



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52714/dthu.15.3.2026.1785>

INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' PRACTICES OF USING ROLE-PLAYS TO DEVELOP PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN AN GIANG PROVINCE

Phan Ngoc Thach^{1*} and Tran Quang Trung²

¹Foreign Languages Faculty, Dong Thap University, Cao Lanh 870000, Vietnam

²Postgraduate, Dong Thap University, Cao Lanh 870000, Vietnam

*Corresponding author, Email: pnthach@dthu.edu.vn

Article history

Received: 17/8/2025; Received in revised form: 26/9/2025; Accepted: 03/10/2025

Abstract

Developing English communication skills is crucial for primary school children and role-play is seen as an effective method to achieve this goal. However, how to apply role-play effectively in English classes remains a challenge. The study aims to investigate primary school teachers' use of role-plays and explore how English teachers use role-plays to develop primary students' English communication skills in the English classrooms. A mixed-methods design was employed, using surveys with 103 English teachers, semi-structured interviews with 6 teachers, and classroom observations with 6 teachers at primary schools in An Giang province. Based on the data collected from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and survey responses, the findings revealed that most teachers employed effective strategies when using role-play in teaching to develop primary students' English communication skills in English classrooms. The findings can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of role-plays in addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization in education and beyond. Thus, pedagogical implications can be suggested for the need to support English teaching in the curriculum and to develop primary students' English communication skills at primary schools in An Giang province, as well as in Vietnam.

Keywords: *Communication skills in English, primary schools, role-plays.*

Cite: Phan, N. T., & Tran, Q. T. (2026). Investigating teachers' practices of using role-plays to develop primary school students' English communication skills in An Giang Province. *Dong Thap University Journal of Science*, 15(3), 58-72. <https://doi.org/10.52714/dthu.15.3.2026.1785>

Copyright © 2026 The author(s). This work is licensed under a CC BY-NC 4.0 License.

SỬ DỤNG KỸ THUẬT ĐÓNG VAI NHẪM PHÁT TRIỂN KỸ NĂNG GIAO TIẾP TIẾNG ANH CHO HỌC SINH TIỂU HỌC TẠI TỈNH AN GIANG

Phan Ngọc Thạch^{1*} và Trần Quang Trung²

¹*Khoa Ngoại Ngữ, Trường Đại học Đồng Tháp, Việt Nam*

²*Học viên cao học, Trường Đại học Đồng Tháp, Việt Nam*

**Tác giả liên hệ, Email: pnthach@dthu.edu.vn*

Lịch sử bài báo

Ngày nhận: 17/8/2025; Ngày nhận chỉnh sửa: 26/9/2025; Ngày duyệt đăng: 03/10/2025

Tóm tắt

Việc phát triển kỹ năng giao tiếp tiếng Anh là điều rất quan trọng đối với học sinh tiểu học, và phương pháp đóng vai được xem là một cách tiếp cận hiệu quả để đạt được mục tiêu này. Tuy nhiên, việc áp dụng phương pháp đóng vai một cách hiệu quả trong các tiết học tiếng Anh vẫn còn là một thách thức. Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu việc sử dụng nhập vai của giáo viên trong các lớp học để phát triển kỹ năng giao tiếp tiếng Anh cho học sinh. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp hỗn hợp, bao gồm khảo sát với 103 giáo viên Tiếng Anh, phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc với 6 giáo viên Tiếng Anh và dự giờ lớp học với 6 giáo viên Tiếng Anh tại một số trường tiểu học ở tỉnh An Giang. Dựa trên dữ liệu thu thập được từ quan sát lớp học, phỏng vấn giáo viên và phân hồi khảo sát, kết quả cho thấy phần lớn giáo viên đã áp dụng hiệu quả các chiến lược nhập vai để nâng cao khả năng giao tiếp tiếng Anh cho học sinh. Những phát hiện này góp phần làm rõ vai trò của nhập vai trong việc giải quyết các thách thức giáo dục do toàn cầu hóa mang lại, đồng thời đưa ra một số hàm ý sư phạm nhằm hỗ trợ việc dạy học tiếng Anh và phát triển kỹ năng giao tiếp cho học sinh tiểu học tại An Giang nói riêng và Việt Nam nói chung.

