



Regular Article

Using role-play strategy in reading on developing prep stage pupils' flexible thinking

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Abstract

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of role playing strategy in reading on developing prep stage pupils' flexible thinking and EFL performance The study adopted a quasi-experimental design (experimental). The sample of the study consisted of a group of (N=30) from the first year prep pupils. The researcher taught them by role playing strategy. The following instrument was used to achieve the question of the study: A prepost reading test and a pre/post flexible thinking test to measure the level of weakness of the pupils in learning reading. The current study indicated the importance of using role playing strategy on developing flexible thinking. The study reached to the positive strategy "role playing strategy. It helped pupils to pay their attentions with teachers because the teaching through new strategies is very interesting, and trains English teachers to use role playing strategy in their teaching. It makes teachers use new methods, which reduce teachers' efforts, make them guiders for pupils and make pupils participants in the class.

Key words: Role playing; Reading; Flexible thinking; prep stage.

Introduction

Language is a set of symbols being mainly used for communication. The symbols may be spoken or written. Language is an aspect of human behavior. In written form it is a long-term record of knowledge from one generation to the next while in spoken form it is a means of communication. Language is the key aspect of human intelligence. Reading is an important aspect of language learning. The learning of this skill is especially essential for acquiring a second language. This is also because most of the teaching-learning material is in the written form, either in the form of books or computer based material. Reading is beyond the mere recognition of words. It is a conscious thinking process whereby the reader applies various strategies to infer the intended meaning of the writer. Reading is the most important skill in English language from other language skills in acquiring language. If students are good in reading, they will be good in other language skills. For this reason, teachers of English language should focus on this skill. Educational researchers have found that there is a strong relation between reading and academic success. In other words, a student who is a good reader is more likely to do well in school and pass exams than a student who is a weak one. Grabe&Stoller,(2002,p13)

Good readers can understand the individual sentences and the organizational structure of a piece of writing. They can comprehend ideas, follow arguments, and detect implications. They know most of the words in the text already, but they can also determine the meaning of many of the unfamiliar words from the context – failing this, they can use their dictionary effectively to do so. In summary, good readers can extract from the writing what is important for the particular task they are employed in and they can do it quickly. Educational researchers have also found a strong relation between reading and vocabulary knowledge. In other words, students who have a large vocabulary are usually good readers. This is not very surprising, since the best way to acquire a large vocabulary is to read extensively, and if you read extensively you are likely to be or become a good reader.(Berardo, 2006,p54)

Many studies about teaching reading via using different strategies were done. Researchers have found that cooperative learning is a successful method in improving reading comprehension as found by Kitano and Lewis (2007), Gungor and Un Acikoz (2004). Other researchers believe that metacognitive strategies need to be explicitly taught in order for students to fully comprehend successfully (Eliers & Pinkley, 2006; Pope, 2007). Other studies suggested using pair loud reading on curing reading weakness and improving reading comprehension (El Eissawy, 2002). The study of Taha,(2003) aimed to find out the effectiveness of using a suggested program via instructional multimedia on developing pupils' creative reading skills and their tendency towards it .The study of (Attallah,2003) aimed to find out the effect of using a suggested program via using linguistic games on curing third primary pupils' reading weakness, also the study of (Hamad,2005) aimed to find out the effect of using role playing strategy on eighth grade pupils' English achievement. According to literature, there are different strategies that have been proven to be effective in teaching reading . Roleplaying strategy is one of these. Role playing is a modification of one's behaviour to accord with a desired personal image, as to impress others or conform to a particular environment. It can be also defined as a method of psychotherapy aiming at changing attitudes and behavior, in which participants act out designated roles relevant to real-life situations". (Webster's College Dictionary,2010).The joy of role playing is that students can become any one they like for a short time! *The president*, the queen, a millionaire ,the choice is endless. Students can also take on the opinions of someone else. For and against debates can be used and the class can split into those who are expressing views in favour and those who are against the theme. Imaginary situations-functional language for a multitude of scenarios can be activated and practiced through role- play. Role-play is a teaching strategy that emphasizes the social nature of learning, and sees the c-operative behavior as stimulating students both socially and intellectually (Joyce and Weil,2000).Role-playing as a teaching strategy offers several advantages for both teacher and student. First, student's interest in the topic is raised. Research has shown that: integrating experiential learning activities in the classroom increases interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content. (Poorman,2002) Secondly, there is increased involvement on the part of the students in a role-Play lesson. Students are not passive recipients of the instructor's knowledge Rather, they take an active part. (Fogg,2001)

