland (2015) conducted experimental research to support the value of role-play in students' speaking abilities. They discovered a significant impact of role-playing techniques on speaking skills.

Eklova, Ilona and Bruno (2017) examined the effect of the role-play technique on pupils' communication skills in the Czech Republic. Various teaching techniques were drawn up

to advance the pupils from controlling the creative activities from accuracy to fluency. However, they decided to adopt the role-play technique in her academic sessions. The study revealed that role-play significantly influences pupils' speaking and oral expression skills.

In English studies classes using Facebook and Skype as teaching aids, Chen (2013) employed a role-playing strategy to enhance student's writing and speaking abilities: a case study in Taiwan. Due to various cultural and environmental factors, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Asia is particularly difficult. These factors include the lack of interactive speaking situations, the emphasis on test scores, and foreign language anxiety. The results of this study demonstrated that the role-playing education approach significantly impacts speaking skills. Role-playing exercises were discovered by Bharathy (2017) to increase the speaking abilities of learners at the tertiary level in India when she investigated the efficiency of this method.

Dakowska (2015) claims that speaking is now the most emphasized skill in foreign language teaching. Still, unfortunately, it is also recognized as the most difficult to develop in classroom conditions. Pupils are constantly encouraged to use the target language during classes, but they cannot use it in honest communication when the lesson is over. Of course, some learners seek to speak their foreign language outside the classroom; however, only some try to practice the target language. Effective speaking also requires listening to and understanding other participants, feelings and cultural and social rules such as turn-taking or speaking loudly. Dobson (2019) suggested that, to ensure every learner can practice the target language, the teacher can appoint a group representative responsible for equal participation among peers. Motivation also plays an essential role in a successful lesson devoted to speaking. Nurbaya (2018) researched on improving pupils' ability to talk about the expression of happiness by applying the role-play technique and found that roles-play practically influence speaking skills.

The term "gender" refers to the socially or culturally driven roles that men and women play. But when we talk about sex, we mean the biological variations between men and women. As a result, most individuals concur that the socialization and culturalization of the person cause gender-based learning differences rather than natural disparities, Feldstein & Jiggins (1994). Corneliussen (2018) researched and applied the role-play technique to encourage pupils to develop learning skills in Zamfara State and found a significant difference in male and female pupils learning abilities based on role-play teaching methods. Yebe (2013) applied the role-playing strategy to enhance learner skills in English in Yobe State and found that role-play teaching

methods significantly influence pupils' learning skills based on gender in favour of male pupils.

Yee (2016) examined the influence of role-playing on pupils' academic performance and found that males significantly performed better in speaking skills than their female counterparts. Males tend to see conversations and actions from a "hierarchical social order", Tannen, (2019) based on power, where they focus on a goal and problem-solving. Females tend to see conversations and actions "as an individual in a network of connections", Tannen (2019) based on solidarity, where they want understanding. They, like the men, also wish to pursue their goals, but they need to focus on them to the same extent as men. These gender differences start early, as a child is spoken to differently depending on if it is a girl or a boy.

According to Tannen (2019), girls often play in small groups, where their games seldom have winners or losers. They often use suggestions and do not try to gain a higher status through their actions. On the other hand, boys often play in larger groups with a more structured hierarchy with leaders. Females are more cooperative in their conversations, work harder to establish equality between people, and are often tentative, using more hedges and qualifiers than men. Collister (2016) conducted a conversation analysis from chat logs in World of Warcraft. She did not only focus on gender but other linguistic findings and found no significant difference in gender in the acquisition of learning skills when using the role-play method. Frost (2010) stated that role-play is essential for the child's development and learning. Conscious use of play to promote the development and understanding of each child should be an omnipresent activity in preschool, irrespective of gender. Recreation and enjoyment in learning in various forms stimulate imagination, insight, communication, and the ability to cooperate and solve problems. The child can express and work through their experiences and feelings through creative and imaginary games.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed to guide the study.

- i) What difference exists in the mean performance scores of pupils taught speaking skills using the role-play teaching method and those conducted using the traditional approach?
- ii) To what extent do male and female pupils taught speaking skills using the role-play teaching method differs in their mean performance scores?

Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed and examined at a 0.05 level of significance.

- i) There is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of pupils taught speaking skills using the role-play teaching method and those conducted using the traditional way.
- ii) Gender does not significantly influence pupils' performance in speaking skills when taught using the role-play teaching method.

2. Materials and Methods

Research Design

The research design adopted was a Pretest-Posttest control group quasi-experimental design. Two intact classes were assigned to the Control group (C) and the Experimental group (E).