Từ khóa: *Kỹ năng giao tiếp tiếng Anh, nhập vai, trường tiểu học.*

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, English has become a crucial tool for communication across nations. Because of its important role worldwide, communication skills are especially essential for people to communicate and participate in today's society. According to Kim et al. (2020), communication involves the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and emotions, and is central to building and maintaining relationships. Thus, the ability to speak and listen well is essential for both cognitive and linguistic development for students. For those reasons, many governments have placed a strong emphasis on improving students' communication skills through educational policies to aim at producing competent English users (Pancerselvam & Mohamad, 2019). However, various challenges hinder the development of these skills. Factors such as low confidence, limited vocabulary, anxiety, and minimal use of English outside the classroom can make it difficult for learners to speak effectively in a second language (Hashim & Isa, 2012; Zakaria et al., 2019).

In recent years, Vietnam's education system has undergone significant changes to better prepare students for the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Educational reforms of the Ministry of Education and Training have aimed to develop students' competencies in response to global demands (MOET, 2018). One concentration of these reforms is to enhance communication skills, especially in English. However, many primary schools in An Giang Province lack effective strategies for implementing role-plays and English communication teaching methods in the English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) classroom. Next, students often come from non-English speaking backgrounds with minimal exposure to the language outside the classroom. In addition, traditional teaching methods that prioritize rote memorization and structures continue to dominate, which hinders the development of students' practical communication skills. In this regard, student-centered approaches that encourage active participation are needed. Therefore, role-plays are a useful technique that allows students to practice speaking English in realistic and engaging situations to help students improve their fluency, build confidence, and enhance their communication skills. They enable learners to practice different social roles, express creativity, and develop confidence in speaking (Togimin & Jaafar, 2020; Vani et al., 2022). This approach is beneficial for primary school students to learn English through fun, active, and collaborative activities.

The research aims to investigate primary school teachers' perceptions and practices of using role-plays to develop students' English communication skills in the EFL classroom. To achieve the two above aims, the following research questions are addressed: (1) What are primary school teachers' perceptions of using role-plays in developing primary students' English communication skills in the EFL classrooms? (2) What types of role-play are used to develop primary school students' English communication skills in the EFL classrooms? Based on these research questions, this article presents the results of an investigation into primary school teachers' practices of using role-play activities, with some recommendations on how to use role-play activities to develop students' communication skills in English in An Giang province. The findings may offer valuable insights into how to use role-plays in the EFL classroom and contribute to the broader goals of educational reform and global integration.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Role-play

Since the emergence of the communicative approach in language teaching, role-play has become an important technique in English classrooms. Scholars such as Byrne (1986), Ladousse (1987), and Ramos (2002) view role-play as an effective method for increasing student engagement and improving English learning. According to Ladousse (1987), role-play

allows students to take on a character in a specific context, encouraging creativity and safe exploration. Similarly, Procter (2000) defines a “role” as a character in a performance, and “role-play” as acting out behaviors or situations, commonly used in language learning and training. Byrne (1986) considers role-play as part of drama activities, including mime and simulation, and describes it simply as “Let’s pretend.” Byrne (1986) also notes that role-play helps students see how English can be useful outside the classroom. Additionally, Ladousse (1987) also highlights that role-play can range from structured tasks to open-ended simulations where students respond creatively. In summary, role-play is widely recognized as a valuable technique to enhance student engagement, creativity, and real-life language use in English classrooms.

2.2. Types of role-play

Role-play activities are typically classified into three main categories based on the level of scripting, and each researcher has various classifications. According to Nestel and Tierney (2007), one category of role play is the fully scripted role-play. In this category, participants interact through a given script. Another type of role play is the partially scripted role-play. During the partially scripted role-play, the participant is given an opening suggestion or an outline to guide his/her answers. The last type of role play is the completely unscripted role play. In the unscripted role play, participants are expected to perform as they typically would within a given situation.

In contrast, Littlewood (1981) classifies role-play activities based on the nature of the information given to learners. The first type of role play is controlled by using prompted dialogues. In this activity, students receive cue cards to help them respond appropriately to their partner. The second one is controlled through cues and information. In these activities, one student improvises while the other responds, allowing more creativity and less teacher control. The third type focuses on controlling the situation and goals, where more control is placed on how students interact. At first, students only know the general situation and their own goals. They have to manage the interaction themselves (Littlewood, 1981). The last type of role-play involves a debate or discussion. For this activity, students need to have enough knowledge about the topic and be able to defend different viewpoints. Next, they must fully understand the issue and then discuss it in small groups. By the end, they will either reach a clear decision or vote on the matter. This interaction shows the outcome of conflicting opinions (Littlewood, 1981).

