

BUILDING UP VOCABULARY USING THE ROLE PLAY STRATEGY IN YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE*

Mónica Jisela Lascano Pérez¹ and Sonia Paulina Altamirano Carvajal¹

¹Language Center, Universidad Técnica de Ambato, mj.lascano@uta.edu.ec, sonniapaltamiranoc@uta.edu.ec

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Resumen

El vocabulario se considera un elemento esencial en el desarrollo de una lengua extranjera. Aprender a utilizar las nuevas palabras del vocabulario en un contexto específico proporciona a los alumnos más oportunidades para expresar sus ideas de forma eficaz. Sin embargo, los entornos de lenguas extranjeras han utilizado algunas estrategias tradicionales para introducir esta habilidad secundaria, lo que ha provocado una producción ineficaz de la lengua extranjera. La aplicación de la estrategia del juego de rol ofrece a los alumnos extranjeros una fuente interactiva y valiosa para utilizar el idioma de forma productiva en situaciones simuladas auténticas. Esta investigación se llevó a cabo para determinar el efecto de la estrategia de juegos de rol en la construcción de vocabulario. Un grupo de 48 participantes del nivel A2 de la Universidad Técnica de Ambato estuvo inmerso en este estudio. Los investigadores desarrollaron un estudio cuasi-experimental en el que los grupos control y experimental no fueron elegidos al azar. El grupo control permaneció aprendiendo el vocabulario con las estrategias tradicionales, mientras que al grupo experimental se le abordó la implementación de una estrategia interactiva y significativa: el juego de roles semiescrito. Para evaluar las destrezas orales en los criterios de gramática y vocabulario, pronunciación y comunicación interactiva se utilizó una rúbrica estandarizada de Cambridge University Press para el nivel A2. Según los resultados obtenidos una vez aplicados el pre-test y el post-test, los alumnos de ambos grupos mejoraron significativamente su capacidad de construir vocabulario en el nivel A2, aunque en el caso del grupo experimental el resultado fue aún mejor ya que mostró una diferencia significativa respecto al grupo de control (p -valor = 0,0055).

Palabras clave:

Construcción, estrategia de juego de rol, habilidades, vocabulario.

Abstract

Vocabulary is considered as an essential element in foreign language development. Learning how to use the new vocabulary words in a specific context provides learners more opportunities to express their ideas effectively. However, foreign language environments have used some traditional strategies to introduce this sub-skill causing an inefficient foreign language production. Implementing the role play strategy offers foreign learners an interactive and valuable source to use the language productively in authentic simulated situations. This research was performed to

determine the effect of the role play strategy in building up vocabulary. A group of 48 participants from A2 level at Universidad Técnica de Ambato were immersed in this study. The researchers developed a quasi-experimental study in which the control and the experimental groups were not chosen randomly. The control group remained learning the vocabulary with the traditional strategies, while the experimental group was approached to the implementation of an interactive and meaningful strategy: the semi-scripted role play. A standardized rubric from Cambridge University Press for A2 level was used to assess the speaking skills in the grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication criteria. According to the results obtained once the pre-test and post-test were applied, the students of both groups significantly improved their ability to build up vocabulary at the A2 level, although in the case of the experimental group the result was even better since it showed a significant difference concerning the control group (p -value = 0,0055).

Keywords: / *Building up, role play strategy, skills, vocabulary.*

Introduction

The research aims to measure the effect of the application of role-play-based teaching strategies for vocabulary building in young adult learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). A student constructs learning through interaction with the information provided by the teacher; assuming a critical, creative, and reflective attitude, and considers to be a self-manager of the learning. Role-play games enhance the educational experience by promoting critical thinking and analytical skills, as well as offering students the promotion of oral and written communication skills. It is feasible, as it has the commitment of authorities, teachers, and young adults at CEFR level A2 (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018). Therefore, in this research, some role-play activities were applied with the aim of allowing students to learn the language through it and use the vocabulary to communicate in specific environments.

