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Peculiarities of role play activities and their efficiency on technical university students' competence

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Abstract

Speaking is a main factor of students' capability in understanding the interlocutor and ability to communicate in any language. Although there are many ways of enhancing this particular skill, technical university students of English are observed to face a lot of difficulties with this skill, which have been attributed to the widespread use of traditional approaches focusing on memorization of phrases and other words. Role-play potentially offers a marvelous way to encourage students to speak, interact with others and utilize vocabulary appropriately in simulated authentic situations. The aim of the article is to pinpoint the significance of role play activities among students of non-linguistic universities. The following methods were required to accomplish the tasks: scientific and methodological literature was reviewed; information sources were evaluated. A questionnaire sampling survey was conducted in order to collect data, as well as this experimental classes were held throughout the period to show the results. The research survey and classes were completed in October and November of 2022. Various methods of role playing can prove the efficiency of their implementation to all learners. Particularly for students of technical universities who struggle a lot while speaking can be of great importance. The research findings let us contemplate the learners' attitude towards role play activities in learning English as a second or foreign language.

For citation

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Keywords

Role play activities, English language, speaking skills, technical university students, communicative competence, interactive methods.

Introduction

In any language speaking is considered to be the key element of students' comprehension and successful communication with other people whether in language one (L1) or in language two, foreign language (L2). Misunderstanding is possible, in both native language or in a foreign language, particularly without having a sufficient number of vocabulary or expressions [Kuipers, Clemens, 1998]. Obtaining various vocabulary is a vital part of boosting speaking in EFL, however knowing vocabulary is not enough; what matters is being able to implement these words and expressions in various situational contexts [ibid.].

In the study, autonomous professionally oriented English communication is defined as a free, self-selected and managed, internally motivated learning activity to master professionally oriented English communication, which involves students to perform a set of action sequences like, defining purposes and objectives of educational activities, inferiority of interests to the aim achievement, self-management in establishing the educational activities and time for their utilization, and self-control of educational activities as well.

Consequently, to evolve all core skills and maintain the development in learning foreign languages, it is crucial to be aware of some techniques like role playing activities. Many students, as well as teachers, neglect this mesmerizing approach, but after trying it, keep using it almost every time. Role play exercises give students the opportunity to presume the role of a person or act out a given situation. These roles can be executed by not only individual students, but also in pairs or in groups which can perform a more complex scenario. Role plays involve and motivate students in real-life situations or scenarios that can be “stressful, unfamiliar, complex, or controversial” and some of which can require them to analyze personal feelings toward others and their circumstances [Intaraprasert, 2004].

Even though simulations and games which are thoroughly planned, structured and may last over a long period of time, role play exercises “are frequently short, spontaneous presentations” nonetheless can be prearranged research assignments [Gu, 2011]. Learning and its strategy is interpreted as purposeful thinking and behavior in order to remember and understand new information in the learning process [Matsagouras, 2011]. Foreign language learning strategies were expressed by Borg S., as “any set of functions, steps, plans, procedures used by a student to facilitate the acquisition, storage, and utilization of information”. According to some linguists [ibid.] learning is a goal-seeking thinking and behavior of the students during learning that helps them find, understand, and remember new information, while others have understood learning strategies as conscious thoughts and actions that learners take in order to understand, learn or store new information.

The learning process requires changes and variation from time to time, due to loads of repetition and structure, it can be even complicated for students to acquire and comprehend new language vocabulary and speaking activities. Afdillah [Afdillah, 2015] states, “Comprehensive learning vocabulary is difficult to teach because of the complexity of its linguistic, semantic and psychocognitive aspects. Therefore, it is crucial for the benefit of all that teachers ought to detect a wide range of ways to substitute rote repetition with more effective techniques” [ibid.]. Despite the fact that there are plenty of ways of improving speaking while learning English as a second language, current levels of proficiency among students suggest that these methods are not sufficient.

