

THE EFFECTS OF ROLE PLAYING ON ENGLISH SPEAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in the context of adult learners with low English proficiency enrolling in a Bachelor of Political Science Program in a Rajabhat University, Thailand. The purpose of the study was to investigate the extend of the learners gain in speaking skill improvement after the use of role playing as part of a language subject in the program. The study used an experimental posttest only design with one group of the participants receiving an intervention, which is role-playing, designed to cultivate English speaking skill necessary for law enforcement. Data were analyzed with percentage, means, and standard deviation. Study tools included communicative-language-teaching lesson plans, and an indirect language test paper in the form of multiple-choice questions in the situations arising while they are on duty. The test determined whether and to what extent grammatical form and grammatical meaning had an effect on use of English after instruction. The results of the study presented empirical evidence in support of the validity of the two underlying constructs operationalized in the role playing used in class. The study had both theoretical and pedagogical implications in addition to implication with respect to accountability.

Keywords: English speaking skill, Professional development, Law enforcement officers

INTRODUCTION

The role of English has become crucial for Thailand due to the fact that improving communicative abilities in English for Thais provides them access to resources and better opportunities for education and socioeconomic success, as well as job advancement. Moreover, the role of English has internationally become more crucial for the country, as well as the other nine neighboring countries in the member countries of the ASEAN economic community (Association of Southeast Asian Nation: ASEAN) [1]. This is because English was adopted as the official working language in the community, and the fluency of it provides Thais for the free movement of trade, labor, and capital economy within the religion. Therefore, in order to effectively compete with other countries in the religion, Thailand does need to develop English communicative skills for its people, who are now considered at low level proficiency, when compared to those of the neighboring countries [2]. Recently, on the 2018 Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) the country ranked 64th out of 88 countries with an average scores 48.54 and labeled as low proficiency [3]. The limited ability of communication in the language lessens the opportunity of Thailand to be more internationalized and progresses cooperation between the country and the international community.

To maintain the country's competitive position in the world economy, Thai government formulated the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017 – 2021) that cross-section of society must comply with, and under which any government must be followed. This 5-year plan places an emphasis on trade liberalization, in which sources of raw materials, labor and association of markets with higher-purchasing power countries (e.g., China, South Africa, and Russian) lead to capital inflow into the Thai production sector, particularly the electronics and automobiles and parts industries, as well as hospitality and services sector including hotels, transportation, cruise line, and tourism. A number of Foreign direct investment (FDI) are drawn into enterprises operated under the management of Thai and foreign investors. Communication and transactions of these enterprises are mostly done in English. However, Thais show skills and knowledge mismatches in relations to what is demanded by the labor market according to the employer survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor in 2015. A large proportion of both semi-skilled and skilled Thai workforces demonstrate lower-than-expected performance in terms of English language, computing, mathematics, communication, management and occupation competency [4].

Tourism is a growing business and becoming more competitive. The travel industry in Thailand has enjoyed such a rapid growth, and the number of travelers from different countries has continued to increase and widespread attractions all over the country. It is therefore undeniable that problem of crimes and manipulations of tourists have been rising at the same time as well. The Royal Thai Police is an organization that has been set up to suppress crime and to prevent criminal problems from endangering any foreign tourist, to facilitate and provide both Thai and international tourist with security, as well as to offer general services in addition of specific ones administered by the local police organization. According to the functions and responsibilities of the police officers, it is clearly seen that knowledge of English as an international language is crucial for their job performance. It is because “English is needed for people who work and will work in the future in tourism, and the civil services.” [5]. The mastery of English will enable the officers to provide international travelers safety, convenience and assistance as defined by the initial purpose of the foundation of the Royal Thai Police. In return, the good image of Thailand will be further enhanced because their well-being and interest will always be protected when being in the country.

To enhance the communicative skill, English speaking skill in particular, role-play activities were selected as the focus of this current study with an aim to promote acquisition of the skill via the uses of language, and bring elements of the outside world into the language workshop as part of this study. The method has been widely used in language classrooms, and accepted as an effective method in foreign language education [6]. Through role-play, language learners practice English in communicative situations relevant to their interest or language needs outside class. They do not only do drills and pre-communicative exercises in class, but interact and communicate with their peers when they use the language patterns they are studying.

Objective To examine to what extent the effects of role playing have on English speaking in the context of a professional development program designed for law enforcement officers

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized quasi-experimental (One-group Post-Test Only) design with its aim to examine a causal link between the treatment condition, namely the role-play activities, and observed outcomes, namely English speaking skill. Academic achievement scores of the learners participating in the study were collected to make inferences about their development of English speaking skill over time.

