

Role Play as an Approach in Business English Course: Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Implementation

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the outcome of role play as an approach in developing the communicative competence of student in Politeknik Negeri Batam. Moreover, the focus of this study was on how the student's willingness, English competence and language improvement. The information was gathered through online survey. Guide questions were prepared and validated; The respondents are student who take Business to Business Sales course. PBL one of learning strategy where teaching is driven by a problem or project. The problem could be a challenge or a description of a difficulty, analyze the case, or find the solution for a certain topic. The result of this research shows that the students have an enthusiasm in learning English by using this strategy, the student's English competence also improved and students also have willingness and ability to improvise during their role play performance.

Keywords: Role play, speaking competence, problem-based learning

1. Introduction

English speaking is one of productive skill that being an issue in student's skill. It's very important in doing a communication but sometime the students have no strong confident to apply it. Brown (2001) that said speaking is an interactive process of conducting meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. It means that by speaking someone can provide his opinion, idea and feeling to it's hearer. The speaking very important in communication. Therefore, teaching speaking skills must be taught with innovative techniques. There are many techniques that can be used, one of which is role play. Many studies state that role playing is an effective way to teach speaking. Byrene (1986) says that role play is a method of playing certain ways to interact with others in imaginary situations then Ladousse(1995) adds that interaction in the classroom and increases motivation. Furthermore, Budden (2006) says that role-play is any activity of speaking when you play as someone else or imagine yourself being someone else. in B2B sales, students are asked to act as sellers and buyers so they will clearly convey the product to potential buyers and try to convince them.

Therefore ,Byrne (1986), grouped the role play into two forms, scripted and unscripted role play:

a. Scripted Role Play

Scripted role play is executed by having a textbook dialogue or conversation. The students have a preparation before doing role play. It will excersice studen't performance and pronunciation by having a time for practicing.

b. Unscripted Role Play

In contrast to scripted role play, unscripted role play deoes not depend on textbook or noted. The student will have a briefing first then executed it without script. The student have a freedom to develop the topic and choose their language.

Many researchers have done such of this research. First, Ramlah A. Ampatuan (2016) with the title Role Play as An Approach in Developing Students' Communicative Competence. Ramlah did FGD (Focus Group Discussion in collecting the data. The results present that role play strategy has an effect on students' communicative competence. It motivated the students to express themselves; provided self-confidence and opportunity for practicing the rules of social behavior; and allowed learners to use their learned language.

Second, Lilis Suryani that conduct the research about the Effectiveness of Role Play in Teaching Speaking. The research to know the effect of using role play in teaching speaking. The research used preexperimental design with one group pretest and posttest design which consist of 30 students as the sample. The data were

obtained by using pretest and posttest. Then, obtained data were analyzed by using SPSS 20. The result of the research showed that teaching speaking by using role play has a significant effect on improving the students' speaking ability.

Then Feng Liu & Yun Ding (2009) who conducted research on role play in language teaching. The focus of this research is how to apply role play in English class successfully and make the best use of it. The results of this research are: teachers must choose real and relevant topics; teachers need to improve their language; correct errors in the right way. Teachers can be facilitators, companions and role play's team. Teacher can also add games so that it is not monotonous and adjust the speed of speaking so that students are more fluent and have a lot of vocabulary. This study is also the same as the previous research but with a different case. In this research, the writer will identify role play in B2B Sales meeting.

PBL is one of strategy where learning is driven by a problem. The problem could be a challenge or a description of a difficulty, analyze the case, or find the solution for a certain topic. It could also be answer the question and issues in society. In PBL the student will give a case about B2B sales meeting, it will do in three meeting: first, they will promote the product, second, they will talk about the price and last meeting they will negotiate with the buyer and convince him to deal and closing.

As discussed earlier, role-play has been claimed as one approach that improve students' speaking competence in English class. Thus, it is interesting to take a deep look on how this approach be implemented in problem-based learning, particularly in a business English class. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) explore the role play approach in problem-based learning implementation, and (2) explore students' perception toward the use of role play approach in a business English class.

