USING ROLE PLAY TO MOTIVATE HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EFL SPEAKING CLASSES

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Abstract:

The recurrent problem among Vietnamese high school students in learning English is the ability to communicate effectively in the target language. The question of how to motivate students to speak English confidently and effectively has driven the researcher to search and experiment with various pedagogical techniques. Therefore, this study is conducted to investigate to what extent using role play can increase students' motivation in EFL speaking classes. The role play technique has been implemented with a group of 33 Math-majored students at a specialised high school in Vietnam. Data collected from observation notes and interviews with 6 student participants revealed that students' motivation to speak English was high. The results also indicate that role play can be fruitfully deployed in EFL-speaking classes to increase students' engagement in language production.

Keywords: role play, motivation, EFL speaking classes, high-school students

1. Introduction

According to many researchers, speaking is regarded as a fundamental and important skill in the process of language teaching and learning (Halley & Austin, 2004; Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Nunan, 1991; Ur, 1996). It is believed that achieving high proficiency in speaking is the prime objective of mastering a foreign language in comparison to the other skills (Nunan, 2001a). Ulas (2008) highlights the pivotal role of speaking in providing and maintaining successful communication among human beings. It is also an important means to reach social solidarity, social ranking, and business, and through which much language is produced and acquired (Ulas, 2008).

Harmer (2001) states that if one can speak a language it means one has acquired the features of that language, and one has the ability to process information immediately. Harmer further explains that language's features are associated with connected speech, expressive devices, lexis, grammar, and negotiation language. Students should learn that

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natural processes such as word omission or schwa production are frequently used in daily interaction. In addition, practicing suprasegmental features like changing the speed of utterance or differing facial expressions to show speakers' emotional states should be taught to students in speaking classes as well. Students also need to master multiple phrases and conversational patterns used for different purposes such as clarification, requesting, repetition, etc. For its complexity and distinguished features, speaking is viewed as an aspect that needs special attention and instruction (Shumin, 2002).

In Viet Nam, in line with Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg "Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008 to 2020" issued in 2008 by the Prime Minister, the National Project 2020 was approved to boost the foreign language competence of Vietnamese people. Its main goal is that the majority of young people will be able to use a foreign language confidently and independently to communicate, study and work in an integrated, multilingual and multicultural context (MOET, 2008). This government strategic plan underlines the importance of English at all levels of education, from primary to tertiary, to serve the nation's aim of industrialization and modernization.

As a unit in the public educational system, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai specialised high school, with its mission of creating the qualified human resources for the province, has recognized the crucial role of English as a key for students' success. Apart from the official English curriculum regulated by the government, the school has also designed its own intensive program for the English subject. Overall, students have five classes of English per week. In the school year of 2018-2019, the school has about 900 students divided into three grade levels of tenth, eleventh and twelfth. Students are classified into groups according to their interested majors of study such as Math-majored, Physic-majored, or English-majored groups.

This study is conducted with a group of Math-majored students who often have good knowledge and ability for every subject they learn. They are often very active and smart students who prefer newness and challenges. Having experience in teaching Math-majored students for many years, the researcher realizes that following the mandatory and out-of-date textbook rigorously will probably destroy and ruin the activeness, enthusiasm, and interest of those clever students towards the English subject. While waiting for the new English textbook which is currently under pilot, some actions should be taken to keep the fire of those students in learning English.

Role play, empirically known for its positive effects towards students' speaking performance (Alrajhi, Abdelrahman, & Alhomoud, 2013; Gill, 2013; Iamsaard & Kerdpol, 2015) has been chosen to accommodate the activeness in learning styles of Math-majored students. To investigate to what extent role play can encourage EFL high-school students to speak up in their speaking classes, the following research question has been addressed:

- To what extent can role play motivate high-school students in EFL-speaking classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Role Play

There has been so far no universal agreement on the definition of role play. Role play originally comes from the field of psychodrama, a form of psychotherapy created by Levy Moreno (Rojas, Villafuerte, & Soto, 2017). According to Moreno (1987), psychodrama is defined as "*the science which explores the truth by dramatic methods*" (p.13). Among the many techniques of psychodrama, role play is the most used in education as education should facilitate spontaneity and creativity for the sake of human development and social change (Moreno, 1987).

British Council (2004) refers to the term "role play" as "*any speaking activity when you either put yourself into somebody else's shoes, or when you stay in your own shoes but put yourself into an imaginary situation.*" The term "role" has its origin in the Greek word "rolled-up", indicating the theater's scripts used in ancient Greece (Craciun, 2010). According to Conforme and Torres (2013), role play is defined as a recreational activity that entertains, amuses, and enables participants to acquire new knowledge significantly and meaningfully. Students, while preparing role play, also consider the appropriateness of vocabulary and expressions to use in the specific situation (Wafaa, 2014) enhancing students' creativity through collaborative learning (Rojas *et al.*, 2017).