English is considered a lingua franca; most people use this language worldwide for many purposes like scientific studies, tourism, entertainment, education, technology, among others. Due to this importance, foreign language learners need to master vocabulary to be involved in interactive communication. Moreover, understanding vocabulary in context benefits their language development; learners feel confident and engaged to express their ideas in second language (L2) (Jambari et al., 2021).

Undoubtedly, learning vocabulary has not been taught in a meaningful way in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The target vocabulary has been learnt isolated, through translation, memorization, repetition, or with a little reinforcement (Yavaşlar & Demirci, 2018). These situations have prevented English language learners to express coherent messages because there is a lack of knowledge to apply the words in a specific context (Mardiningrum, 2016). According to the information provided by Nation, (2006) to cover 95% of a daily conversation, it is necessary to know between 2000 to 3000-word families, and between 6000 and 7000 for 98% coverage.



Some strategies are commonly used to improve students' vocabulary learning, including role play (Formadon & Sidabalok, 2017), which is a strategy for dramatizing real-life situations that are represented in the classroom. The tasks framed in the role play strategy should be close to daily life so that the participants can be effectively involved with the role they are going to play (Cuitiño et al., 2019). According to Alabsi (2016) role play is considered a useful strategy to enhance vocabulary; learners feel engaged when they are immersed in typical situations (Arciniegas Paspuel, O. G., Álvarez Hernández, S. R., Castro Morales, L. G., & Maldonado Gudiño, 2021).

It is important that students who are learning the English language have a vocabulary according to the level at which they are, in this way they will be able to have the required basis for the development of the four language skills (reading, writing, and speaking) (Rahmanullah et al., 2022). Vocabulary is necessary for reading words, constructing written texts, and establishing interactive conversation (Babayiğit et al., 2022). Speaking is considered essential in the teaching-learning process, as it allows sharing and constructing meanings through both verbal and non-verbal symbols. The oral component is currently considered to improve students' communicative skills as it relates vocabulary and fluency in a speech to the acquisition of English as a second language (Neupane, 2019) (Fatwa Mohd Razali & Ismail, 2017).

Within the paradigm of constructivism, where the learner is the protagonist of the training. Role-play is an active learning strategy in which a real-life situation is simulated (Alshraideh & Alahmdi, 2020). Students can learn difficult concepts by simulating a scenario where they must apply those concepts. Active learning is an approach to teaching in which students participate in the learning process by developing knowledge and understanding (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2019).

This study aimed to measure the effect of the application of teaching strategies based on role-play for building up vocabulary in young adult learners of EFL at the A2 level of the CEFR. Based on the above background, the present study originates from the following research question: How does the role play strategy contribute to build up vocabulary in young adult learners of EFL? At the same time the alternative hypothesis is "the application of the role-play strategy builds up the vocabulary skills of young-adult learners of EFL". To contribute to vocabulary development a proposal was implemented focused on enabling students to work on speaking skills, especially in vocabulary criterion.

Methodology and Materials

A sample of 48 students at A2 level were made up of two courses enrolled in the regular modality at the Language Center of Universidad Técnica de Ambato. The sample was divided into two groups of 24 students each, one experimental and the other control. A quasi-experimental research design was applied because an educational intervention was made in a group of young adult learners, who were part of an experimental group. This intervention was performed using the role play strategy to build-up vocabulary. But simultaneously, traditional didactic strategies were applied in the control group. At the same time, a quantitative approach and a relational scope were

applied.

In the beginning, an evaluation (pre-test) of the vocabulary development of the students in the experimental and control groups was conducted using the speaking section of the Cambridge A2 Key English Test (KET). The test is composed of three criteria which are: grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication. Subsequently, a proposal through classroom lessons based on the use of the role play strategy was implemented in the experimental group. Finally, another model (post-test) of the same speaking section of the Cambridge A2 Key exam was applied to measure the improvement of speaking skills after the application of the proposal, especially in vocabulary to analyze the effectiveness of the role-playing strategy in A2 learners.