The researcher's experience and the results of an exploratory study indicate that some of the struggling and awkwardness facing technical university students are vocabulary limitations so extreme as to prevent effective conversation and comprehension, misapplication of words, incorrect pronunciation of new words, rephrasing words owing to lack of vocabulary and frequent hesitation. As

a consequence of this reason, the present study aims to investigate the effect of role play to enhance speaking skills of students, as well as to enrich and boost vocabulary in order to enable learners to use the foreign language deftly in real life situations.

There are a lot of benefits of role playing: during classroom activities they allow to learn skills used in real-world situations (negotiation, debate, teamwork, cooperation, persuasion); upgrade current teaching strategies; motivate and engage students; meliorate ways for critical observation of peers; supply with real-world scenarios to help students learn; and amend current teaching strategies [Farhady, 1995]. According to research, a child's capacity for cognitive flexibility and creativity are linked to role playing, as they train and exercise their brain, and practice using imagination at an early age [Huang, Shan, 2008].

Methodology

The younger generation is usually very quick to pick up new words, couple that with a character or celebrities they love and a whole new vocabulary is built. Role playing offers all learners an opportunity to try these vocabularies. Through these methods of implementation of new expressions or words, students gain confidence with their communication. As a result, they learn to convey a message by picking their words carefully. Subsequently, students not only learn to speak properly, but also to listen.

Besides, role playing activities provide students with such an environment, where they would be able to feel free and confident. The process of interaction helps learners to set social environments and experiment their skills with others somewhere there. As far as they tend to be someone else, it makes learners relate to their emotions as well as gain control over their behavior.

Apart from all the above benefits of role playing among students of higher education, they also gain a lot physically. Never-ending tutorials make them exhausted throughout the day, however applying these approaches and various role-playing activities would benefit to their physical development and to the process of mental advancements, by engaging their motor skills and hand to eye coordination.

The analysis of scientific literature on the researched problem has shown that various factors influence students' choice of foreign language learning strategies and ways. For instance, Ellis [Aliakbari, Jamalvandi, 2010] has distinguished individual, social and situational factors that impact on the students' choice of learning. Furthermore, Borg [Borg, 2011] and Ehrman [Huang, Shan, 2008] have pinpointed some factors that influence the choice of foreign language learning strategies and ways of improving skills: age, gender, learning style, cultural background, type of tasks, motivation, learning context, language skills, attitude and perception of the educator. Various scientific studies [Hong Lip, 2009] have dealt with the connection between learning methods and students' knowledge. Their results have shown that those students who regularly use different learning methods and a wide range of activities make progress in language acquisition. Many broad reasons for using role play as a teaching strategy for learning vocabulary and ameliorate speaking skills of students of technical universities.

As it was mentioned above, role play is a major strategy in the communicative approach and has many advantages, as it can encourage forms of social interaction that provide an important stimulus to use the language in real life and challenge learners' existing beliefs. In spite of this, it is suggested by many researchers that effective learning can take place especially when teachers challenge students with problems and facilitate the process of finding the solution. Undoubtedly, role play engages learners in activities that bring realism to their learning and help them to apply it in real situations. In order to

surpass speaking ability vocabulary should be learned in such a way that learners will be able to communicate effectively, successfully and appropriately, what is more students have to be capable of recalling necessary words and expressions easily, recognizing how to use and when to utilize the appropriate words.

The given research uses a quasi-experimental method by using a “pre-test and post-test” design. It aims to see whether the role play technique is effective in means of speaking skills and providing new vocabulary to third year technical university students. Thus, before starting the experiment, the teacher has decided to vary her tasks by adding something entertaining to the syllabus, therefore she has managed to prepare various activities, methods and ways to present and teach the material. Throughout this period while teaching English as a L2, the materials applied for the experimental group were cards containing roles to be practiced in the class. Whereas students from the controlled group did not experience working with role play cards, instead they were taught according to the agenda, by being given materials based on the traditional method of teaching a foreign language. As a result, the following procedures were planned to conduct the classes:

