

The Role of Group Discussion and Role-Play Techniques in Promoting Oral Communication: A Case of Second Year English Majors Students at Omdurman Ahlia University-Sudan

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Abstract: *This study aimed to investigate empirically the effect of classroom discussion and role-play techniques on promoting English majors' oral communicative competence. The population of this study consists of 152 second-year students majoring in English at Omdurman Ahlia University. Out of the 152 students, 148 participants were randomly chosen. Checklists and observation notes were used as instruments for data collection. The data was linguistically and statistically analyzed using the ANOVA scale. The main findings of the study indicated significant differences in second-year English majors' oral communicative competence before and after the intervention of using classroom discussion and role-play techniques.*

Keywords: Role-play, classroom discussions, communicative competence

1. Introduction

It is observed that teaching methods and techniques at university level do not encourage oral interaction, and most students don't get the chance to practice their language orally outside of the classroom. Although great efforts are made to facilitate the practice of language at this level, it is still an area that requires improvement. This study aims to investigate experimentally the role of communicative techniques in enhancing learners' oral communication skills, emphasizing classroom discussion and role-play techniques. Thus, this study attempts empirically and objectively to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the significant differences and the level of promotion in the students' oral communicative competence prior to and post being exposed to teaching through classroom discussion and role-play techniques?
- 2) To what extent does the implementation of communicative method techniques, particularly classroom discussion and role-play, facilitate meaningful communicative situations and provide student involvement through real communicative activities?
- 3) How do classroom discussion and role-play techniques create motivating situations for students to discuss different topics and play various roles in oral communication?

To answer the above questions, three hypotheses were set out for this study:

- 1) There is a significant difference in the level of promotion in the students' oral communicative competence prior to and post being exposed to teaching through classroom discussion and role-play techniques.

- 2) The implementation of communicative methods techniques, particularly classroom discussion and role play, facilitates students' engagement in real and meaningful communicative situations.
- 3) Students who are taught through classroom discussion and role-playing techniques are more motivated to discuss different topics and play various roles in oral communication.

2. Conceptual Background

The conceptual background of this study views the following issues: classroom discussion and role-play techniques, group instruction, group work, and students' oral interaction and role-play activity in oral communication, respectively. It seems that oral performance is a critical component that reflects the development of language in general. Promoting students' oral performance demands certain techniques to foster their confidence while they produce utterances. In addition, teachers have to think mostly about how to reduce students' apprehension about oral communication. In this regard Mahadi, (2015), states that teaching English to non-native speakers necessitates a variety of techniques and strategies in order to make students feel at ease while learning. Also Howat, (1984 P: 192), claims that "learning to speak a language is an intuitive process for which human beings have a natural capacity that can be wakened provided only that the proper conceptions exist." Simply, there are three such conditions: someone to talk to; something to talk about; and a desire to understand and make yourself understand. Nation (1989), states that group work provides a motivating environment in which the learners co-construct and examine their knowledge of language. Porter and Grant, (1992) add that participating in small-group discussion based on interest in the topic creates a good chance of being an effective participant. Lynch,

