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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE PLAY IN ARABIC LANGUAGE SKILLS ACQUISITION

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of role play method in the teaching and learning of Arabic language as third or foreign language. Generally, role play has been widely used in all levels of education institutions and is proven to greatly improve students' reading, writing, listening and most significantly, speaking skills. This is due to active participation of students as well as close observation by the lecturers which oftentimes provide feedback after the role play sessions. A total of 291 students participated in the survey that incorporated seven-point Semantic Differential-based scale. Next, the data was analysed using SPSS and PLS-SEM approach to examine the dependencies of the variables. Findings reported that role play method in Arabic language courses do not only enhance students' communicative abilities but also increase their confidence level and they have higher motivation to speak Arabic. In addition, lecturers as facilitators also help students to be more creative and attentive towards the role play activities.

Keywords: Arabic language, communication skill, role play, skills acquisition, student proficiency

1. Introduction

A person's first language depends on the mother tongue or native language where it is exposed to the person since birth and in Malaysia, it is generally Malay language, whereas English is the second language (Hazrul Affendi, 2020), and the foreign languages include Mandarin and Arabic (Hazrul Affendi, 2020; Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1997; Maimum Aqsha Lubis et al., 2019). This shows that Arabic has become more popular (Brinson, 2015; Ilmiani et al., 2020). Language learning generally involves not just writing and reading skills but also speaking and listening skills (Brinson, 2015). Among the skills listed, speaking skills are deemed to be the most challenging (Zhang, 2022). Nevertheless, language learning activities that incorporate speaking skills are shown to be the more effective (Alfaris et al., 2023; Awang et al., 2013; Rachmawati et al., 2020). Therefore, improving speaking skills through role play activities needs to be highly acknowledged in language classroom. However, Arabic language acquisition is not as easy (Saja @ Mearaj et al., 2021). It is reported that only 33.6% students manage to surpass this period (Razif et al., 2020). In University of Technology MARA (UiTM), Arabic language is one of the university elective subjects (Sopian, 2016). There is an urgency in creating effective and appealing learning environment in conventional classrooms. One of the approach to promote it that has been in practice is role play (Che Mat et al., 2019; Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023; Setiawan & Lubis, 2016; Sulaiman et al., 2017).

Role play assessment is carried out in the final week of the semester in UiTM which is the fourteenth week where four to five students are assigned in a group. Since 2020, due to COVID-19 and the Movement Control Order (MCO), role play has been assessed online through video recording. Currently as of 2022, learning sessions are now through blended learning where the role play assessment in physical classroom which bears them 30% of the coursework (Universiti Teknologi MARA, 2021). Role play has significant position in teaching and learning sessions because it allows flexibility (Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2017) since it requires no specific settings and students are able to practice literally anywhere be it (Sulaiman et al., 2017).

There are five elements in role play which include the speaker, message, media, listener and effect. The speaker is an important element in verbal communication skills and the lecturers have the upper hand in deciding the approach that enhance students' speaking skills (Abdullah et al., 2021; Che Mat & Soon, 2011; Setiawan & Lubis, 2016). Role play method stimulates students' efforts to speak confidently with continuous practices and activities. Lecturers should also act as the facilitators that assist students to be greatly engaged in learning activities through role play method (Arifin et al., 2014; Setiawan & Lubis, 2016). The next element is the message of the verbal communication, which is the most important element. The message relayed has to be rightfully understood by the listener (Arifin et al., 2014; Azizah, 2020; Setiawan & Lubis, 2016). Through role play, the message is usually in the form of dialogues that carry a theme or specific situation (Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023). Hence, students can demonstrate their language knowledge learned throughout the semester authentically through the dialogues or conversation. Next, media or channel is also essential for an effective role play method. Students have shown great interest in this method which can be done during lesson as well as outside the scheduled class these days (Ismaiel et al., 2023) as students are able to learn casually but it still contributes to students' language skills excellently. Among the media than can be utilised for role play is a recorded video. A recorded

video produced by students allows them to demonstrates their creativity (Azmi et al., 2011; Ismail et al., 2021; Mady & Baadel, 2020; Nofrika, 2019; Saja @ Mearaj et al., 2021).