- Presenting a topic based on the selected unit (7-8) from textbook;
- Using different warm up activities to introduce the new topic;
- Presenting and discussing the new vocabulary by using various approaches such as pictures, realia, and sometimes even miming, in order to focus on pronunciation and meaning;
- Writing the new expressions, collocations and other vocabulary on the board, to boost spelling;
- Giving a particular scenario and special cards, which were designed and distributed to students, to perform about the topic discussed earlier in the class;
- Requesting them to brainstorm and deliver meaning in a short, concise way in conversation to interact with other students, by implementing the new vocabulary; Dividing the class into groups of students, consisting of four or five;
- Explaining and giving instructions properly to gain communication competence and to give and check timing;
- Selecting a particular group of students and asking them to act out;
- Observing and monitor the performance;
- Discussing and assessing each group's performance.

The teacher prepared all the material and an achievement test based on the course book Evolve 6. Tests were designed in order to see the noticeable difference between those who were taught according to these new ways and the ones who were taught traditionally, as well as this, both groups were taught by the same teacher.

Results

The study confirmed the findings on the notion and significance of various role play activities in English classes within technical university students. For conducting the research, students of bachelor degree have been taught English for two months. Two groups were chosen to conduct the experiment, the experimental (group 1) and control group (group 2). Subsequently, they expressed their attitudes towards the role play activities and started implementing various types of new words, collocations, phrasal verbs and expressions in their speech. Before starting the experiment, a pretest was held in order to be able to compare the results after the experiment.

Judging by these results it can be claimed that not many students got the maximum 10 out of 10,

except one student. The majority of the students from both groups received 8 and 7 points out of 10. Whereas 3 students got 6, almost the same result shows the second group. 5 or less points were gained by students of both groups, however the number of students is not more than 2 or 1.