The proposal was applied in three weeks, students worked in pairs or groups of three depending on the activity; first, they read the vocabulary related to each activity and after they performed a role-play. Learners were approached to three activities per week according to the Cambridge Empower A2 Student Book (Doff et al., 2015). The development of the role-play was semi-scripted and based on the vocabulary of the activities in the student's book.

The proposal consisted of nine activities as follows: Activity 1: Daily routines, (p. 30 - 31), Activity 2: Talking about technology (p. 32 - 33), and Activity 3: Making arrangement plans (pp. 34-35). Activity 4: Buying food (p. 41). Activity 5: Cooking (p. 43) Activity 6: Ordering a meal in a restaurant (p.45), Activity 7: Describing family's picture (p. 60), Activity 8: Learn to leave a voicemail message and ask for someone on the phone (p. 64). and Activity 9: Talk about past journeys (p. 70). In the mentioned five activities the students worked in pairs, and in the last four activities students worked in group of three. A grading rubric was developed for the evaluation of the role-play activities directed to measure: accuracy and believability of the role, clarity of speech, expression, body language, and overall impression. Reinforcement vocabulary activities were also applied using a free website (e.g., <https://learningapps.org/watch?v=pj1qgis321>).

The Cambridge A2 Key test assesses the ability to communicate in English in common and simple situations. The vocabulary assessment measures the degree of control of simple grammatical forms, it is expected that students use a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about everyday situations (Cambridge Assessment English, 2020). The Cambridge test score for the Speaking section was out of 15 points, with each of the criteria (grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication) being evaluated out of 5 points according to the rubrics.

Results

Initially, the speaking section of the Cambridge A2 Key English test was applied to verify that there were no significant differences in the means of the control and experimental groups, for which the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test was used for two independent samples at two tails and with a significance level of 0,05. When the test was applied, a W-value equal to 300 was obtained, which represented a p-value of 0,808, which is greater than 0,05. This result showed that both groups had similar averages during the initial evaluation (pre-test). In that sense, the control and experimental

groups had similar performance in vocabulary assessment.

The application of the proposed use of role-play strategy in the experimental group was well received by the young adult learners in the sample. At the same time, the KET test was applied again at the end of the educational intervention to assess the effect that the incorporation of the strategy based on the use of role-play had on the building up vocabulary ability, and the results of which are shown in the following table:

Table 1 / Summary of the means obtained in the pre-test and post-test by groups. $n = 24$.

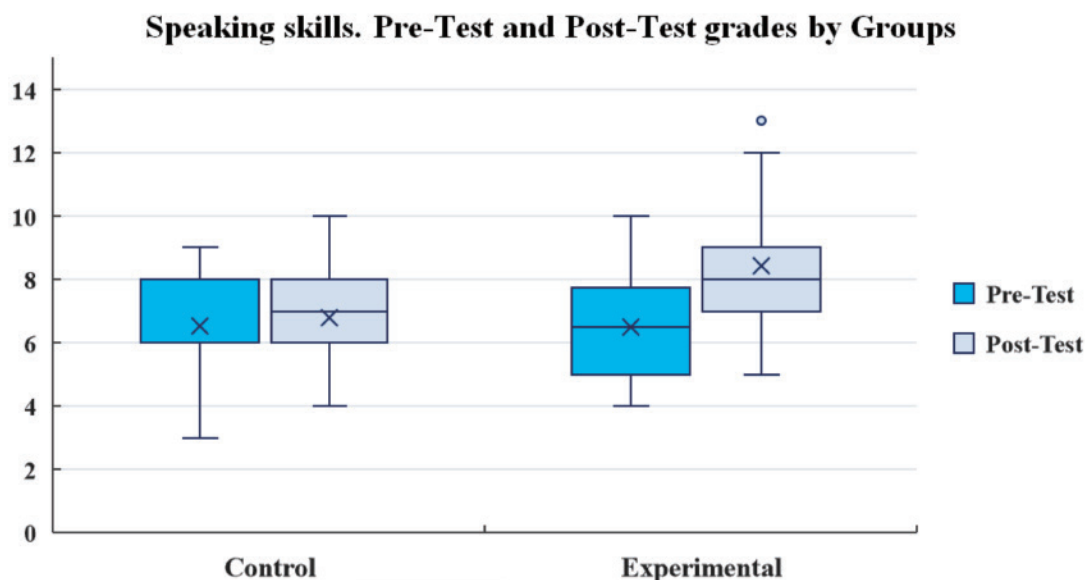
Criterion	Out of	Group			
		Control		Experimental	
		Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean
Speaking skills	15	6,54 ± 1,50	6,79 ± 1,47	6,50 ± 1,53	8,42 ± 2,10
Grammar and vocabulary	5	2,29 ± 0,69	2,46 ± 0,59	2,25 ± 0,53	3,08 ± 0,88
Pronunciation	5	2,08 ± 0,72	2,13 ± 0,68	2,13 ± 0,80	2,92 ± 0,83
Interactive communication	5	2,17 ± 0,70	2,21 ± 0,72	2,13 ± 0,61	2,42 ± 0,78