It has been proven in different studies the effectiveness of role playing strategy. It can help develop students' thinking skills. Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity is characterized by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. Creativity involves two

processes: thinking, then producing. If you have ideas, but don't act on them, you are imaginative but not creative. (Naiman,2006)

Students use flexible thinking both for learning to read and for reading to learn. When they are starting out, flexible thinking enables them to understand how the same letter combination can make different sounds (such as the "ough" in words like *enough* and *plough*). As kids start reading books to get information, they use flexible thinking to understand what information is important and what details are just used to add to a description. Flexible thinking is also what helps them understand the perspectives of different characters in a story. If a student is rigid in thinking, identifying the correct pronunciation for words and interpreting what is being read seem to be a big problem. A student is surely 'being creative when through drama and role-play, being able to show a personal response to a dramatic, if pretend, situation. Drama games and skills enable students to 'express and communicate 'their own ideas in a fun, imaginative and creative way. In an increasingly technological world students are spoon-fed with acceptable responses through exposure to passive entertainment in the form of television programs and computer games. The world of drama and role-play can provide a vital medium for the development of imagination and imaginative thinking. (Adams, 2005)

Role-Play helps develop each student's unique perspective and individual style of creative expression. Plays express the student's personal, unique responses to the environment. A play is a self-expressive activity that draws on the child's powers of imagination. A play is open-ended, free-form and children have the freedom to try out new ideas as well as build on and experiment with the old. (Aziz&Saad,2001)

Context of the Problem: As the researcher works as a teacher at the preparatory stage he observed that students are suffering from a problem with reading. In order to be sure of the existence of the problem of the present study , the researcher conducted a pilot study using a diagnostic test and two questionnaires mainly to investigate the extent of obstacles which pupils face during reading especially what is related to flexible thinking and how good are pupils at reading or what is known as language performance ,also, the extent of English language teachers' knowledge of role playing strategy and creative thinking skills, especially flexible thinking. The following table can best illustrate the statistical analysis of the study sample in the diagnostic test.

Table (1)

Statistical description of the study sample in the diagnostic test

<i>MEAN</i>	<i>MEDIUM</i>	<i>VARIANCE</i>	<i>LOWSCORE</i>	<i>HIGHSCORE</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
6,44	7	13,	2	11	53.6

Table (1) shows that 80% of pupils have a lack in flexible thinking towards what they read and weakness in answering flexible thinking questions. As for teachers, the questionnaires which included 30 teachers showed the following results:

71.5% of teachers haven't enough information about role playing strategy whether its advantages or disadvantages. At the same time they suffer from a lack of information about creative thinking skills especially flexible thinking and methods to develop it.28, 5 % of teachers have a good deal of knowledge about role playing strategy and flexible thinking.

The researcher found out the following consequences:-

- 1- Prep stage students suffer from their inability to read well.
- 2- Prep stage students suffer from their inability to answer thinking question.
- 3- Students suffer from a great delicacy of flexible thinking in reading.
- 4- There is a great gap in teachers' recognition of role- playing strategy.
- 5- The pilot study teachers have little information about creative thinking.
- 6- The pilot study teachers don't know how to develop pupils' flexible thinking.