Additionally, the role play method will not be applicable should there be no element of a listener. This is mainly because interaction only works successfully is the message relayed by the speaker is well understood by the listener. Listener has a very important position here in order to ensure the message received is understood and speaker can then expect relatable responses (Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023; Syed Shaharuddin & Harun, 2022). Finally, another main element in role play is its effect. Diversified practices and activities benefit students tremendously in improving their confidence to speak Arabic and at the same time improving their reading, writing and listening skills. Students are also more acceptable towards role play activities than lectures, public speaking sessions, debates or presentations (Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023; Syed Shaharuddin & Harun, 2022).

This section explains about speaking skills strategies. Multiple studies have stated that there are eight speaking skills strategies through role play which are delivery, question, response, reinforcement, initiation and closure, teamwork, leadership and discussion strategies (Che Mat et al., 2019; Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023; Nofrika, 2019; Sulaiman et al., 2017; Syed Shaharuddin & Harun, 2022). Firstly, the delivery of the message to the listener needs to be appropriate according to the recipient's language proficiency level. Moreover, at university level, the delivery of the message must be in accordance with the situation and manner (Arifin et al., 2014).

Meanwhile, the questioning strategy in role play activities is a dialogue session between three to four students in a group. Oftentimes, a student will initiate questions while others respond appropriately and this raises natural reaction and ideas in response to the speaker (Altamimi & Alsager, 2023; Fan, 2020). The response strategy in role play activities also has more positive impacts (Asiri, 2022). The following strategy is the reinforcement in role play activities which is an enhancement on reading, writing and listening skills as this method incorporates all language or communication skills. Next is the initiation and closure strategy where it generates role play activities that are more systematic and interesting. Students can cultivate thoughtful ideas from the beginning to the end of the role play session (Che Mat et al., 2019; Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023; Nofrika, 2019; Sulaiman et al., 2017; Syed Shaharuddin & Harun, 2022).

The group strategy is crucial in role play method as it requires group interaction in order to improve proficiency and fluency in speaking skills. Along with these strategies, role play activities also develop leadership skills in students as they have to lead the session with the suitable style, effort and situation. This can also foster leadership qualities (Syed Shaharuddin & Harun, 2022). Lastly, role play method applies numerous discussion strategy. For instance, students construct a critical situation that requires a solution proposal which can be achieved through effective discussion. Thus, students are given the opportunity to enhance higher-level thinking skills through Arabic speaking activities.

2. Problem Statement

In UiTM, role play method is scheduled in the final week of the semester where students are already exposed to basic Arabic language syllabus throughout the first thirteen weeks. Nevertheless, students still display grammatical errors in verbal and written dialogues which they are required to present

in class (Ismail et al., 2022). Other than that, students also demonstrate low confidence level whenever they need to speak in Arabic for role play assessment (Al Aghar et al., 2023). This shows that students do not have sufficient practice nor preparation for their role play assessment (Che Mat & Soon, 2011; Che Mat et al., 2019). A factor for Malaysian students to have low Arabic acquisition is mainly due to lack of authentic environment with native speakers and they are likely to converse in their first language (Asbulah et al., 2019). In addition, it is also found that 35% students refuse to converse in Arabic out of embarrassment and another 25% Arabic language learners do not have pleasant teaching and learning process in the classroom (Rachmawati et al., 2020).

3. Research Questions

Therefore, the research questions of this study are, how far is the implementation and effectiveness of role play method in students' Arabic language proficiency specifically their speaking skills?

4. Purpose of the Study

For purpose of the study are, to investigate the implementation and effectiveness of role play method in students' Arabic language proficiency specifically their speaking skills.