(1996) explains the role of the classroom environment in stimulating oral communication competence. He asserts that teachers have to know when to relax their control of classroom interaction. Al Alami, (2014) stresses the vital role of communicative language teaching activities, particularly pair and group work. He also emphasizes the potential of other practices that are likely to suit each local context by itself. These practices involve cultural and even physical settings and tasks that are suitable for small groups or for a whole class format. Lynch, (1996) mentions that in a setting of group work, the teachers have to decide who works with whom, so as to avoid the problems that may appear as a result of homogeneity. In addition, Lynch, (1996) considers cultural background an important element in group instruction. He indicates that a classroom in most of the world is a limited setting, where learners come from a single cultural background and share a common first language. In this case, the teacher lacks the option to put two speakers together with different first languages. In the same regard, Kharu and Gandhi, (2007) indicate that "group discussion has become a popular mode of interview and assessment. They explain three major aims for group discussion in terms of testing the following aspects: firstly, to test the candidates' knowledge of the subject; secondly, their ability to communicate with others; and thirdly, their ability to cope with others in a group. Long (1996: 452) believes that interaction allows learners to bridge the gap between target language forms and their first language. Crawford et al, (2015) add that, the pressure to demonstrate effective learning in colleges and universities, many teachers attempt to cope with group work in their classes. A variety of studies suggest that cooperative grouping has high value since it represents one of the most reliable ways to boost learner achievement in the classroom. Rao and Stupans, (2012) indicate that the role play, along with gaming and computer stimulation, is regarded as a kind of stimulation and has been described as either interactive techniques, whereby students act out the role of a certain character in a particular situation according to a set of rules, or non-interactive, whereby a presentation is made by an individual who has adopted a particular character. They also add that, role-play can be a popular teaching method by which learners can stimulate language acquisition. Setvens, (2015) conducted a study to support some views about the effectiveness of role-play activities. The result showed that role play can be counterproductive for weak or unprepared students, although it depends on a teacher to form and prepare it to impact the learning outcome. Contradictory, Widdowson, (1990) argues for the possibility of creating situations that facilitate learning without considering the role of the teacher. He emphasizes the importance of both the teacher and the learner in their respective roles. Cook (2009: 249) shows that in a guided-role play technique, students improvise dialogues around a certain issue without information gaps. Cook, (2009) claims that, through particular guided role plays, students might try to satisfy their communicative needs by interacting socially, in terms of buying tickets, requesting, or asking for the time of a train, and so on. Anderson et al (2001), argue that role-play technique is considered to be effective in achieving a variety of learning outcomes. Moreover, it is able to address cognitive abilities as well as "psychomotor" domains of learning.

3. Methodology

The population of this study consists of 152 second-year students majoring in English at Omdurman Ahlia University. Out of the 152 students, 148 participants were assigned, and randomly distributed to 14 small groups to facilitate the implementation of the activities. The participants were enrolled in an intensive English language course that included speaking and listening for a semester. Checklist, observation notes, and the videotaped transcription of the discussion were used as instruments for data collection. Pre- and post-checklists were used to measure five main criteria of the participants' performance: the degree of clarity, vocabulary selection, sentence structure, error correction, and comprehensibility at the end of the semesters. The pre-checklist was used without the participant being exposed to teaching through classroom discussion and role-play techniques. The same checklist was administered after the participants had been exposed to teaching through classroom discussion and role-playing techniques. A considerable time was spent observing students' oral performance during discussions and role-play activities, gathering as relevant information as possible. Then observation data was collected. The field notes of observation data described the activities as objectively as possible. The observation sought to provide oral information such as phrases, accents, and grammar, by listening to what students had said, how it was said, and what it implied. Thus, pronunciation, the use of related vocabulary, and other aspects of oral communicative competence were observed and treated in light of the questions and hypotheses of the study. For the purpose of data analysis, the participants' checklists were statistically distributed and calculated. The means and standard deviation of each component (the degree of clarity, vocabulary selection, sentence structure, error correction, and comprehensibility) were presented in separate tables in order to facilitate analysis. A T-test was used to compare the participants' scores in pre-intervention to their post-intervention scores. The basic strategy of the T-test is to compare the actual difference between the means of the participants' group in pre and post-intervention ($X_1 - X_2$).

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the data collected by the checklist before and after the intervention for the performance of the students in oral presentations, videotaped discussion, and observation notes analysis.

4.1 Analysis of the oral presentation results (pre-and post-intervention)

This section includes the analysis of data collected by the checklist tool to measure five main criteria of the participants' performance (clarity, vocabulary selection, grammar structures, error correction, and comprehensibility) and total oral performance scores pre-and post-intervention.

4.1.1 Criteria of the participants' performance

A. Clarity

Table 4.1: Paired Samples Statistics: Clarity.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	post	5.6622	148	1.61437	.13270
	pre	3.7838	148	1.74395	.14335

As seen in table (4.1) the number of students who were checked was 148. The mean of post intervention (5.7) is greater than the pre-intervention one (3.8).