Statement of the problem: Based on literature review, the results obtained from the previously mentioned pilot studies (a diagnostic test &two questionnaires), and the researcher observation, it is emphasized that the first year prep stage pupils need to develop their flexible thinking in reading via a new and an interesting method in teaching reading using role- playing strategy .Therefor, the problem of the current study represents as follows:

First year prep stage pupils' lack of flexible thinking towards what they read. Pupils often suffer from intellectual dogma in case of exposure to flexible thinking questions. At the same time they suffer from a

failure in their reading language performance due to the traditional methods of teaching reading.

Objectives, Questions & Hypotheses

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks hard to achieve the following purpose-

1- Identifying the effect of using role-playing strategy on developing flexible thinking.

Questions of the Study

The current study is an attempt to solve the following main question:-

1- What is the effect of using role- playing strategy in reading on developing flexible thinking?

Out of this question, the following sub question is sprung:-

1- What is the effect of using role- playing strategy in reading on developing flexible thinking?

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the study group in the pre post reading test in favor of the post test.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the study group in the pre post flexible thinking test in favor of the post scale.

Significances of the Study

This study seems to be important for: -

1- Pupils: This study may help to:

Provide students with an opportunity to learn reading in an enjoyable atmosphere. □

Increase their positive participation in all educational activities.

Enjoy expressing different learnt topics and daily life situations through play.

Correct some reading pronunciation habits.

2- Teachers: This study may help to:

Provide EFL teachers with an effective teaching strategy that cope with pupils' abilities and interests.

Encourage teachers to be more effective and friendly when participating in performing roles.

Change teachers' roles from just as bearers of knowledge to facilitators for the educational process.

Develop their leading and guiding role in managing the affairs well.

3-Stake holders: This study may help to:

Help the stake holders of the educational process to train teachers how to use new methods of teaching that can arouse creative thinking and develop other skills.

Guide those who are responsible for the means of assessment to use new specifications in tests to measure the creative thinking skills.

4- Curriculum developers: The study may help to:

Guide Curriculum developers to set various topics which can be easily explained through active learning strategies especially role-pay.

Design curriculum developing creative thinking skills via using role-play strategy.

5- Other Researchers: The study may help them to:

Provide other researchers with new ideas that help them to conduct other studies in the field of teaching English language by using other learning strategies.

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design employing one group. The materials of the research have applied on the group pre and post the experiment. The researcher taught the group of the study by using role playing strategy.

This design included the following variables:

1. Independent variable; role playing strategy.
2. Dependent variable; flexible thinking.

Population

The population of the study consisted of 1st grade preparatory pupils at Beni- Hani preparatory schools in Beni Suef. Directorate enrolled in the first semester of the academic year (2019-2020).

Participants

The participants were randomly selected from Beni- Hani preparatory schools in Beni Suef. A group of 1st grade preparatory stage pupils. There was only one group (the study group).

Definition of Terms

1- Role-playing strategy:

Kumar (2011:p12) defines role-play is a powerful and effective teaching method for children and adult and can be adapted to deliver any learning objectives from simple to complex concepts. It really lends well to practice communication skills, debate complex ethical issues or explore attitudes and beliefs.

"An instructional method done by performing a situation which resembles a certain problem by the pupils and directed by teachers. Through performing the role, pupils can embody other characters, incidents of various situations while other pupils watch and criticize. After finishing the teacher holds a guided debate in which all pupils share." (AlGalad,2008,p151)

Nunan (2005:p52) defines that role play is a speaking activity in which the learners take the part of other people and interact using the characteristics of those people ,for instance; age, gender occupation ,and so on. Also explain that role play includes a particular communicative task, for example negotiating a purchase, solving a problem, making a reservation, getting information, and so on.

"A method of teaching via performing areal behavior in an unreal situation, some materials are used during performance to help play the role perfectly, the role of the teacher is to be a supervisor and a facilitator on this method (**Saad, 2005,p 20**)

The operational definition

"A teaching strategy that provides a group problem-solving situation in which students enjoy performing roles to practise the language and develop reading skills.

2-Reading.