2.3. The practices of using role-plays through the six steps

When role-play activities are applied in the classes, teachers must bear in mind that the procedure goes through certain steps. As suggested by Kodotchigova (2002), there are six steps that can be used to make an effective lesson.

Step 1 - Choose an appropriate situation

Choosing a situation is the first essential step in planning a role-play activity, as it helps define students’ needs and interests. According to Livingstone (1983), the teacher can choose exactly what the students have just learned to create a speaking topic. More interestingly, students can be allowed to select the topic and situation themselves, provided that it is suitable for the cultural features of the country. This flexibility in topic selection can increase students’ engagement and make the role-play activity more relevant.

Step 2 - Role Play Design

The second step of role play will be carried out when the situation of the conversation is formed after discussion and reaching a consensus on the topic. This step generalizes the

ideas about the development of the situation. However, Livingstone (1983) also noted that students' level of language proficiency should be carefully considered when carrying out any activities. This argument is explained by the viewpoint of Harmer (2001) that role-play helps motivate learners, especially at intermediate and higher levels, because the situations and conflicts in them encourage learners to use language more naturally.

Step 3 - A Preparation in the aspect of Linguistics

The necessary communicative language in role-play activities depends largely on the students' competence level. According to Livingstone (1983), at the beginning level, the language required is almost totally predictable. Moreover, according to Byrne (1986), the introduction of any new vocabulary, structure, or pronunciation is necessary before any role-play activities can be started.

Step 4 - Factual Preparation

This step plays a crucial role in providing students with precise information and clearly defining their roles in the activity. According to Van Ments (1999), this step has the main function of providing students with more precise information and carefully describing the role of each student. This step will help students imagine more easily the job that they are going to be involved in, so that they will act more confidently. Finally, to gather this sort of detailed information, students need to be asked to prepare the contents of the lesson at home in advance by their teacher.

Step 5 - Assigning the Roles

In this step, integrating role play in the classroom can enhance student understanding and engagement, especially when supported by the teacher and peer collaboration. According to Harasim et al. (1995), some instructors ask for volunteers to act out a role play in front of the class because it can be a sample for students to follow. In addition, if there is not much time left, teachers can ask students to perform their play at home as preparation and will act in the next lesson.

Step 6 - Follow-up

Following the application of role-play activities, teachers should spend time examining, not concentrating mainly on pointing out and correcting mistakes made by students during the time they take part in activities. According to Milroy (1982) and Horner and McGinley (1990), debriefing, or follow-up, means asking every student's opinion about the role play and welcoming their remarks. This step is essential and should occur after the role-play in the classroom.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

Role-play is a widely recognized technique for enhancing primary school students' communication skills in English. It is an interactive approach aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes real-life communication over mere linguistic accuracy (Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Building upon this perspective, this study is based on a conceptual framework of theories and prior research on communication skills, role-plays, and teachers' classroom practices in EFL settings. Next, a crucial component of this framework is communication skills, which are fundamental to language learning, enabling students to interact effectively. In addition, further reinforcing the conceptual framework, it is essential to examine the relationship between teachers' role-play practices and students' communication skill development.

Moreover, the theoretical foundation of this study is supported by several key theories. Firstly, Social Interaction Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes the role of communication in real-life contexts in language development. Secondly, Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 2014) explains why role-play facilitates effective language learning through experience and reflection. Finally, CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) underscores the importance of authentic communication in language education. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study and shows how communication theories and teachers' role-play practices collectively develop primary students' communication skills in English.