A. Participants

30 police officers enrolling in POS2208 Local Politics Comparative in ASEAN Countries in 2018 academic year in a Rajabhat University, Thailand voluntarily participated in the study. The course was a part of the Bachelor of Public Administration Program in the University.

B. Research instruments

The instruments used in this study were:

1) two lesson plans with the emphasis on manipulation of the language forms (structure and vocabulary) presented in the conversation relevant to the job performance of law enforcement officers and role playing requiring to manipulate the taught forms in the situations found in working context;

2) an indirect academic achievement test on speaking in the form of multiple-choice questions. The test consisted of a stem and four alternative answers, among which are one correct answer and the others incorrect answers. The stem presented situations (e.g., conversation of between a police officer and a tourist reporting lost items at a police station) with a question asking test takers to choose an answer that is grammatically correct and socially appropriate.

C. Data collection procedure

This study is an examination of one particular setting of an English workshop for Thai police officers in a Bachelor of Political Science Program in a Rajabhat University, Thailand. The data collection methods and procedures that were used in the current study is presented as follows:

a) After the permission given by the Program chairperson, researcher as an invited guest speaker in the subject contacted the sampling via the program coordinator. Details of the language workshop itinerary were given to a class helper and distributed to participants. The sampling attended the workshop for four days in two consecutive weeks on voluntarily basis. The time period of attendance is limited (only to 2 days a week for 2

weeks) due to the tight timeline of the course, within which activities were ordered and established in advanced. Adjustment of the timeline for the extension of workshop was not possible.

b) The researcher ran a two-week language workshop. A balanced between pre-communicative and communicative activities were made in the way that the former prepared the learners to handle the language rules, and the latter enabled them to use the structures in role playing.

c) An indirect academic achievement test on speaking was given to assess the extent of the learners gain in speaking skill improvement after the use of role playing as part of a language subject in the program. The test was in the form of multiple-choice questions.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented according to the research objective: To what extent the effects of role playing have on English speaking in the context of an English for Specific Purposes program designed for law enforcement officers. Descriptive statistics (frequency count, percentage, means and standard deviation) were calculated in order to obtain information on the participants' speaking performance and to examine to what extent the scores from the assessment provided evidence for making inferences about the development over time.

The participants were 30 police officers enrolling in a Bachelor of Political Science Program in 2018 academic year in a Rajabhat University, Thailand. Among 30 participants attending the workshop for four days in two consecutive weeks at a Rajabhat University, it was reported that 25 out of 30 respondents earned academic achievement scores that met the 70% target attainment. From Table 1.

Table 1
Academic achievement of the respondents' English speaking skill against 70% target attainment

No.	Academic achievement scores (N=20)	Percentage	Academic achievement scores (N=20)
1	18	90	Pass
2	18	90	Pass
3	15	75	Pass
4	18	90	Pass
5	17	85	Pass
6	17	85	Pass
7	17	85	Pass
8	14	70	Fail
9	14	70	Fail
10	20	100	Pass
11	20	100	Pass
12	20	100	Pass
13	15	75	Pass
14	18	90	Pass
15	18	90	Pass
16	18	90	Pass
17	17	85	Pass
18	14	70	Fail
19	18	90	Pass
20	18	90	Pass
21	14	70	Pass
22	17	85	Fail
23	17	85	Pass
24	17	85	Pass
25	20	100	Pass
26	20	100	Pass
27	14	70	Fail
28	20	100	Pass
29	15	75	Pass
30	15	75	Pass

Note: The scores that are 14 or greater than that are considered “pass”.
The scores that are 14 or less than that are considered “fail”.

Table 1 illustrated academic achievement of the respondents’ English speaking skill against the 70% target attainment. They are assessed on the correct usage in sentence-level construction and knowledge of appropriate language use (e.g., knowing what setting officers need to be formal, how to express politeness, how to address tourists correctly, what terms are politically correct). Scores of the former is expected to yield the inferences about linguistic competence dealing with vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and those of the later is expected to give inferences about sociolinguistic competence concerning social rules and proper oral practices for individuals. Out of 30 respondents, 25 respondents (83% of the total participants) earn the scores of 14 or greater, and only 5 of the 30 (23% of the participants) earn less than 14. To be specific, there are 5 respondents (16.66%) whose scores are below 14 points; 12 respondents (40%) whose scores are within the range of 15 points – 17 points; 13 (43.33%) respondents whose score are within the range of 18 points – 20 points. From Table 2.