5. Research Methods

This research aims to investigate the effect of role play on student communication skill in Arabic language. For the purpose of attaining the objectives of this research, investigating role play in the context of undergraduates in UiTM Melaka branch, a quantitative research method was utilised to retrieve data. The primary data for this descriptive and analytical study were obtained through questionnaires administered to all students who learn Arabic language as a third language in UiTM involving 3 campuses; Alor Gajah, Bandaraya and Jasin campuses. A simple random sampling technique has been used in this through Google Form survey to obtain the responses. The sample size for this study was 107 people who have been identified primarily by referring to the G*Power Calculation Software (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the G*Power 3.1 software analysis, the effect size (f2) used for this research paper is 0.15 of the minimum number. According to Cohen (1992), the effect size indexes and conventional value is medium but it is relevant for social sciences studies. The issue of error on alpha values (α) is 0.05 (95% confidence level) and beta value (β) is 0.05 (at 95% position to avoid error). Therefore, the minimum sample size required to be calculated by G*Power in this study is at least 107 respondents. Since a total of 291 students participated in this study, the minimum sample size requirement has therefore been met.

A seven-point Semantic Differential-based scale was used in the questionnaire to represent the most suitable responses from the respondents. The description of the semantic differential scales used includes, 1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree (John, 2010). To test the reliability of the answers of the questionnaires, reliability analysis was used in the study. The reliability analysis has been conducted by referring to the rule of thumb made by Perry et al. (2004). They described that Cronbach's alpha (α) 0.90 and above shows excellent reliability, 0.70 to 0.90 shows high reliability, 0.50 to 0.70 shows

moderate reliability and 0.50 and below shows low reliability. All factors of independent variables (role play method) and dependent variables (communication skill) have been tested using SPSS. The study used mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression analysis to examine the relationship between role play on student communication skill. Besides, the analyses also have been carried out to identify the most influential factors that affect communication skills among students towards Arabic language.

Once the questionnaires were successfully collected, the data were cleaned through SPSS 28.0 software. This stage is needed to reduce errors that may affect the study findings by removing unqualified data such as missing data, straight lining, outliers, normality test and collinearity statistics. Non-differentiation in ratings was detected and thus, a total of 14 respondents were discarded. However, the present study did not have missing data and outliers. In addition, the normality of the data was reviewed to ensure that the data provided for the analysis stage is within the range of abnormalities acceptable to PLS-SEM, which is between the values -1 and +1 (1 and þ1). However, for some cases (collinearity and/or small sample size), values lower or higher than 1 are still accepted (Hair et al., 2019), in contrast to Kline (2016) setting, skewness value <2.0 and kurtosis value <7.0. Testing of normality in the study found that the distribution of data was abnormal, but still in skewness and kurtosis that met the PLS-SEM requirements, which ranged from 2.0 to 7.0 (Kline, 2016). The total number of questionnaires or respondents who qualified for the final analysis stage was 277.

6.   Findings

The results are categorised according to descriptive analysis on the demographic data and PLS-SEM Approach on Measurement Model to test validity and reliability of the data, Structural Model to investigate the effectiveness of role play method on communication skill (CS) proficiency as well as Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA) to find out to what extent the importance and achievement of student's proficiencies about role play method in Arabic language. All the findings of the study are shown in the table. Table 1 showed descriptive analysis on the demographic data.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis

Demography	Category	Frequecy	Percentage
Gender	Male	91	32.9%
	Female	186	67.1%
Campus	Alor Gajah	65,	23.5%
	Bandaraya	114	41.2%
	UTM Jasin	98	35.4%
Age	20 to 22 years	222	80.1%
	23 to 25 years	52	18.8%
	26 to 28 years	2	0.7%
	29 years and above	1	0.4%
Faculty	Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences	102	36.8%
	Faculty of Business and Management	69	24.9%
	Faculty of Accountancy	47	17%
	Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management	47	17%
	Faculty of Communication and Media Studies	12	4.3%
TAC Level	TAC401	108	39%

	TAC451	90	32.5%
	TAC501	79	28.5%
Have basic	Yes (middle school/diploma)	186	67.1%
Arabic Language	No	32	32.9%

The results showed that majority of the respondents were females (n=186, 67.1%). Based on findings before this, demographic analysis shows that more female students agree with the effectiveness of role play in improving Arabic language proficiency compared to male students. From all the respondents, majority were come from UiTM Bandaraya campus (n=114, 41.2%). Most of them are from the age group of 20 to 22 years (n=222; 80.1%). In addition, majority of the respondent's study at Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences (n=102, 36.8%). Most of them also are learning Arabic at level 1; TAC401 (n=108, 39%). The Arabic educational background of the respondents shows that 67.1% (n=186) have studied Arabic at the middle school and diploma level. It has been discovered that most of them know what Arabic language is. Among the contributing factors is the existing knowledge in the language (67.1%) and this is in line with studies by Che Mat et al. (2019), Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan (2023) and Sulaiman et al. (2017).