Source: Test applied to students at UTA – Language Center by Lascano, M. and Altamirano, S. (2022).

According to the information in Table 1, the students in the experimental group obtained a mean score of $6,50 \pm 1,53$ out of 15 in the pre-test and $8,42 \pm 2,10$ in the post-test. On the other hand, students in the control group achieved a mean of $6,54 \pm 1,50$ out of 15 on the pre-test and $6,79 \pm 1,47$ on the post-test. The results showed an improvement in the building up vocabulary ability of students in both groups at the end of the teaching period of the didactic contents.

When delving into the results of the evaluated criteria, for the case of the experimental group it was observed that in Grammar and vocabulary the students obtained a mean of $2,25 \pm 0,53$ out of 5 in the pre-test and $3,08 \pm 0,88$ in the post-test; while in the Pronunciation criterion they reached a mean of $2,13 \pm 0,80$ out of 5 in the pre-test and $2,92 \pm 0,83$ in the post-test; while in the Interactive communication criterion they obtained a mean of $2,13 \pm 0,61$ out of 5 in the pre-test and $2,42 \pm 0,78$ in the post-test. On the other hand, regarding the case of the control group in Grammar and vocabulary the students obtained a mean of $2,29 \pm 0,69$ out of 5 in the pre-test and $2,46 \pm 0,59$ in the post-test; while in the Pronunciation criterion they reached a mean of $2,08 \pm 0,72$ out of 5 in the pre-test and $2,13 \pm 0,68$ in the post-test; while in the Interactive communication criterion they obtained a mean of $2,17 \pm 0,70$ out of 5 in the pre-test and $2,21 \pm 0,72$ in the post-test. The results indicate that the students' scores improved in all the criteria evaluated, especially in grammar and vocabulary, while progress in interactive communication was lower.

Graph 1 / *Boxplot of the vocabulary grades in the pre-test and post-test by groups.*



Source: Test applied to students at UTA – Language Center by Lascano, M. and Altamirano, S. (2022).

In addition, Graph 1 presents a boxplot illustrating the behavior of the main descriptive statistics of the students' grades on the speaking skills assessment in the pre-test and post-test. The boxplot information corroborates the fact that initially the two groups of students had a similar performance in vocabulary construction, except for the fact that the minimum grades of the students in the control group were lower than the corresponding grades of the experimental group. On the other hand, in the post-test, the grades of the experimental group presented some differences with respect to the control group, particularly the interquartile range (IQR) in the experimental group was lower than the corresponding one in the control group, and the means and medians of the experimental group were higher with respect to the control group. Another aspect to take into account is that the means and medians tended to coincide with each other, something that was observed in both groups, since there was not a normal distribution of the data (with the Shapiro-Wilks normality test, the p-value was less than 0.05).