The benefits of this research are as follows: For Polibatam lecturers, this research can be a picture for improving their method in learning, may it can be effective too in delivering their lesson. For students, this research will provide knowledge about related points with English communication.

2. Methods

2.1 Settings and Participants

The participants of the study were the students who took Business to Business Sales course. There were forty one first year students from International Trade Logistics study program participated in present study. The sampling strategy was a convenience sample, in which the researcher was in charge as the participants' teacher in the mentioned course. In addition, only few of participants has had experience with role playing. The majority of participants (85%) got role playing in this course as their first experience.

2.2 Research Design and Analysis

This study conducted in Business to Business Sales course. The course implemented a problem-based learning course, in which the expected outcome of the courses was students' participation in the Sales Competition. The courses were lasted for 7 weeks, with hourlong classes twice a week and 14 meetings in total. The topic for each meeting were set (see Figure 1) and it started with the introduction to the B2B Sales and role play technique. The students' role play team were then set up and the study case given every week. Students will act as a buyer, seller and also observer in their team. The role might change in each case as all of student in team would get the opportunity to be the speaker and listener. The role play performances were held synchronously through Zoom meeting and recorded. At the end of the course, potential students were encouraged to participate in Sales Competition held by the institution.

Meeting (Week)	SUB-CONTENT
1	1. Intro to the B2B Sales course
2	1. Preparation of sales meeting 2. Case study for qualifying round and role play technique explained
3	1. Supporting skills a. Active listening b. Conversation skills c. Cultural sensitivity d. Empathy e. Improvisation f. Self-presentation g. Speaking in front of crowds
4	1. Selling techniques 2. Students team up in different teams, case study
5	1. Supporting skills 2. Live role play
6	1. Experience sharing/Video sharing by former Polibatam B2B Sales Delegation 2. Live role play
7	1. Experience sharing/Video sharing by former Polibatam B2B Sales Delegation 2. Live role play
8	1. Experience sharing/Video sharing by Business Expert 2. Live role play
9	1. Industry/buyer sharing 2. Live role play
10	1. Industry sharing/Video sharing 2. Live role play
11	1. Industry/buyer sharing 2. Live role play
12	1. Experience sharing/Video sharing 2. Live role play
13	1. Experience sharing 2. Live role play
14	1. Experience sharing/Video sharing 2. Live role play 3. Preparation for sales competition

Figure 1. B2B course topic

The data in present study were collected using an online questionnaire. Ten questions were administered in Bahasa Indonesia, measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from total disagreement (point 1) to total agreement (point 5). The questionnaire measured students' perception toward the use of role play approach in their course. Moreover, participants were also asked to assess their speaking competence before and after the role play. In addition, one open-ended question was given to participants, which asked about their suggestion related to the role play activities they have done before.

Furthermore, the question items were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. The data were categorized under three themes; of which each theme represented a different aspect namely: Learning Enthusiasms, Language Improvement, and Willingness to Improvise. Additionally, the responses from open-ended question were also analyzed to support the findings from the questionnaire responses.

3. Result and Discussion

The present study aims to investigate the use of role play approach in a problem-based learning course and students' perception toward the role play approach in their business English class. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the research objectives. In this section, the result is presented under three themes, including Learning Enthusiasms, Language Improvement, and Willingness to Improvise.