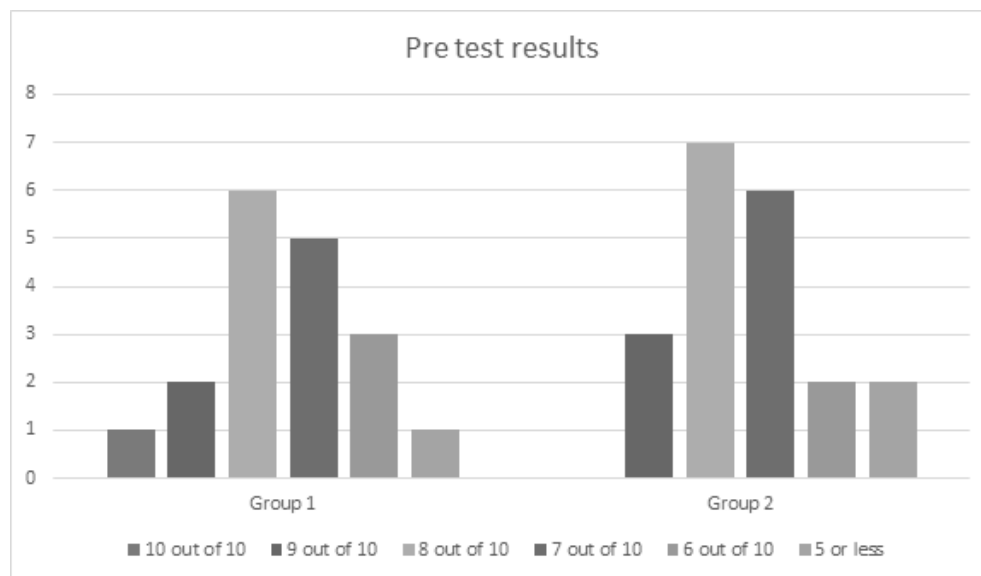


Figure 1 - Pre-test results

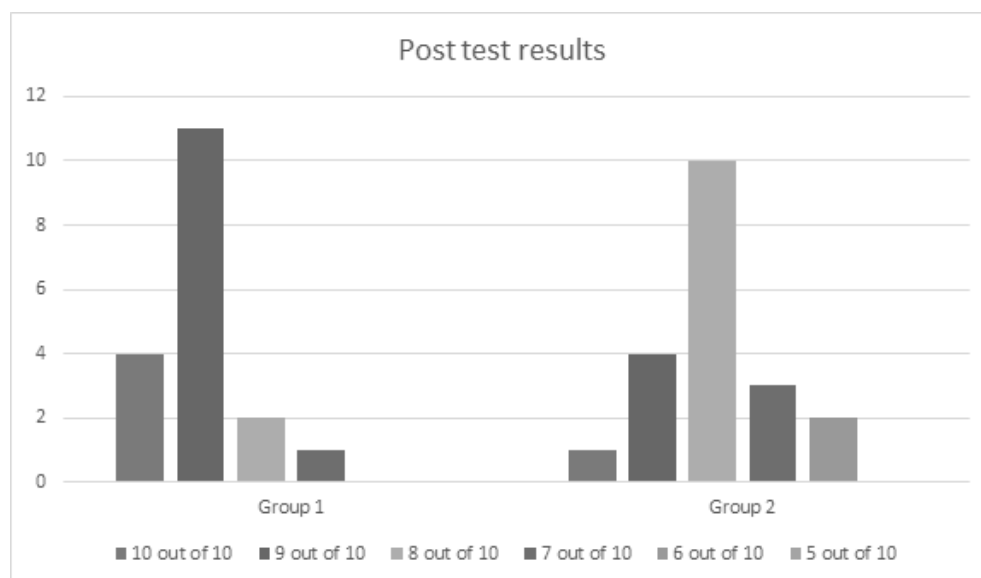


Figure 2 - Post-test results

The results of the posttest have significantly increased in both groups. As for the highest came 9 points out of 10, followed by 10 out of 10 in experimental group 1. The lowest point showed 7 and only 1 student received it. Whereas the second group 2 managed to do the test relevantly well, the vast majority of students got 8 out of 10, followed by 9 and 7 points out of 10. In spite of this, there were two students who received 6 out of 10.

Subsequently, after the research survey was conducted in order to assess overall impression by these two months. The survey was conducted by both groups, experimental and control. Students were

asked to give their opinions concerning role play activities and various other techniques which were widely utilized through these months. Learners were requested to select the following statements choosing the numbers from 1 to 5. Number 1 is equal to the answer 'I strongly disagree', number 2 is equal to the answer 'I disagree', number 3 is equal to the answer 'I neither agree nor disagree', number 4 is equal to the answer 'I agree', and last but not least, number 5 is equal to the answer 'I strongly agree'.

Questionnaire and survey comments

All diagrams depicted below resulted from the processing of the collected data. The given data exported from the responses of Russian students are provided below. The first pie chart (Figure 3) shows the significance of role play activities within English classes. By contrast, the answer 'I strongly agree' collected the largest percentage of all five answers, at 56%. Whereas the answer 'I neither agree nor disagree' depicts the lowest percentage, at 11%.