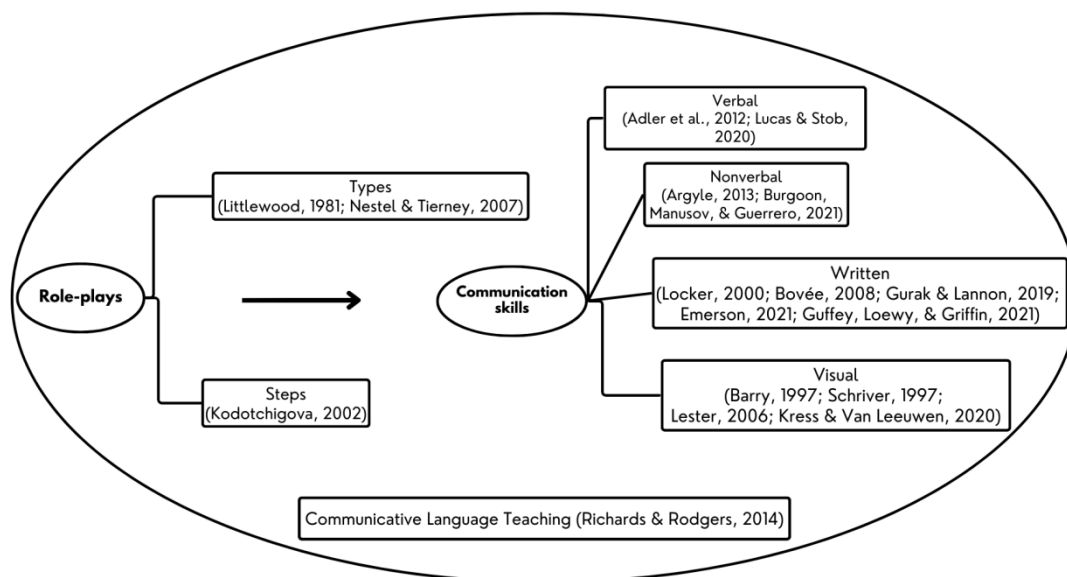


Figure 1. A conceptual Framework

3. Data and research methods

A mixed methods design was employed in this study to investigate primary school teachers' perceptions and practices of role-plays in developing primary students' English communication skills in the EFL classroom, in An Giang province. In addition, a mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem (Plano Clark, 2016). Because the primary goal of this study was to investigate primary school teachers' practice of role-plays in developing primary students' English communication skills in the EFL classroom, it might be regarded as an intrinsic case study.

Next, participants of this study were EFL teachers who worked at various primary schools in An Giang province. A total of one hundred and three EFL teachers participated in the survey, six EFL teachers were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews, and six classroom observations took place in primary schools in An Giang province. According to Creswell and Clark (2017), participants were selected through stratified random sampling, purposive sampling, and convenience sampling. Stratified random sampling was used to select primary school teachers from various schools in An Giang province for the questionnaire to ensure that the sample represented various sub-groups of the population, including schools in both urban and rural areas. For semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling was employed to enable the researcher to choose teachers who were most relevant to the study's aims. Lastly,

convenience sampling was used to select classes from schools where teachers are available and willing to allow the researcher to observe role-play activities for classroom observations.

Moreover, the main data collection instruments and validity and reliability (questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations) were used in this study. Questionnaires are one of the primary sources of data in any research. According to Green and Salkind (2003), a questionnaire is a useful tool in educational research since individuals can complete it without any direct assistance or intervention from the researchers. The questionnaire consisted of 55 items developed from theories of communication skills and the use of role-playing games in language teaching (Littlewood, 1981). These items were grouped into nine themes: (1) communication skills, (2) verbal communication, (3) non-verbal communication, (4) written communication, (5) visual communication, (6) understanding of role-playing games, (7) types of role-playing games, (8) role-playing game practices, and (9) perceptions. Following the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand the teachers' use of role-plays in developing primary students' English communication skills in the EFL classroom. According to Turner III (2010), these interviews were basically conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee that were conducted for a specific purpose. The interview consisted of 16 questions grouped into three main themes: (1) general information about the teachers, (2) their perceptions of role-playing activities and communication skills, and (3) their practices in using role-playing games in the classroom. Next, six classroom observations were done with six EFL teachers who work in different public schools in An Giang. Classroom observation is a widely used qualitative tool that allows researchers to gather first-hand information about what actually happens in teaching settings (Creswell, 2002). The observation sheet included four clusters: (1) participant information, (2) the way in which teachers use role-plays in the EFL classroom, (3) observation details, and (4) the practices of using role-plays through the six steps of inventory. Observations help the researcher explore the ways in which EFL teachers practice role-plays to develop primary students' English communication skills in the EFL classroom, and in which situations primary school teachers practice role-plays. Finally, the questionnaire was developed based on Gardner's (2004) analytical framework, and its reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Pilot interviews and classroom observations were also conducted, with participants informed of the study's objectives prior to data collection. All interviews and observations were recorded, transcribed, or extracted for further analysis.