Table 2
The average mean score and standard deviation (S.D.) of the respondents’ English speaking skill

Number of the respondents (N = 30)	Average mean score (X) by group	Standard Deviation (S.D.)
30	17.1	2.06

Table 2 illustrated the average mean score and standard deviation (S.D.) of the respondents’ scores on English speaking skill. The average mean score by the group of the 30 participants is 17.1. The number represents a range of scores that is commonly achieved by majority of the officers in the study. This score serves as a guideline for one’s to be compared to those of the majority. It also appears that standard deviation of the scores is 2.06. The number indicates that the scores tend to be close to the mean of the set, not spreading out over a wider range of values.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this section, the results of the empirical study are discussed as they related to the research question posed. Findings are considered and followed by a discussion of the implications related to theory and pedagogy from the current literatures. The section concludes with possible directions for future studies.

A. Summary of the results

30 police officers enrolling in a Bachelor of Political Science Program in 2018 academic year in a Rajabhat University, Thailand participated in the current study. They voluntarily attended the workshop for four days in two consecutive weeks. The time period of attendance is limited (only to 2 days a week for 2 weeks) due to the tight timeline of the course, within which activities were ordered and established in advanced. it was reported that out of 30 respondents, 25 respondents (83% of the total participants) earned academic achievement scores that met the 70% target attainment, and only 5 of the 30 (23% of the participants) failed to meet the target. The average mean score by the group of the participants is 17.1, and that standard deviation of the scores is 2.06. The number indicates that the scores tend to be close to the mean of the set.

B. Discussion of the implications

Based on the findings, the effects of role playing on English speaking in the context of an English for Specific Purposes program designed for law enforcement officers can derive from the followings:

a) The two lesson plans were designed to balance between pre-communicative and communicative activities. A sequence of two types activities was introduced in a rung on the pedagogical ladder. A balanced between pre-communicative and communicative activities were made in the way that the former prepared the learners to handle the language rules for actual communication in the occupational context, and the latter enabled them to use the structures in role playing. Role plays were designed in a way that grammatical structures were recycled with more complex variations, and the learners used the structures naturally and not artificially. They were given interval time breaks for practice to internalize those taught patterns at the end of units.

b) Role play involves spontaneity. It adds inventiveness to language lessons, allowing learners to think at higher cognitive levels. While traditional method of teaching foreign languages relies heavily on reception, memorization, and memorization and acted out, or read aloud, they bore learners and possibly lead them to withdraw from class activities. Doing role play, learners experiment with words and structures taught in class, venturing into the unknown, and testing hypothesis about the target language. They also learn to projected expectancies and informed guess [7]. In plain language, through role play, learners learn to be inventive, managing to get message across without exact words, through paraphrases [8].

c) Grammatical patterns were learned at the discourse level. Learners do not only do drills and controlled practices (i.e., learners practice target language in a limited form), but also they interact and communicate (e.g., in free practice involving learners producing language using target content freely) with peers. The learners use the language patterns they are studying. Target forms (vocabulary and structural units) are presented as a whole, in a situation, not chopped up in parts, encouraging learner to go behind the words and structures and onto the action. Learners are aware of the fact that forms can only take meaning when they enter a particular text. There is no fixed meaning to every form, but a variety of meanings to every form [8]. For instance, students would use “stop” to ask for interruption in a conversation if the word is presented individually. Nevertheless, the words are presented in context (e.g., dialogues of a police officer calling tourists’ attention while they talking among the others), learners will learn to articulate “Excuse me, mam”, and not “Stop talking for a second.” With such an utterance, there is nothing grammatically wrong, but it is not socially appropriate.

D. Future work

a) Teaching and learning for adult language learners require course designers adopt specific work approaches to select language content, as well as develop soft skill (i.e., social interaction skills) and identified need in the specific field, such as those of the law enforcement.

b) To help understand language use among those in occupations, it is suggested that Systematic Functional Linguistics provides course designers an analysis framework. The framework permits the understanding on language functions (i.e., what language does and how it does it) [9]. That allows course designers for the description and interpretation of texts [10].

c) Future research area can broaden the scope of occupational areas under scrutiny. It would be interesting to carry out similar study in the future since the use of role play is widely accepted in language classrooms, as a possible comparative study.

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