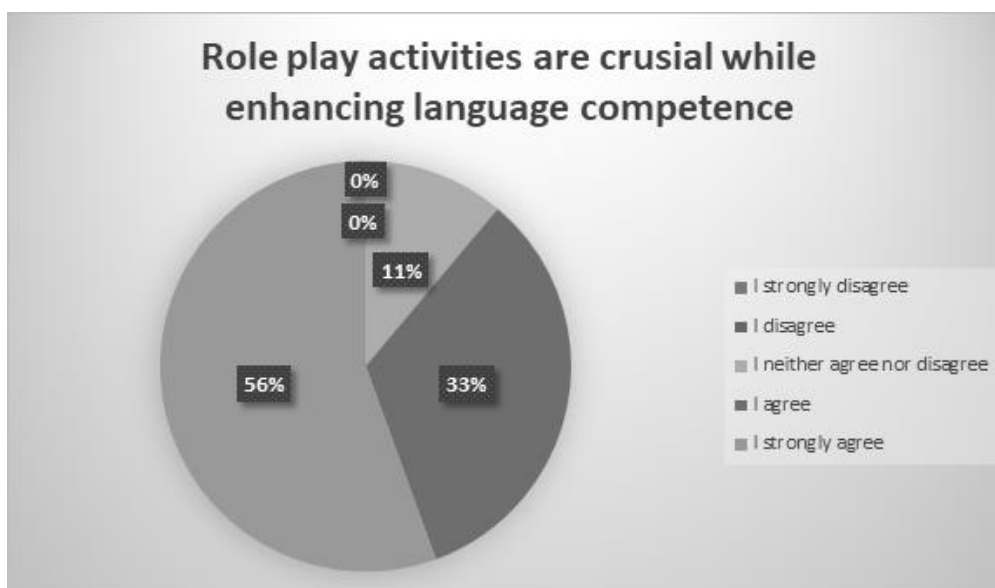


Figure 3 - Significance of role play activities

The following pie chart (Figure 4) enumerates the usage of various role play activities in English classes before the experiment. The vast majority of the participants stated that they neither agree or disagree (39%), disagree (28%) and strongly disagree (22%), gathering 89% in total.

The given pie chart (Figure 5) reveals the number of students who adore implementing a wide range of role play activities in English classes. Overall, the answer 'I strongly agree' gathered the largest percentage of all five answers, at 50% of the sum total, followed by 'I agree' with 33%. However, 11% of students gave the answers 'I neither agree nor disagree' and 6% only chose the answer 'I disagree'.

The next pie chart (Figure 6) expresses the diversity of tasks and activities concerning role playing in English lessons. 61% of students undoubtedly use different kinds of role play activities during tutorials, whereas 33% of them claimed 'I agree'. However, only 17,6% of students expressed 'I neither agree nor disagree'.