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study's target population was primary five pupils from Cross River State's public schools. Multi-stage random sampling technique was employed during sampling. The coeducational schools were selected from the study area, and two schools were later chosen randomly. An entire class was randomly selected from each of the two schools. One of the intact classes was randomly selected to serve as the experimental group, while the other was the control group. The sample for this study consisted of 43 primary five pupils, of which 23 were females while 20 were male and 21 were from the experimental group, while 22 were from the control group.

Instrumentation

The Speaking Ability Test (SAT), which served as a pretest, was used to gather data (PRESAT). The POSTSAT was used to determine achievement after treatment. The researcher developed the Speaking Ability Test (SAT). The speaking ability test aims to determine the pupils' ability to express themselves orally by speaking. In testing pupils' ability to speak, pupils were given a poem and story to recite by their teachers. The researcher, with the help of research assistants, rated the pupils' writing ability based on fluency, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation on a 4 Likert Scale of No Help Needed (NHN)=4 points, Little Help Needed(LHN)=3 points, Moderate Help Needed (MohN)=2 points and Much Help Needed (MuHN)=1 point. The total points were computed using simple percentages and entered for pupils' speaking skills. The test (SAT) was subjected to face and content validity. A pilot study was conducted to make

sure that the SAT was reliable. Using the Kuder-Richardson formula 20 (KR-20), the dependability coefficient was 0.80.

Administration of the Instrument

The research assistants, the English Studies teachers in the sampled schools, were trained by the researcher on how the teaching was to be carried out. A pretest PRESAT was administered to subjects in both groups to rate pupils' ability in writing skills. The control group was taught speaking skills using only the conventional method for three weeks, and the experimental group was led writing for three weeks with role-play learning strategies. All subjects took the POSTSAT after three weeks. To evaluate students' speaking skills two weeks after the POSTSAT was administered.

3. Results

The result of the analysis is presented in Tables 1 & 2. The hypotheses were tested at a .05 significance level.

Hypothesis one: The average performance of students taught speaking skills using the role-play teaching approach and those trained using the traditional method does not significantly differ from one another. The independent variable in this hypothesis is the role-play learning strategy, while the dependent variable is the pupils' speaking skills. A one-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was adopted, and the result is presented table 1.

Table 1: One-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the effect of role-play teaching method on pupils' speaking skills

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	123.497a	2	61.749	55.675	.000	.736
Intercept	126.395	1	126.395	113.964	.000	.740
Pretest	.052	1	.052	.047	.829	.001
Treatment	71.461	1	71.461	64.432	.000	.617
Error	44.363	40	1.109			
Total	6193.000	43				
Corrected Total	167.860	42				

a., R value =.858, R Squared = .736 (Adjusted R Squared = .722)

Table 1 summarises the one-way ANCOVA on students' achievement in SPAT. The result revealed a significant difference between the mean performance of pupils taught speaking mastery using the role-play teaching method and those taught using the traditional method. ($F=64.432$, $p=.000$). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis was approved, and the null hypothesis was invalidated. The result also shows the partial Eta squared estimate, a measure of the effect size of

.617. This implies that treatment accounted for 61.7 per cent of the variance observed in the post-test scores regarding the influence of the role-play learning strategy on pupils' speaking skills. The R-value of.858 shows a positive relationship between the variables, which results in an R-squared value of.736. This suggested that about 73.6 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable (pupils' speaking skills) can be accounted for by pretest.

Hypothesis two: Gender does not significantly

Influence pupils' performance in speaking skills when taught using the role-play teaching method. The independent variable in this hypothesis is gender, while the dependent variable is pupil speaking skills. A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was adopted and the result is presented in table 2.

Table 1: One-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the influence of gender on pupils' speaking skills using the role-play teaching method (N=21)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	.456a	2	.228	.134	.876	.015
Intercept	111.613	1	111.613	65.469	.000	.784
Pretest	.140	1	.140	.082	.777	.005
Gender	.358	1	.358	.210	.652	.012
Error	30.687	18	1.705			
Total	3899.000	21				
Corrected Total	31.143	20				

a. R Squared = .015 (Adjusted R Squared = -.095)

Table 2 summarizes the one-way ANCOVA achievement, which means a score for male and female students exposed to various treatments. The findings above showed no statistically substantial difference between the male and female students' mean scores at 0.05 alpha levels ($F=.210$; $p=.652$). Because speaking abilities were taught to students using a role-playing learning technique, the null hypothesis was not rejected because there was no discernible difference in the mean score between male and female students.