In this, PLS-SEM approach on measurement model to testing of the validity and reliability of the data was performed involving three criteria that are essential to fulfil the requirements which are the validity of convergence, the validity of discrimination and the internal reliability of the study items (Ramayah et al., 2018). Convergence validity refers to the level of several items that can measure the same concept. This validity is achieved when all AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values exceed the value of 0.50 and CR (Composite Reliability) passes the minimum level of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). The reliability of the construct or factor studied is tested using the value of Cronbach alpha and the value of rhoA. The minimum required value is 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951). The findings showed that the minimum requirements for convergence validity, validity of discrimination and reliability of questionnaire items were met even though three items had a loading value of 0.5 (Gold et al., 2001). The results of the analysis were summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Convergent Reliability Test

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach	rhoA	CR	AVE
Teaching Implementation (TI)	TI1	0.853	0.925	0.927	0.940	0.691
	TI2	0.835				
	TI3	0.788				
	TI4	0.793				
	TI5	0.798				
	TI6	0.879				
	TI7	0.867				
Learning Implementation (LI)	LI1	0.839	0.912	0.918	0.932	0.696
	LI2	0.735				
	LI4	0.871				
	LI5	0.801				
	LI8	0.857				
	LI10	0.839				
Communication	CM1	0.880	0.938	0.939	0.945	0.765

Skill (CM)	CM2	0.835
	CM3	0.911
	CM4	0.901
	CM5	0.896
	CM6	0.820

rhoA & CR: Composite reliability, AVE: average variance extracted

The validity of discriminant was checked using the criteria of the Heterotrait-Monotrait method – HTMT (Henseler et al., 2015). If the HTMT value is 0.90 or smaller than 0.90, the validity of discriminant has been achieved (Gold et al., 2001). As described in Table 3 below, the validity of discrimination between the constructs of the studies is below the prescribed value of 0.90. All values obtained below the HTMT level of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001) and this indicates that the validity of discriminant has been achieved. According to the 291 survey respondents, students agreed that the implementation of role play method through the teaching and learning session offers positive impact towards students' communication ability. In teaching approach, lecturers play an important role as facilitators and speakers in successful role play activities to encourage students to speak Arabic in classroom. This is based on 264 respondents (90.7%) who agreed that lecturers incorporate role play method in classroom (T14) and 271 0r 93.1% respondents agreed that they encourage students to speak in class (T15). According to Sulaiman et al. (2017), a lecturer can integrate role play method with other techniques to accommodate the limitations and weaknesses found in the technique. The findings also strengthen the results found in previous studies by Abdullah et al. (2021), Che Mat and Soon (2011) and Setiawan and Lubis (2016). Selection techniques which are students-centred and activities that provide space and opportunities for students to actively participate in the activities are intended to ensure that students are able to communicate well in a second language. Besides, the effects of role-play strategy not only on language proficiency but also other variables, such as motivation for learning the target language, should be explored (Alabsi, 2016). Previous studies (Altamimi & Alsager, 2023; Fan, 2020) have also described the interpersonal effects through group interactions have better impact on students than body language and facial expressions. Meanwhile, students showed great interest in role play activities (176 respondents or 60.5%) and agreed that this method significantly improve their speaking skills (220 respondents or 75.6%). Undoubtedly, role play has essential position in enhancing the memorisation skills of Arabic words (L14), agreed by 233 respondents (80.1%) and requires their involvement and commitment in implementing this method. It also increases the mastery of speaking skills (CM1) (202 respondents or 69.4%) and helps improve students' creativity skills (CM5).