1. Learning Enthusiasms

There were three item questions under this theme which asked about students' motivation during the use of role play approach in their class. For item 1, 82.9% students revealed that they favored the use of role play approach in their English class (see Table 1). In line with that, the majority of students also feel excited to attend the course since the role play approach were used as one of learning approach (80.5%). Moreover, for item 3, students overwhelmingly showed an agreement (92.7%) that their confident in speaking English improves by having such preparation in role play performance.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and responses in percentages for theme 1

Question items	Mean	SD	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
1. I like the role play approach that was used in B2B course	4.22	0.78	82.9%	17.1%
2. Role play approach makes me more excited to attend B2B course	4.05	0.79	80.5%	19.5%
3. Role play approach makes me feel more confident when speak English	4.44	0.62	92.7%	7.3%

The result above support the claim that role play approach help students gain confident when speaking English. This is consistent with the earlier study which reported that students actively participated in role play as it build their enthusiams in learning [3]. Previous studies also mentioned that playing a role are found to foster students' confidence in speaking English [3, 9]. It is believed that the preparation students took for the play helped them gain their confident.

2. Language Improvement

There are five items under this theme which examined students' language improvement during the use of role play approach in their class, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall speaking ability (see Table 2). All of students stated that the use of role play in their English class definitely helps them finding various new vocabulary. Moreover, the majority of students also agreed that the role play implemented in their class has helped them to understand the meaning of new vocabulary they found (95.1%), as well as helped them to build up their vocabulary bank (97.5%).

In line with that responses, the result shows that 39 of 41 students (95.1%) reported that the role play approach helps them improve their English pronunciation. Additionally, 95.1% students agreed that performing role play for several weeks makes students agreed that they have improved their overall speaking ability.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and responses in percentages for theme 2

Question items	Mean	SD	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
4. Role play approach helps me find new vocabulary	4.73	0.44	100%	0%
5. Role play approach helps me understand the meaning of new vocabulary	4.68	0.56	95.1%	4.9%
6. Role play approach builds up my English vocabulary	4.63	0.52	97.5%	2.5%
7. Role play approach helps me improve my English pronunciation	4.61	0.57	95.1%	4.9%
8. Role play approach improves my speaking ability in English	4.53	0.58	95.1%	4.9%

The results above concludes that role play approach makes an improvement in terms of students language competence. It is in the lines of earlier literature [9] that found students' speaking skill and oral fluency were improved after being taught through role play approach. The study reported that students' accent, pronunciation, and vocal expression were better than those who were taught through traditional grammar based method. Other study also revealed that role play approach significantly affected students' components of speaking skills, including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and even self confidence [1, 11]. It is understandable because students got more exposure to the target language when preparing for a play, as they had to memorize the lines and be given more opportunity to practice the language [1, 8, 11].

3. Willingness to Improvise

In the third theme, the way students perceive their willingness and ability to improvise during their role play performance was addressed. Table 3 shows how students responded to the questions under this theme. Item 9 stated: "*When performing in role play, I like to improvise with my own words outside the existing script*" and 80.4% of students were in agreement with the statement. It means that students were willing to produce the language besides the script they have memorized.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and responses in percentages for theme 3

Question items	Mean	SD	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
9 When performing in role play, I like to improvise using my own words besides the existing script	4.17	0.72	80.4%	19.6%
10 If I forget the memorized script, I am able to continue the performance using my own words	3.60	0.98	56.1%	43.9%

However, when it comes to forgetting the script during role play performance, almost half of students disagreed that they are able to continue the role play (43.9%). It revealed that even though students are willing to improvise, many of them believe that they do not have the ability to keep the performance on without the script.

In terms of students' speaking competence, a self-assessment was conducted through online questionnaire. The result shows an improvement of students' speaking competence after having role play activities (see Figure 2). It appears from Figure 2 that before participating in role play activities 15 of 41 students (36.5%) assessed themselves as either having *Very Low* or *Low* speaking competence. Besides, the majority of students assessed themselves as *Fair* (46.3%) and only few of them suggested themselves as either *Good* or *Very Good* (19.5%).