Table 4.2: Paired Samples Test: clarity

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	post-pre	1.87838	1.74927	.14379	1.59422	2.16254	13.063	147	.000

As shows in table (4.2) above, $t(147) = 13.063$, $P = 0.000$. This shows that the level of Sig. is 0.000 which is less than 0.05.

The effect size is

$$ES = \text{Mean/Standard Deviation} = 1.87838/1.74927 = 1$$

This result indicates that, the participants are more able to provide information and ideas about various topics. Moreover, they looked for additional information to clarify and challenge their opinions. So they shaped the performance with their vast knowledge and beliefs about the world around them.

B. Vocabulary selection

Table 4.3: Paired Samples Statistics: Vocabulary selection

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	post	5.4324	148	1.47155	.12096
	Pre	3.7095	148	1.57900	.12979

As seen in table (4.3) above the mean of the post intervention (5.4) is greater than of the pre-intervention (3.7) one.

Table 4.4: Paired Samples Test: Vocabulary selection

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	post-pre	1.72297	1.60705	.13210	1.46192	1.98403	13.043	147	.000

In table (4.4) above, $t(147) = 13.043$, $P = 0.000$. This shows that the level of Sig. is 0.000 which is less than 0.05.

$$ES = \text{Mean/Standard Deviation} = 1.72297 / 1.60705 = 1.07$$

In terms of vocabulary selection component, the result

shows that, the participants expanded their vocabulary bank by using sophisticated phrases and sentences.

C. Grammar structures

Table 4.5: Paired Samples Statistics: Grammar structures

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Post intervention	4.0338	148	1.46346	.12030
	Pre intervention	2.7568	148	1.39299	.11450

Table (4.5) shows that, the mean of the post intervention (4.03) is greater than of the pre-intervention (2.76) one.

Table 4.6: Paired Samples Test: Grammar selection

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Post intervention Pre intervention	1.27703	1.62389	.13348	1.01323	1.54082	9.567	147	.000

Table (4.6) above shows, $t(147) = 9.567, P = 0.000$. This shows that the level of Sig. is 0.000 which is less than 0.05.

The effect size is

$$ES = \text{Mean/Standard Deviation} = 1.27703/1.62389 = 0.79$$

This reveals that in post intervention, the students succeeded to solve some difficulties in dealing with grammar in a form of social practice. They showed progress in understanding how to use tenses and other grammatical aspects correctly.

D. Error correction

Table 4.7: Paired Samples Statistics: Error correction

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	post intervention	3.3784	148	1.65124	.13573
	Pre intervention	2.2095	148	1.44398	.11869

Table (4.7) above shows that the mean of the post intervention (3.4) is greater than the pre-intervention (2.2) one.

Table 4.8: Paired Samples Test: Error correction

		Paired Differences				t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	post intervention-pre intervention	1.16892	1.71186	.14071	.89084	1.44700	8.307	147	.000

As seen in table (4.6) above, $t(147) = 8.307, P = 0.000$. This shows that the level of Sig. is 0.000 which is less than 0.05.

The effect size is

$$ES = \text{Mean/Standard Deviation} = 1.16892/1.71186 = 0.68$$

The result highlights that the promotion in students' error correction ability is obvious since the students are trying to produce the language spontaneously. The participants were allowed to reconsider inaccuracies and misconceptions as well as have opportunities to self-correction and clear up any confusion about the topic. The participants managed to correct their mistakes after the intervention techniques.

E. Comprehensibility

Table 4.9: Paired Samples Statistics: Comprehensibility

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	post intervention	6.1216	148	1.66968	.13725
	pre intervention	4.2297	148	1.98667	.16330

The mean of the post intervention scores (6.1) is higher than the mean of the pre-ones (4.2), as shown in Table (4.9).

Table 4.10: Paired Samples Test: Comprehensibility

		Paired Differences				t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Post intervention-pre intervention	1.89189	1.96962	.16190	1.57194	2.21185	11.685	147	.000

As in table (4.10) above, $t(147) = 11.685, P = 0.000$. This shows that the level of sig. is 0.000, which is less than 0.05.