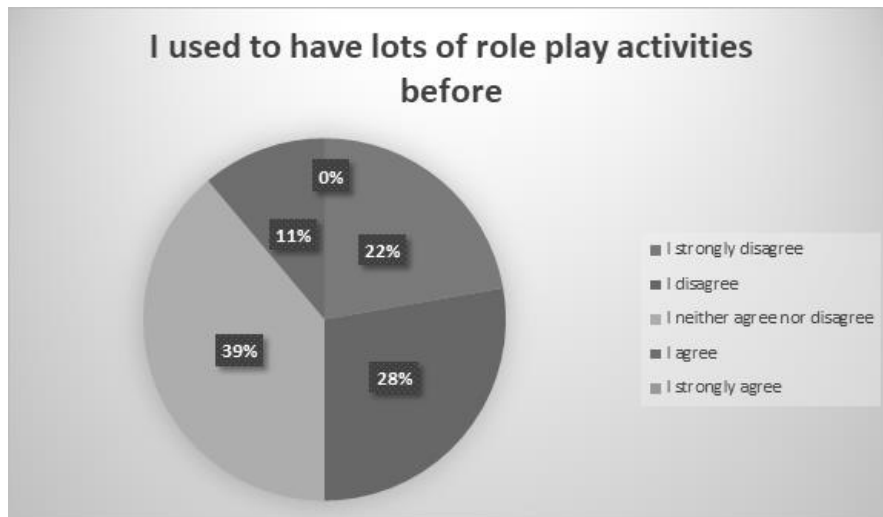


Figure 4 - Implementation of role play activities before the experiment

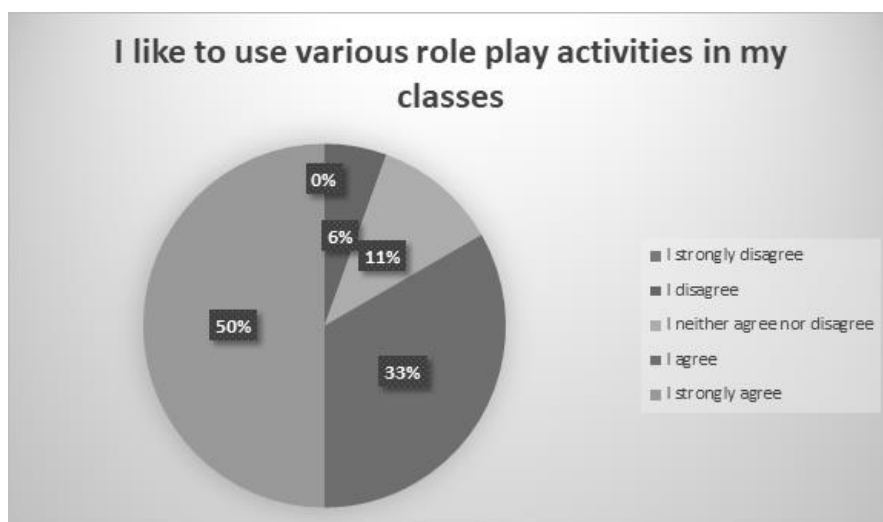


Figure 5 - Preferences in role play activities

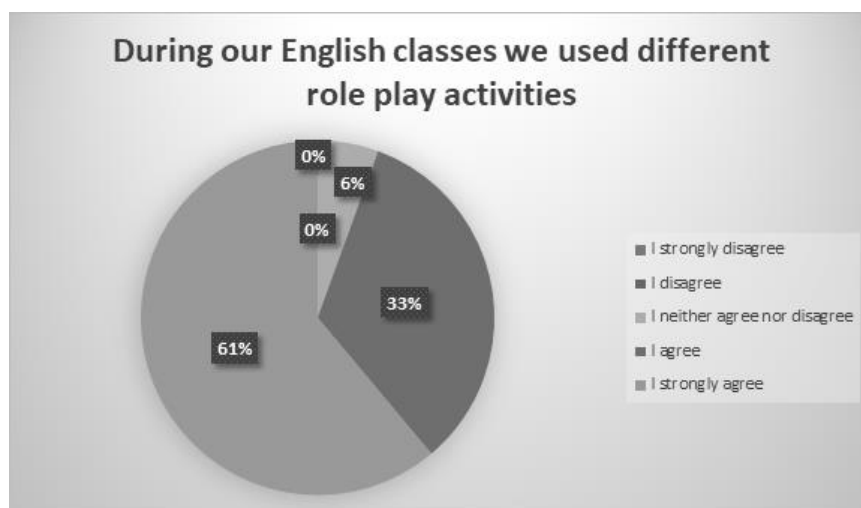


Figure 6 - Utilization frequency of role play activities

According to the shown pie chart (Figure 7) answers can vary, as for the majority of students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of role play activities within English classes in technical university, the answer 'I strongly agree' gathered the largest percentage of all other statements, at 72% of the sum total, followed by 'I agree' statement with 17%. However, 11% of students selected 'I neither agree nor disagree'.