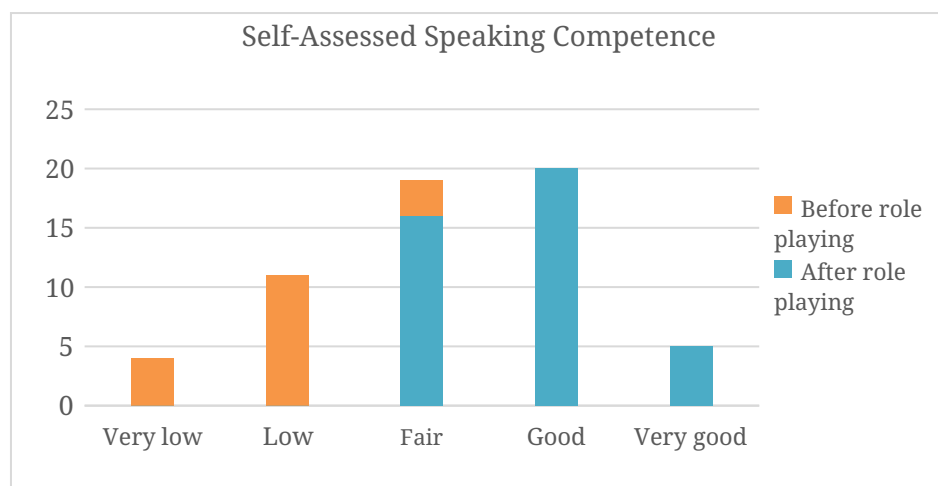


Figure 2. Students' self-assessed of speaking competence

As shown in Figure 2, students' perception toward their speaking competence changed after participating in role play activities. It is plotted in Figure 2 clearly show the improvement of students' speaking competence. After having role play activities, none of students assessed themselves as either having *Very Low* or *Low* speaking competence. Instead, the majority of students reported that their speaking competence were either *Fair* or *Good* (87.8%) and 12.2% signed themselves as having *Very Good* self competence.

In addition, students' suggestion toward role playing activities were also collected. There are several point of suggestions emerged from students' viewpoint, that can be concluded as follows. First, students suggested that semi-scripted role playing will better help them acquiring the target language. It is reasonable since in semi-scripted role play students will have more chance to produce the language on their own. They also have freedom to elaborate the situation and think of appropriate verbal and non verbal communication. Moreover, students also stated that they prefer vocabulary building activities before having the role play activities, as they argued that it will help them understand the script or situation better. Additionally, students recommended that the case and script should be discussed before memorizing and performing. Discussing the profile of the role they play can help students gain more information about how to act and what to do during the performance. The discussion will also help them adapt to the moods and vocal expression of the given case. Finally, students are also eager to engage in more genuine conversation in English during in-class meeting, as it will help them having more exposure and practice to the target language.

4. Conclusion

The present study was designed to explore the use of role play as an approach in a business english class which implement a problem-based learning, and also how students' perceive about the approach in their class. The study has found that generally students considered the role play approach as engaging activities in their business class. The findings show that the majority of students favored role playing and it helped them gain their confidence in speaking English. In addition, students stated that their speaking skill components were also improved including vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Through a self-assessed questionnaire, students' overall speaking competence also had an improvement after participating in role play activities. Moreover, students' suggestion toward the role play activities are also reported. In summary, students required more preparation such as vocabulary building and case discussion before the performing in the role play. Other important points are providing students more exposure in the target language, for instance, giving a semi-scripted role play and engaging more genuine conversation in class meeting.

The evidence from this study suggests that role playing can be seen as concordant approach to be implemented in a of problem-based learning course. As mentioned earlier, problem-based learning encourage student-centered learning and role playing let students explore their ability and stimulate their speaking skill. The situation assigned in role play activities also gives students challenge to put in the effort to consider of the

appropriate language, style, and expression in communication. Nevertheless, the limitation in this study is necessary to be address. The data gathered in this study only take students' point of view without any summative assessment to judge students speaking competence. Further research should therefore concentrate on measuring students' speaking competence through a summative assessment.

Acknowledgement

We thank Politeknik Negeri Batam for providing a grant as financial support for this study. The gratitude also for Management business major and language and humanities study.

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