Last but not least, the data collected from questionnaires, interviews, observations, video recordings, and audio recordings were examined carefully and qualitatively. The participants were handed out questionnaires through the Google Forms platform, designed for the selected EFL teachers to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Then, the collected data were comprehensively analyzed to answer the two research questions of the study by using SPSS software (version 26.0) to analyze the data from the survey. In addition, all interview data were processed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher analyzed the interview transcripts by coding and categorizing excerpts about teachers' perceptions and role-playing practices, identifying themes, and translating selected excerpts from Vietnamese to English. Moreover, for the observation, teachers' practice of role plays was marked by the strategies and the purposes of using role plays in the EFL classroom. They were checked by verifying the video recording. Teachers' strategies and the purposes of using role plays were taken note of in detail. Extracts of classroom observations related to their role-play practices were teased out and transcribed.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. From the questionnaires

A Descriptive Statistic was run to examine the mean and Std. Deviation score of the concept of role-plays, the types of role-plays, and the practices of role-plays.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the concept of role-plays

Concept of role-plays	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
...be a "role".	103	3.89	0.90
...play the role of a character in a specific setting.	103	3.95	0.86
...involve acting out different behaviors or taking on different characters.	103	3.90	0.83
...be considered "Let's Pretend".	103	3.50	0.99
...include "pantomime" and "simulation."	103	3.65	0.98
...mean students provided with specific content, simulations and roles.	103	3.89	0.90
Valid N (listwise)	103	3.80	0.91

The table below gives information about the overall mean and Std. Deviation score of the concept of role-plays. Overall, 103 participants rate the concept of role-plays at a high level ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.91$). This means everyone rates the concept of role-plays at a very high level, and the respondents are very different. It is interesting to say that "...play the role of a character in a specific setting." is ranked at 3.95 (the highest level). This shows that role-plays play the role of a character in a specific setting. Next, the values of the Std. Deviation is around 0.83 to 0.99. This also means that respondents' ratings about the concept of role-plays are very near the same, as well as very different. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a varying rate among the respondents, and participants completely agree with the concept of role-plays.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the types of role-plays

Types of role-plays	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
...be a fully scripted role-play.	103	3.71	0.93
...be a partly scripted role-play.	103	3.58	1.00
...be a completely unscripted role-play.	103	3.22	1.31
...be controlled by using prompted dialogues.	103	3.71	0.91
...controll through cues and information.	103	3.85	0.91
...focus on controlling the situation and goals.	103	3.82	0.89
...involve a debate or discussion.	103	3.78	0.89
Valid N (listwise)	103	3.67	0.98

Table 2 gives information about the overall mean and Std. Deviation score of the types of role-plays. Overall, many participants show their views on non-verbal communication at a high level ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.98$). This means each participant strongly agrees with the types of role-plays, and the respondents are very different. It is exciting to say that “... *control through cues and information.*” is ranked at 3.85 (the highest level). This shows that participants strongly agree that role-plays are controlled through cues and information. Next, the values of the Std. Deviation is around 0.89 to 1.31. This also means that respondents’ ratings of the types of role-play are very different. Thus, it can be understood that there is a very different rate among the respondents, and participants completely agree with the types of role-play.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the practices of role-plays

The practice of role-plays	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
...choose the right content the students have just learned as the speaking topic.	103	3.97	0.85
...consider carefully the language level of the students before undertaking any activities.	103	4.00	0.89
...introduce new vocabulary, structures, or pronunciations before starting any role-playing activity.	103	3.99	0.90
...provide accurate information to students and clarify their roles in the activity.	103	4.08	0.81
...ask volunteers to role-play in front of the class as a model for students to follow.	103	4.06	0.83
...ask each student their opinion about the role-playing game and welcome their comments.	103	3.90	0.99
Valid N (listwise)	103	4.00	0.88

The table below shows that the overall mean and Std. Deviation score of the practice of role-plays. Overall, many participants show their views on the practice of role-plays at a high level ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.88$). This means each participant strongly agrees with the practice of role-plays, and the respondents are nearly the same. It is exciting to say that “...*provide accurate information to students and clarify their roles in the activity.*” is ranked at 4.06 (the highest level). This shows that participants strongly agree that the practice of role-plays provides accurate information to students and clarifies their roles in the activity. Next, the values of the Std. Deviation is around 0.81 to 0.99. This also means that respondents’ ratings about the concept of perspectives are nearly the same, as well as very different. However, there is also a very different choice with the highest level (0.99). Hence, it can be implemented that there is nearly the same rate among almost all respondents, and participants completely agree with the practice of role-plays.

4.1.2. From the interviews

a. The perspectives of role-playing activities

When asked about their understanding of role-playing activities, five of six participants answered that role-playing activities were to let students play a role. The five extracts below illustrate their views.