Table 3. Convergent Reliability Test

	BL	KN	SG
CS			
LI	0.85		
TI	0.713	0.634	

CS: Communication Skill, LI: Learning Implementation, TI: Teaching Implementation

Table 4 showed about convergent reliability test. In investigating the of effectiveness of role play method on communication skill proficiency students in UiTM Melaka Branch, two hypotheses were tested between the variables in the study. The Smart PLS 3.0 bootstrapping function was used to test the

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significant level and t-value of all path coefficients in the study model (Ringle et al., 2014). The results of the analysis revealed that both the path coefficient of teaching implementation and student's implementation were found to significantly affect their proficiency in at level 0.05 with a value of $t \geq 1.96$. Next, the quality of the study model was determined by the effect size (f2), R2 value and Q2 value (Hair et al., 2017). The results of the analysis show a very significant difference in the effect of size (f2) between the two constructs with (0.178) and (0.696). The value of R2 is large at 0.793 in which Q2 exceeded 0 (0.593) has indicated that the study model has a big predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017). All the results of the study's hypothetical testing analysis and model quality are described in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Convergent Reliability Test

Hypothesis	Correlation	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	Result	R^2	f^2	Q^2
H1	TI -> CS	0.237	0.049	4.876**	Supported	0.793	0.178	0.593
H2	LI -> CS	0.731	0.037	19.494**	Supported		0.696	

(**p<0.05, t value greater than 1.96)

To obtain the diagnostic value, an IPMA analysis was carried out (Martilla & James, 1977). This assessment is based on a comparison between the average value of CS and the expectation of PLS which will result in one measure of the importance of each construct in the study model. In more detail, through the analysis of IPMA, the importance and achievement of each factor influencing the stigma will be identified.

Table 5. IMPA Analysis

Construct	Importance (Total Effect)	Performance (Index Value)
CS	-	72.044
TI	0.237	84.742
LI	0.731	66.349

CS: Communication Skill, LI: Learning Implementation, TI: Teaching Implementation

Table 5 clearly shown that factor learning implementation (LI) is the most important factor with interest values (0.731) and performance values (66.349) outperforming teaching implementation (TI) by interest values (0.237) and performance values (84.742). This exhibits that learning implementation is more important than teaching implementation but is often overlooked by the students. They should improve their self-efficacy, memorisation skills of Arabic words and work in a group to enhance their speaking skills. They are aware that lecturers only act as the facilitators during role play activities but tend to depend more on the lecturers in the implementation of role play activities in Arabic language learning.

The simplicity of role-play strategy allows students to immediately apply the contents as they think beyond the confinement of classroom setting as well as providing immediate feedback with regard to students' understanding of the content. As they try to complete the task assigned to them dan cooperate in memorising the scripts, they also learn and support each other to achieve the objectives. This new finding, as based from a previous study by Syed Shaharuddin and Harun (2022), has shown that role play

and other assessments will not be successful without students' effort in improving Arabic language proficiency despite the motivation and guidance from lecturers. Role play offers training and the application of the gained knowledge. Therefore, it can be considered as a useful strategy that prepares students for better communication skills. It allows learners to participate in the evaluation process and in the teaching and learning process, which are important steps towards a comprehensive education and have a more communicative perspective. In addition, it supports learning the content in a deeper way and students are able to memorise their roles and vocabulary. The instructor or lecturer acts as a guide or a facilitator, and the students complete all the speaking activities which has made the educational process more effective and enjoyable (Subaihi, 2015).

7. Conclusion

According to the research findings, role play is an excellent strategy for developing students' speaking abilities. The result indicates that role play approach greatly enhance learners' speaking abilities. The benefit of using role play helps students build their confidence and inventiveness by motivating them to participate in speaking activities. Students become proficient in Arabic as a result of their regular role-playing exercises. Additionally, it builds vocabulary, which aids in selecting appropriate words for the scenario. Finally, the study demonstrates that role play has a significant pedagogical impact on improving students' communication abilities in Arabic language courses. The three main factors in the effectiveness of role play method are the lecturers as the facilitators and students as the speakers and listeners as well as the various approach in organising role play according to current situational and technological needs. As a result, it is possible to conclude that role-playing could immensely improve students' oral communication skills in the classroom. For future research, the study intends to venture into listening skills assessments as students are found to have difficulties in achieving excellent grades where students generally only obtained an average of B-. This issue needs to be addressed in order to ensure student achievement in Arabic language learning.

Acknowledgments

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