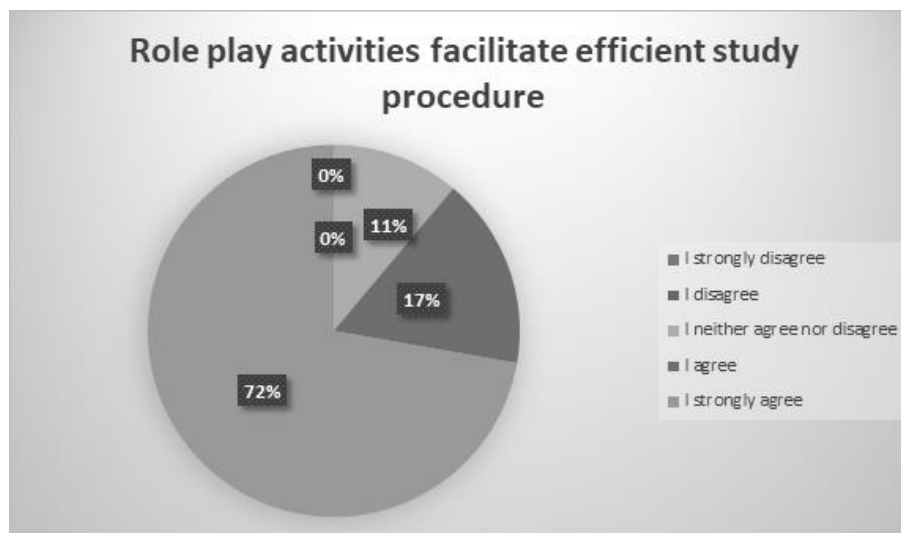


Figure 7 - Efficiency of role play activities

Conclusion

Role play can be used as a means of achieving a wide variety of outcomes, such as the acquisition of knowledge, application of knowledge to develop further understanding and skills, and attitudinal change not only in teaching students of technical universities but also in other spheres. It is a particularly useful strategy in learning vocabulary, surpassing speaking, as well as boosting listening skills, where learners are required to increase their knowledge of other skills and understanding by reading, researching, selecting and organizing relevant materials, analyzing and synthesizing information, and discussing/arguing/debating different issues. Undeniably, learning in a relaxed and playful environment lets learners know it is safe to play around with what they are learning, and use their vocabulary in a real situation and in new creative ways.

Vast majority of the students who participated in the research agreed to the significance of learning English with the help of role playing for effective way of communication. Analyzed data led to vital facts regarding the usage of role play activities in teaching English as a second or foreign language. The substantial number of students who participated in the survey were male students at the age of 17-20, followed by females at the age of 17-20 and 20-25. Regarding students' pre and post results, it is obvious that the number of students who gained higher points increased inevitably. Concerning the students' replies, most participants agree on the importance of role play activities while learning English as a foreign language. However, a few students expressed their dilemma towards these statements. Thus, this can raise the question of the need for all students to be taught the language with the help of role playing.

Role-play gives students the chance to practice the language in real life situations in an interesting and fun way and at the same time stimulates unmotivated students to share and use the language when

they play their roles in front of the class. Advantages of using role-play Role play strategies have proven their effectiveness in teaching English to learners, as they can increase students' enthusiasm, self-confidence, empathy, and encourage critical thinking. Role-play is a teaching strategy that models all skills relevantly in a cost-effective, controlled, and fun way for both students and teachers. Regardless of the level of the learners, teachers should deliberate about the ways and other techniques of implementing role play activities to encourage students and make them discover new horizons while learning English.

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Особенности ролевых игр и их эффективность на компетентность студентов технического вуза

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Аннотация

Говорение является основным фактором способности студентов понимать собеседника и умения общаться на любом языке. Хотя существует много способов улучшения говорения, студенты технических университетов, изучающие английский язык, сталкиваются трудностями во время оттачивания этого навыка, которые объясняются широким использованием традиционных подходов, ориентированных в основном на запоминание фраз и других слов. Ролевая игра потенциально предлагает чудесный способ побудить учащихся говорить, взаимодействовать с другими и правильно использовать словарный запас в

смоделированных аутентичных ситуациях. Цель статьи – выявить значимость ролевых игр среди студентов неязыковых вузов. Для решения поставленных задач потребовались следующие методы: проведен обзор научной и методической литературы, дана оценка источников информации. Для сбора данных был проведен выборочный анкетный опрос, а также в течение всего периода проводились экспериментальные занятия для показа результатов. Исследовательский опрос и занятия были проведены в октябре и ноябре 2022 года. Различные приемы ролевых игр могут доказать эффективность их реализации всем учащимся. В частности, для студентов технических вузов, которые сильно затрудняются во время разговора, может иметь большое значение. Результаты исследования позволяют нам рассмотреть отношение учащихся к ролевым играм при изучении английского языка как второго иностранного.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Ролевые игры, английский язык, говорение, студенты технического вуза, коммуникативная компетентность, интерактивные методы.

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