“...the teacher will assign my students to play a character...” (Participant 1).

“...let my students play a role...” (Participant 2).

“...let my students play a role...” (Participant 4).

“...students will play a specific character...” (Participant 5).

“...to let them role-play...” (Participant 6).

However, two of the six participants understood role-playing activities in that teachers asked students a question, and students answered a question, or one student asked a question and another one answered a question. The two extracts below illustrate their views.

“...the teacher to ask students to answer or for one student to ask and one student to answer.” (Participant 3).

“...give for children to role-play by asking or answering.” (Participant 6).

In addition, they also showed their views about role-playing activities. Three of them said that types of role-playing activities were a fully scripted role-play given by the teacher and a role-play without dialogue. These four extracts below express their views.

“...role-play follow the script given by the teacher in advance...” (Participant 1).

“...a fully scripted role-play given by the teacher...” (Participant 4).

“...without needing a script in advance.” (Participant 4).

“...role-playing without dialogue...” (Participant 6).

Besides that, three of them also understood that type of role-playing activity was a role-playing activity that follows a dialogue. The three extracts below present their viewpoints.

“...role play follow a dialogue ...” (Participant 2).

“...role-playing activities include both conversational and dialogue.” (Participant 3).

“...role-playing activities can be two-person role-playing...” (Participant 5).

b. The practice of role-playing activities

When asked about using role-playing activities, five of six participants claimed that they usually used the structures for students to practice (one student asked a question, and another answered a question). The subsequent examples demonstrate these views.

“...they can apply the structures in class...” (Participant 1).

“...I can let them role-play about this or that sentence pattern, let them practice with their friends, one asks, one answers...” (Participant 2).

“...one person asking and one person answering is more.” (Participant 3).

“... the children will act out role-plays in pairs...” (Participant 5).

“...the students will role-play by asking and answering.” (Participant 6).

However, participant 4 used both scripts and non-scripts *“...I use both scripts and non-scripts.” (Participant 4).*

In addition, when asked about describing a specific role-playing activity, each participant had a different one. The six extracts below present their descriptions.

“...I let my students draw a hat with the shape of an ant and a grasshopper on it, and then they role-play each other; they role-play the actions in that story, they use the vocabulary and sentence patterns they’ve learned and they read...” (Participant 1).

“...I let them role-play according to the book, the activities that first put them in context to lead me to give the sentences for the children to practice...” (Participant 2).

“...when I teach children about toys, I will teach the sentence pattern “How many trains do you have?” then one student will be responsible for answering, his or her answer is “I have two trains or any toy” that he or she has at home.” (Participant 3).

“...for the third grade of Global Success book, there is a lesson about food and I will ask the students to work in groups of four and prepare the food in their own restaurant with drawings and colors, they do it themselves and then there will be a character, one person will be the waiter and the rest will be the customers, I will let them think for themselves what they will say, what they will ask people, what they will ask the customers and how the customers will answer...” (Participant 4).

“...after the children finish the lesson “Read and complete”, there will be two dialogues A and B. I will let the children practice as two friends. They will practice for about two minutes, then they will volunteer. I will invite two random friends to come up and one of those friends will play role A, one will play role B to practice that dialogue.” (Participant 5).

“Role-playing is done a lot in the classroom. For example, each new lesson in Lesson 1, Lesson 2 has a role-playing activity that is not only in Lesson 1, Lesson 2. In other parts, this is a regular activity in the classroom.” (Participant 6).

4.1.3. From the observations

Role-play practice of six participants was seen in the following several extracts, taken from each participant. T is for teacher and S for students (all used pseudonyms). The six extracts were taken from a female teacher working in a primary school in the town and five female teachers working in a primary school in a rural area. These extracts were taken from teachers in both urban and rural schools to represent different teaching contexts and ensure that the data accurately reflects the actual situation of English teaching in An Giang. The observed class was in grades 3, 4, and 5. In addition, they are quite good at English, but some of them are average at English. It was clear that six participants used the control by using prompted dialogues to practice the structure, which helped them speak English and taught them how to use this structure proficiently, with the following extract.

Participant 1

Extract 1

T: Now, work in pairs, one asks and one answers.

S: Work in pairs.

Participant 2

Extract 2

T: That’s good. Clap your hands for them. Work in pairs (ask and answer) and change.

S: Work in pairs and exchange the role.