The size of the effect is

$$ES = \text{Mean/Standard Deviation} = 1.89189/1.9662 = 0$$

4.1.2 Total oral performance scores pre-and post-intervention

Table 4.11: Paired Samples Statistics: Total scores of pre and post intervention

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	post intervention	24.6309	148	6.69242	.54826
	Pre intervention	16.6577	148	7.43692	.60926

As seen in Table (4.11), the mean of the post-intervention (24.6) is greater than the pre-intervention one (16.7) in relation to the five oral communicative components.

Table 4.12: Paired Samples Test: Total scores of pre-intervention and post intervention

		Paired Differences				t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	post intervention-pre intervention	7.97315	9.85431	.80730	6.37784	9.56847	9.876	148	.000

As in table (4.10) above, $t(148) = 9.876, P = 0.000$. This shows that the level of Sig. is 0.000 which is less than 0.05.

The effect size is

$$ES = \text{Mean/Standard Deviation} = 7.97315/9.85431 = 0.81$$

This is a large-sized effect, which means that the intervention has improved the performance of the students' a lot. The students' oral communicative skills are increased in terms of pronunciation, communication skills, and fluency. In this regard, the participants were more able to comprehend. Also, they were able to understand various ideas as presented in the topics.

Table 4.13: Summary of the Oral communicative competence five components

		Pre		Sig	Effect size
		Pre	Post		
1	Clarity	3.7838	5.6622	0.000	1.07
2	Vocabulary selection	3.7095	5.4324	0.000	1.07
3	Grammar structures	2.7568	4.0338	0.000	0.79
4	Error correction	2.2095	3.3784	0.000	0.68
5	Comprehensibility	4.2297	6.1216	0.000	0.96
6	Total	16.6577	24.6309	0.000	0.81

Table (4.13) above shows the following:

- All the means of the post-intervention are larger than the means of the pre-intervention.
- The level of sig. for all components is less than 0.05.
- The effect size is very great.

It can be concluded that classroom discussions and role-play techniques have affected a statistically significant difference in the communicative competence of the students after intervention than before.

4.2. Analysis of videotaped discussions

In this section, the participants were assessed to get a more detailed description of their participation and the acquisition of new communicative skills that featured their oral performance.

Table 4.14: Analysis of videotaped discussions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Weak	6	3.9	5.4	5.4
	Average	32	21.1	28.6	33.9
	Good	74	48.7	66.1	100.0
	Total	112	73.7	100.0	
Missing	System	40	26.3		
Total		152	100.0		

In the analysis of videotaped discussions, the participants' performance was rated according to three main levels: Weak, Average and Good. As seen in table (4.14) the

majority of the participants (66.1%) belong to the category of "good". Those who belong to the category (average) represent (28.6%). A very small minority of (5.4%) belong to the category of "weak." As appeared in the discussion sheet, the group participation is characterized by the command of communication skills and competence such as collecting data, distributing roles, and asking and answering questions. Hence, the participants' assessment indicates the promotion they gained during group discussion.

4.3 Observation notes analysis

Table 4.15: Observation notes Analysis of participants' activities)

In pairs	In group
Exchanging ideas and clarified definition of difficult words.	Guessing games
Practicing, repeating and using the patterns.	Information gap-exercises
Supply pronunciation, vocabulary, structure and information needed to express themselves.	Discussing topics and working together to solve problem pooling information
Personalized the dialogues	Rehearsal of real life situations and opportunities for real communication

Table (4.15) shows the observation notes analysis of participants' activities. The result of the analysis shows that, the activities of classroom discussion and role play provide the participants with more engagement in real-life communicative situations. It is noticed that much information has been shared as a result of classroom discussion and role-playing activities. The participants became more knowledgeable and skillful in gathering and sharing information from different resources. As has been observed, communicative techniques and activities such as group work and role-play performances make participants feel more at ease sharing ideas and exchanging personal experiences in groups. In class, the student's cultural background, thoughts, and beliefs were clearly expressed.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