Berardo defines it as "Decoding symbols and transferring printed ones into sounds to form an aural spoken language" (Berardo,2006,p106)

According to Kavalaiauskiene (2005), reading is a complex cognitive activity,and its development can be promoted by two approaches –extensive and intensive reading practice. Extensive reading is known to develop word recognition and general language proficiency, while intensive reading deals with detailed comprehension and teaching reading strategies.

Grabe and Stoller (2001) offered a definition of reading:" The ability to read requires that the reader draws information from a text and combines it with the existed information and expectation.

The operational definition

“Acognitive process based on decoding letters to form meanings and reach the cognition stage.”

3- Flexible thinking

“It concerns instantaneous consideration of multiple perspectives and the ability to make changes in one's thoughts or beliefs (**Garner, 2009**).

“The ability of an individual in a group to collectively assess her/his own behavior, and make the required adjustments for effective functioning” (**McComb, Green, & Dale Compton, 2007**).

The operational definition

“A key competency necessary for adapting to new learning environments, for transferring knowledge to new situations, and for understanding and solving unfamiliar problems”

Review of literature

The purpose of **Make (2013)** was using scripted role-play activities to improve Thai primary-level students’ oral English performance. The study attempted to determine: a) whether scripted role-play could enhance primary-level students’ oral performance; b) which features of the students’ talks could be improved through the use of scripted role-play, and c) whether the features improved could be retained in their talks after one month of no practice. The participants in this study were 20grade six students from Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School in China, S, in academic year 2012. They were individually interviewed to assess their oral English performance before the treatment and after ten weeks of scripted role-play practice.

The students’ interviews and role-play conversation Analysis principles and rated in the following features: pronunciation, speech melody, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and response. The research instruments employed in this study were 1) teaching materials; 2) lesson plans used in teaching; and 3) oral communication tasks, namely, the pre-test, the role-play activities, the post-test, and the daily test. The research findings based on statistical and CA analysis showed that the students’ oral English performance considerably improved through the use of scripted role-play activities. Frequently, being engaged in role-play conversation, the students improved most on the promptness of their response to preceding turns, while speech melody appeared to be the most challenging feature to enhance due to

pervasive mother-tongue interference. The findings additionally confirmed the performance improvement of every target speech feature after a period of one month. However, the degree of the performance improvement significantly decreased in three features, i.e., pronunciation, speech melody, and response. It was suggested that pronunciation, speech melody, and prompt responses require more frequent guided practice than other speech features for more sustainably effective oral communication.

The purpose of **Mc-Philomy (2014)** was to gain understanding on how role playing and simulation techniques could be used in teaching grammar to students of English as a Second Language (ESL). The study focused on exploring the effects of these interactive techniques on students' learning experiences and used them as tools to build their confidence and increase motivation in the process of learning grammar. The study was conducted using a classical content analysis approach.

The participants were videotaped during the interviews. Classroom observations and after-class discussions were conducted and documents were reviewed to collect data. This research study was necessary to contribute to knowledge that might help ESL students and practitioners in their practices. The main concept that emerged from the interview data based on participants' descriptions and insights was that role plays and simulations have essential meanings for the second language students in the process of studying grammar. These interactive techniques increased students' motivation, confidence, and use of language structures in meaningful contexts. The themes were important to understanding the participants' perceptions of being comfortable in the target language environment and not fearing grammar, which contributes to student achievement. The study contains recommendations and practical suggestions to the ESL community in reflecting on an alternative approach to grammar instruction and making the process of teaching and learning grammar a more meaningful and enjoyable experience.

Results and Discussions

1- Results of the First Hypothesis:

To validate the first hypothesis (p.8) t-test for the experimental group was used to measure the differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the flexible thinking test.