Participant 3

Extract 3

T: Now work in pairs (Pictures A,B,C,D)

S: Work in pairs

Participant 4

Extract 4

T: Now you work in pairs (one asks and one answers), Ok, yes or No

S: Yes

Participant 5

Extract 5

T: Now, can you two sit at the same table and practice these four pictures for me? Okay, now, I'll ask and you'll answer. Say all four pictures and then we'll reverse them. Okay, now you ask and I'll answer. Okay, now two minutes, two minutes, guys.

S: Work in pairs

Participant 6

Extract 6

T: Now class, you will work in pairs, các bạn làm việc theo cặp, in 2 minutes

S: Work in pairs.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Investigating primary school teachers' use of role-plays in developing primary school students' English communication skills in the EFL classrooms

As shown in the questionnaires and interviews, teachers perceived role-play as a valuable tool for enhancing students' English skills. This perception aligns with the previous study of Ladousse (1987), who found that role-play promotes students' confidence, vocabulary use, fluency, and motivation. Most teachers in the study believed that role-playing helps learners become more engaged in classroom activities, and also allows them to practice language in real-life contexts. These findings confirm the communicative approach to language teaching, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful interaction (Byrne, 1986). Most participants described role-play as students acting out dialogues or conversations in pairs or groups. Their perception clearly reflects the definition of role-play by Byrne (1986) and Ladousse (1987), who stated that role-play allows learners to practice the language in real or imaginary contexts. Finally, teachers mainly used role-playing games to practice dialogues, either scripted or unscripted. This aligns with Byrne's (1986) classification of role-playing games. They also viewed role-playing games as an effective way to motivate students, consistent with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, some teachers regarded role-playing games as simple question-and-answer exchanges, which indicates a limited understanding of their broader potential. As Ladousse (1987) emphasises, role-playing games should go beyond controlled exercises to promote more natural language use.

4.2.2. Exploring the ways in which EFL teachers use role-plays to develop primary students' English communication skills in the EFL classrooms

According to interviews, teachers mainly used controlled dialogues and scripted role-plays. This is consistent with Littlewood's (1981) classification of role-play activities. Many teachers designed activities that connected lesson content to real-life situations, such as role-playing in a restaurant or practicing shopping conversations. These activities illustrated Kolb's (2014) Experiential Learning Theory. Teachers also followed some of the six steps recommended by Kodotchigova (2002) for implementing role-plays. These steps include choosing a relevant situation, designing the role-play, preparing vocabulary and grammar structures, assigning roles, performing the role-play, and conducting a follow-up. However, classroom observations showed that role-plays were often limited to practicing sentence patterns in pairs (simple question-and-answer exercises). Although these activities aid in the mastery of sentence patterns, they may not fully develop higher-level communication skills such as negotiating, expressing opinions, or dealing with unexpected situations, as Littlewood (1981) suggested.

5. Conclusion and policy implications

This study explored how primary school teachers in An Giang province practice using role-plays to develop students' communication skills in English. The results show that teachers have positive attitudes towards role-plays and understand their benefits in improving students' speaking and listening skills. Most teachers use structured, fully scripted role-plays, controlled dialogues, and follow preparation steps, such as introducing vocabulary and assigning roles. However, different types of role-play, like discussions or unscripted dialogues, are rarely used. In addition, teachers believe role-play effectively improves speaking and listening skills, but they may need more training and guidance to use it in diverse and creative ways. Overall, based on the findings of the research, the study confirms that role-play is an effective method for promoting communication skills in primary English classrooms.

The findings through data collected from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and teachers' observations in the study are significant for EFL teacher professional development. Firstly, teacher training programs should prioritize the inclusion of workshops focused on the implementation of role-plays. Secondly, professional development initiatives should encourage collaboration among teachers. Thirdly, implementing role-plays into the curriculum requires careful planning and consideration of students' needs. Fourthly, teachers should be supported in implementing the full six-step role-play process in their classrooms. Fifthly, classroom observations revealed that teachers used textbooks as the main source for role-plays, especially the Global Success textbooks. The last one, an important implication, is the need for supportive school policies that promote role-playing in EFL classrooms.