4. Discussion

The finding of the first hypothesis revealed a significant difference between the mean performance of pupils taught speaking skills using the role-play teaching method and those taught using the traditional way. Role-play is essential in teaching speaking because it allows pupils to practice communication in different social contexts and indifferent social roles. The pupils can be more motivated and challenged

to communicate using English daily because they have to practice in the classroom. According to Brown and Yule (2014), speaking is an interactive process that combines information production, reception, and processing. The setting in which it takes place, including the participants, their shared experiences, the physical betterment, and the objective of speaking, determines its shape and intention.

The finding is in line with Harmer (2009). They stated that extensive and intensive listening is necessary as it helps pupils improve their listening or speaking skills and get a better input of language when pupils are taught using the role-play method (Harmer, 2009). It helps pupils develop values by modelling and using real-life examples. This is supported by Rogers and Evans (2008), who listed three reasons to use role-plays in class to improve speaking skills, which include: (a) most teachers who used this technique have noticed that it helps pupils to improve social skills to communicate with others; (b) it helps pupils to develop their creativity and imagination, and (c) it helps teachers and pupils to reinforce learning. In the beginning, pupils of the elementary level felt afraid of speaking in class, but everything changed after using role-plays with them.

The results are consistent with Ashok's (2015) assertion that role-playing fosters the development of communication, language, and social skills when students work together as a team, express their ideas through acting out and making sense of real-life scenarios and improves speaking and listening abilities. The result is consistent with experimental research conducted by Kusnierek, Anna Leszno, and Poland (2015), whose main goal was to determine whether role-play activities contribute to the development of students' speaking skills in the ELT classroom and found a significant influence of role-play methods on speaking skills.

The finding agrees with Eklova, Ilona and Bruno (2017). They examined the effect of the role-play technique on pupils' communication skills in the Czech Republic and found that role-play significantly influences pupils' speaking and oral expression skills.

Chen (2013) applied a role-playing strategy to enhance learners' writing and speaking skills in English studies courses using Facebook and Skype as learning tools and found that a role-play teaching strategy significantly influences speaking skills. Bharathy (2017) examined the effectiveness of role-play in enhancing the Speaking Skills of Tertiary Level Learners in India and found role-play activities to improve speaking skills among the learners.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that gender does not significantly influence pupils' performance in speaking skills when taught using the role-play teaching

method. The finding contradicted that of Corneliussen (2018), who researched and applied the role-play technique to encourage pupils to develop learning skills in Zamfara State and found a significant difference in male and female pupils learning skills based on role-play teaching methods. The finding disagreed with the result of Yebe (2013) applied the role-playing strategy to enhance learner skills in English in Yobe State and found that role-play teaching methods significantly influence pupils' learning skills based on gender in favour of male pupils.

The finding disagreed with the discovery of Yee (2016), who examined the influence of role-playing on pupils' academic performance and found that males significantly performed better in speaking skills than their female counterparts. According to Tannen (2019), girls often play in small groups, where their games seldom have winners or losers. They often use suggestions and do not try to gain a higher status through their actions.

On the other hand, boys often play in larger groups with a more structured hierarchy with leaders. Females are more cooperative in their conversations, work harder to establish equality between people, and are often tentative, using more hedges and qualifiers than men." Collister (2016) conducted a conversation analysis from chat logs in World of War craft. She did not only focus on gender but other linguistic findings and found no significant difference in gender in the acquisition of learning skills when using the role-play method. According to Frost (2010), role-play is essential for the child's development and learning. Conscious use of play to promote the development and education of each child should be an omnipresent activity in preschool, irrespective of gender.

5. Conclusion

Because of the findings of this study, the following conclusion was drawn; the performance of students who learned speaking skills through role-playing differs significantly from those who discovered those using traditional methods. Also, gender does not considerably influence pupils' performance in speaking skills when conducted using the role-play teaching method. Role play is a learning strategy that serves as a strategy to help learners organize their cognitive frameworks into more powerful integrated patterns. It arouses pupils' interest and .motivate them to learn speaking skills.

6. Recommendations

The following suggestions have been made in light of the study's findings.

- i) The role-play instructional method should be adopted in primary schools to improve the acquisition of speaking skills.
- ii) Teachers should properly plan and organize role-play teaching methods to ensure the expected result of high performance without minding the challenges associated with using the learning techniques.
- iii) More attention should be given to pupils irrespective of gender as a way of sustaining their interest as this will lead to improvement of speaking skills.

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Citation of this Article:

Undie Ushinyin Josephine, Ekpenyong Effiong Ibok, Okon Emilia Etim, "Effect of Role-Playing on Pupils' Speaking Skills in Childhood Education in Cross River State, Nigeria" Published in *International Research Journal of Innovations in Engineering and Technology - IRJIET*, Volume 7, Issue 4, pp 202-207, April 2023. Article DOI <https://doi.org/10.47001/IRJIET/2023.704030>