The research questions are used to guide the analysis, interpretation, and synthesizing of data, which helps in viewing and establishing connections and links across the data items, categories, and patterns. A conceptual basis for the categories is identified and explained. The discussion includes the different aspects of oral communicative competence. First, it identifies the significant differences and the level of promotion in the five components of oral performance. Second, it emphasizes the impact of implementing communicative methods and techniques, particularly classroom discussion and role play, in facilitating meaningful communicative situations and

providing students with a high level of involvement in real communicative activities. Finally, it attempts to evaluate the influence of classroom discussion and role-play activities in overcoming students' oral communication problems as well as creating motivation.

Question 1: What are the significant differences and the level of promotion in the students' oral communicative competence prior and post-exposure to teaching through classroom discussion and role-play techniques?

The results of this study that the level of topic discussion and role-play participation has increased over time. This is due to the type of discussion and the interest in the topics. Depending on the type of activity, the participants' oral performance shows some improvement. As seen in table (4.13), in clarity, the participants' oral performance in post-intervention increased to (5.622) compared to (3.7838) in pre-intervention one. The participants got a better understanding of the world around them as they expanded their knowledge. Also, the results show that there is an increase in the amount of vocabulary produced by the participants in post-intervention performance and during their participation in the communicative activities. The mean (x) was (5.4324) in the post-intervention versus (3.7095) in the pre-intervention. The results also provide evidence that across two important techniques of communicative methods: classroom discussion and role-play, participants' achievement in the quality of everyday sentences increased from (2.7568) in pre-intervention compared to (4.0338) in post-intervention. Moreover, the results show that the participants' oral performance ability to correct errors increased to (3.5784) in post-intervention compared to (2.7568) in pre-intervention. The main effect of the comprehensibility level, as shown in table (4.13), rose to (6.1216) in post intervention, compared to 4.2297 in pre-intervention. The results support the first hypothesis: "There is a significant difference in the level of promotion in the students' oral communicative competence prior to and post being exposed to teaching through classroom discussion and role-play techniques."

Question 2: To what extent does the implementation of communicative method techniques, particularly classroom discussion and role-play, facilitate meaningful communicative interactions and provide involvement for students through real communicative activities?

The participants' checklists and observation notes at the time of discussion or role-play sessions showed that students believe and appreciate the way of getting them more involved in communicative activities. However, it is still concerning that not everyone actively participates in discussion and role-playing activities. The result agrees with Douglas (2000) that interaction needs total commitment, involvement, and intellectual and emotional responses to participate in situations of communication. Some of the participants were asked about the benefits of the course and the effect of activities on their oral performance. Some participants seemed to recognize that group discussion helped them to make connections with other students, strengthen their social relations, and improve their

communicative competence. Some other participants strongly believed that such activities provided them with extra information about various topics. Hence, the techniques of classroom discussion and role-play help interaction between the students and lead to more involvement and cooperation in learning. The results support the second hypothesis: "The implementation of communicative methods techniques, particularly classroom discussion and role play, facilitates students' engagement in real and meaningful communicative situations."

Question 3: How do classroom discussions and role-playing techniques create motivating situations for students to discuss different topics and play various roles?

The results show that classroom discussion and role-play activities provide the participants with a comfortable atmosphere to make them relaxed and to achieve their objectives in learning English. Moreover, they provide students with a driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process. It was observed that during the intervention, the participants' oral communicative competence was influenced by their willingness to participate, even in short conversations. Also, the participants showed true desire and enjoyment in relating their experiences to what they were doing. Moreover, the participants get involved in the discussion sessions and role-play sketches presented by their classmates. They showed capability and self-determination. Their reactions and behaviors were natural and characterized by laughter, smiles, and clapping. The results generated by the different instruments indicate that classroom discussion and role play increase participants' motivation towards meaningful interaction. In addition, these techniques create and maintain a sense of determination and confidence in being effective communicators. The results support the third hypothesis: "Students who are taught through classroom discussion and role-playing techniques are more motivated to discuss different topics and play various roles in oral communication."

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