The grades obtained by the young adult learners in the post-test with a significance of 0,05 were significantly higher than those of the pre-test (p-value equal to $2,11 \times 10^{-5}$) in the experimental group, but not in the control group (p-value equal to 0,0719) by applying Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test for paired samples. It was also statistically proven through the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (data was not normally distributed) that the grades obtained in the three criteria evaluated (grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication) were higher than those achieved in the pre-test in both groups, control and experimental (p-value lower than 0,05).

However, because the purpose of the paper was to determine whether the use of the role-play strategy improves students' building up vocabulary, Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test for two independent samples was also applied to compare the post-test grades of the two groups. The result showed that the grades of the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the

control group (p-value equal to 0,0056). That is to say that working with the role-play strategy helped young adult learners to become more capable for building up vocabulary, with respect to those who worked with traditional teaching strategies. Therefore, the application of the role play strategy builds up the vocabulary skills of young-adult learners of EFL.

Discussion

According to the results, the criterion that better improved with role play strategy was grammar and vocabulary, followed by pronunciation, and finally interactive communication. The role play strategy helps to master vocabulary with accuracy, which overlaps with the study conducted by (Formadon & Sidabalok, 2017). Similarly Fatwa Mohd Razali and Ismail (2017) mentions that role play improves students' speaking as it allows to increase fluency and practicing new vocabulary. According to Khan et al. (2018) inefficient vocabulary knowledge and related problems in communication are indicators of speaking inability. Khan et al. (2018) also states that teachers should focus on vocabulary learning strategies and thus improve the development of students' speaking skills.

Krebt (2017) in his research entitled *The Effectiveness of Role Play Techniques in Teaching Speaking for EFL College Students*, investigated the impact of role play on the speaking skills of Iraqi EFL students at the University of Baghdad. For this purpose, he conducted a quasi-experimental study, implementing three types of role play: fully scripted role play, semi-scripted role play, and non-scripted role play. The researcher also applied 30 questions to assess students' speaking skills in the pre-test and post-test. The results of that research showed that there was a significant difference in the total post-test scores between the experimental and control groups, in favor of the experimental group.

The final result of the Krebt's research is consistent with the present study, although the instrument used for the evaluation of speaking skills was different, a survey developed by Krebt, while the Cambridge test was used in the present case. A semi-scripted role play was developed in the present research since a discussion model was established with some keywords, and the students filled in the blanks with the appropriate terms for these situations. On the other hand, Krebt experimented with the three types of role play. According to Quinteros-Villacís & Fajardo-Dack (2022), a semi-controlled role play allows to the teacher or a textbook determine how language is acquired and it is "useful for students with upper-beginner to intermediate levels of competency". It can therefore be used for students who are able to understand the basic procedures and wish to progress to higher levels.

Conclusion

This study examines the effect of the use of role-play strategy on young adult learners' vocabulary building. When analyzing the control and experimental groups, it is observed that at the beginning of the evaluation, students of both groups are at the same level in speaking skills as well as in grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication. After that, the teacher implemented the nine speaking activities with topics related to daily routines and

technology; these topics are of great relevance since it is important to communicate using accurate vocabulary. Next, the Cambridge English A2 Key test was applied again at the end of the intervention.

Once the role-play activities were performed, the participation of students was encouraged, and they were motivated to learn new words and increase their vocabulary. Likewise, collaboration and feedback among classmates were observed, which helped students with low level language performance.

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Appendix

Table 2 / Cambridge A2 Key English test speaking section rubrics.

A2	Grammar and Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about everyday situations.	Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels.	Maintains simple exchanges. Requires very little prompting and support.
4	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>		
3	Shows sufficient control of simple grammatical forms. Uses appropriate vocabulary to talk about everyday situations.	Is mostly intelligible, despite limited control of phonological features.	Maintains simple exchanges, despite some difficulty. Requires prompting and support.
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>		
1	Shows only limited control of a few grammatical forms. Uses a vocabulary of isolated words and phrases.	Has very limited control of phonological features and is often unintelligible.	Has considerable difficulty maintaining simple exchanges. Requires additional prompting and support.
0	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>		