Table (2):

T-test results that show the differences between mean scores of the study group in the pre-post flexible thinking test:

Group	N.	Mean	SD	T-test	Sig. Level	Effect size
Stu. Pre	30	25.80	4.238	4.173	0.05	0.231
Stu. Post	30	30.90	5.182			

Table 2 proves that there was a significant difference between the results of the experimental group in the flexible thinking test and the experimental group in the post reading test as the t value was 4.173, which is statistically significant at 0.05. Therefore, the first study question is answered, concluding that there is a significant difference in learning reading between learners taught with role playing strategy and the same learners before taught with that strategy in favour of the learners taught with role playing strategy. Moreover, in order to make sure that the results obtained from the t-tests are reliable and to measure the effect of role playing strategy on developing pupils' flexible thinking, the effect size of this strategy on pupils' flexible thinking was calculated according to the following Formula suggested by **(Dunlap, 1994)**. $d = \frac{2t}{\sqrt{d.f}}$ Where **d** = the calculated effect size, **t** = the estimated t value and $\sqrt{d.f}$ = the square root of degrees of freedom. The referential framework for identifying the effect size of t- values is as follow:-

Table (3):

The referential framework for identifying the effect size of T-values:

Effect Size (d-value)	Degree
From 0.2 till less than 0.5	Small
From 0.5 till less than 0.8	Medium
0.8 or more	Large

As shown in table (3), the calculated effect size value of the instructional strategy on developing pupils' flexible thinking was (0.231). Therefore, it can be inferred that the role playing strategy had a large effect on the experimental group pupils' flexible thinking on the post- test as compared to that of the pre- test.

2- Results of the second hypothesis:

To validate the first hypothesis (p.8) t-test for the experimental group to measure if there was a difference between the main score of the experimental group in the pre post EFL reading proficiency test.

Table (4):

Shows results concerning the second hypothesis which addressed the differences between the mean scores of the study group of the pre-post pre post EFL reading proficiency test

Group	N.	Mean	SD	T-test	Sig level	Effect size
Stu. Pre	30	19.30	4.087	5.282	0.05	0.324
Stu. Post	30	24.43	3.411			

Table (4) presents t- test results of the pupils' EFL reading proficiency test.

The above table shows that the estimated t-value (5.282) was statistically significant at (0.05) level. Thus, it can be safely said that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-post EFL reading proficiency test In addition, the effect size value (0.324) shown in the above table reveals that teaching by using role playing strategy had a large effect on the study group pupils' motivation on the post-test as compared to the pre scale .So, the second hypothesis was confirmed.

Conclusion

The results related to both hypotheses of the study showed that using role playing strategy in teaching reading had a positive effect on developing flexible thinking. The study group in the post flexible thinking test and the post scale outperformed the same group in the pre vocabulary test and the pre scale in the whole score. As shown in the tables above that the mean score of the pupils in the post EFL reading test and in the post flexible thinking is better than the mean score of the same pupils in the pre EFL reading test and the pre flexible thinking test. The t-value was statistically significant at (0.05) level in both the post test and the post scale. This means that the teacher used an effective strategy "role playing strategy which developed the pupils' ability in learning reading and increased their motivation during learning. This strategy may help teacher during teaching not only reading but also any other English language skills.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the current study, the following recommendations were offered:

1. The study reached to the positive strategy "role playing strategy" facilitating the teaching of English language reading for preparatory first year pupils.
2. Encouraging English supervisors and teachers for using the current strategy in teaching that make pupils sharing and activating their thinking and abilities. Helping pupils pay their attentions with teachers because the teaching of new strategy as role playing strategy is very interesting.

3. Training English teachers for using role playing strategy in their teaching. Making teachers, use new methods, which reduce teacher's efforts, make them guiders for pupils and make pupils participate in class.
4. Adapting role playing strategy in teaching reading in all educational stages.

Suggestions for Further Studies

In light of the present study results, more studies can be suggested in the area of using role playing strategy in teaching English as a foreign language:

- 1- Conducting a study to investigate the effect of using role playing strategy on developing Pupils' engagement during learning English language.
- 2- Conducting a study to investigate the effect using role playing strategy on developing productive skills (speaking and writing).
- 3- Conducting a study to investigate the effect of role playing strategy on developing pupils' fluency.
- 4- Conducting a study to investigate the effect of stories / songs on developing preparatory stage pupils' language skills.
- 5- Conducting a study using role playing strategy to develop the speaking skills.

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