References

- Adler, R. B., Rodman, G. R., & DuPré, A. (2012). *Understanding human communication*. Oxford University Press.
- Argyle, M. (2013). *Bodily communication*. Routledge.
- Burgoon, J. K., Manusov, V., & Guerrero, L. K. (2021). *Nonverbal communication*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003095552>
- Bové, C. L. (2008). *Business communication today*. Pearson Education India.
- Barry, A. M. (1997). *Visual intelligence*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780791495841>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Byrne, D. (1986). *Teaching oral English*. Longman Publishing Group.
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative* (Vol. 7). Prentice Hall Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. SAGE Publications.
- Emerson, L. (2021). *Writing guidelines for business students 6e*. Cengage AU.
- Guffey, M. E., Loewy, D., & Griffin, E. (2021). *Business communication: Process and product, Brief Edition*. Cengage Canada.
- Gurak, L. J., & Lannon, J. M. (2019). *Strategies for technical communication in the workplace*. (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Green, S. B., & Salkind, N. J. (2003). *Using SPSS for windows and macintosh* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gardner, R. C. (2004). *Attitude motivation and second language learning*. In A. M. H.
- Harasim, L., Hiltz, S. R., Teles, L., & Turoff, M. (1995). *Learning networks: A field guide to teaching and learning online*. Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Hashim, H., & Isa, I. S. (2012). Students' anxiety level towards speaking in English: Malaysia polytechnic experience. *2012 IEEE Symposium on Business, Engineering and Industrial Applications*, 595-599. <https://doi.org/10.1109/isbeia.2012.6422957>
- Harmer, J. (2001). Book review : The practice of English language teaching. *RELC Journal*, 32(1), 135-136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003368820103200109>
- Horner, D., & McGinley, K. (1990). Running simulation/games: A step-by-step guide. In D. Crookall & R. Oxford (Eds.), *Simulation, gaming and language learning* (pp. 33-45). New York: Newbury House Publishers.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT Press.
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2020). *Reading images*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>
- Kim, H. J., Shin, M. S., & Chang, H. J. (2020). Self-perception early childhood teachers of the importance of communication skills. *Journal of speech-language & hearing disorders*, 29(1), 105-110. <https://doi.org/10.15724/jslhd.2020.29.1.105>
- Kodotchigova, M. A. (2002). Role play in teaching culture: Six quick steps for classroom implementation. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 8(7). <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kodotchigova-RolePlay.html>
- Ladousse G.P. (1987). *Role play*. Oxford University Press.
- Lucas, S. E., & Stob, P. (2020). *The art of public speaking*. McGraw-Hill.
- Locker, K. O. (2000). The state of the journal, 2000. *Journal of Business Communication*, 37(1), 111-113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002194360003700108>

- Lester, P. M. (2006). Book Review: Toni Schlesinger: Five flights up and other New York apartment stories. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 13(4), 256-257. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15551407vcq1304_6
- Livingstone, C. (1983). *Role play in language learning*. Longman Publishing Group.
- Littlewood, W. (1981). *Communicative language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Milroy, E. (1982). *Role-play: a practical guide*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.
- MOET, (2018). *English language curriculum for general education*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House. Available from <http://moet.gov.vn/>
- Nestel, D., & Tierney, T. (2007). Role-play for medical students learning about communication: Guidelines for maximising benefits. *BMC Medical Education*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-7-3>
- Plano Clark, V. L. (2016). Mixed methods research. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 305-306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262619>
- Paneerselvam, A., & Mohamad, M. (2019). Learners' challenges and English educators' approaches in teaching speaking skills in an ESL classroom: A literature review. *Creative Education*, 10(13), 3299-3305. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1013253>
- Procter, P. (2000). *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*.
- Ramos, F. B. R. (2002). *ESL students' perceptions of role-play activities*. West Virginia University.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024532>
- Schriver, K. A. (1997). *Dynamics in document design: Creating text for readers*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc..
- Turner III, D. W. (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The qualitative report*, 15(3), 754. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1178>
- Togimin, N., & Jaafar, H. (2020). Role play activities: An innovative approach to teaching speaking skills in an ESL classroom. *LSP International Journal*, 7(2), 19-36. <https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v7.16310>
- Vani, R., Mohan, S., & Ramkumar, E. V. (2022). A study on ameliorating Indian engineering students' communication skills in relation with CEFR. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(6), 1172-1180. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1206.17>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (Vol. 86). Harvard university press.
- Van Ments, M. (1999). *The effective use of role-play*. London: Kogan
- Zakaria, N., Hashim, H., & Yunus, M. M. (2019). A review of affective strategy and social strategy in developing students' speaking skills. *Creative Education*, 10(12), 3082-3090. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1012232>