Besides, role play is viewed as a "*complete range of communication technique which develops language fluency and promotes student interaction during the class, increasing students' motivation, encouraging their learning, but also sharing responsibility between teacher-student*" (Kuśnierek, 2015, p. 7).

Ladousse (1987, p. 3) highlights the large scope of role play activities in that they may "*range from highly-controlled guided conversations at one end of the scale, to improvised drama activities at the other; from simple rehearsed dialogue performance, to highly complex simulated scenarios.*" Students can be involved in a simple role play like practicing a small dialogue with patterns or cue cards provided. On the other hand, role play might be an activity in which more improvisation is practiced rather than following the sample conversation. The levels of complexity among role play activities also vary in that some performances may be short and simple whilst the others may be structurally sophisticated. The difficulty of the activity inevitably depends on the language proficiency of students.

According to Byrne (1986), role play activities can be categorized into two forms, namely scripted and unscripted role play.

Drawing from the related literature, role play, in this study, is defined as an instructional technique where students are representing various character roles in a predefined and realistic scenario.

2.2 Procedures to Organize a Role Play Activity

Researchers have proposed different instructions on how to set up a role play (Ladousse, 1987; Maley, 1987; Van Ments, 1999). Cherif, Verma, and Somervill (1998) introduced four stages in a role play: preparation and explanation of the activity by the teacher, student

preparation of the activity, the role play itself, the discussion or debriefing after the role play activity has finished. Similarly, Holsbrink-Engels (1997) stated that all role plays used in interpersonal skills training include four parts: introduction, instruction, run session, and debriefing. Kodotchigova (2002) based on the empirical evidence, suggested a six-step role play: select a situation for a role play, role play design, linguistic preparation, factual preparation, assigning the roles, and follow-up.

According to Kuśnierek (2015), any teaching activity requires three crucial components: the engage stage, study stage and activate stage. At first, teachers' job is to attract and maintain students' attention and interest in the lesson. Some interesting warm-up activities like a small game or a nice picture can be used to involve students in the lesson physically and mentally (Harmer, 2012).

Next, teachers may provide students with new language input such as grammar or vocabulary. Then, students should have the opportunity to activate both the new linguistic knowledge and the language they have known. The activation usually happens whilst students make free oral production. Harmer (2012) asserts that role play is an ideal technique for students to put the language into use.

In case role play is not based on the materials from the course book, it is students who will select what language to use and how a conversation is organized (Adrian, 1989). Consequently, careful planning is needed for a role play to be successful. Teachers may brainstorm the useful structures and expressions that speakers may say (Kuśnierek, 2015). Indeed, drilling the important structures role players would use is necessary as this equips students with appropriate resource of language (British Council, 2004).

More importantly, teachers' instruction should be clear enough for students to thoroughly understand the situation to play and what is written on the cue cards before starting the activity (Ladousse, 1987). Besides, if role play is introduced to students for the first time, its difficulty and emotional language embedded should match students' cognitive and linguistic levels. Instead, simple information-gap role plays can be a good start (Kuśnierek, 2015). The first practice might not be very successful as some players can be too shy to act out confidently. As usual, after some more practice, students will get used to role play (Ladousse, 1987).

During the preparation of role-playing, students work in pairs or groups and discuss the content of the play. The amount of planning time may vary among different groups since students of low proficiency level may need more linguistic support whilst students of higher level need more time to study their roles. Realia also plays a crucial part as it makes role play more resemble situations in real life.

Since a systematic procedure of organizing role play is followed, teachers can efficiently use the time and resources available to conduct a successful role play in their class.

2.3 Significance of Role Play in Developing Students' Speaking Proficiency

Brown (2004, p. 174) asserts that *"Role playing is a popular pedagogical activity in communicative language-teaching classes."* Similarly, Kayi (2012) clarifies that communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations requiring much

communication. Language teachers should set up a classroom environment where students can practice real life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language.

Harmer (2012) modifies that role play stimulates the real world in such a similar way that students are encouraged to speak and act from the viewpoint of their new characters. Consequently, the use of role play in classrooms helps enhance students' speaking ability since a role play is a highly flexible learning activity which adds variety and imagination. It uses different communicative techniques and develops fluency in the language, promotes students' interaction and motivation in the classroom (Kusmana, 2011).

Kusmana's opinion is strengthened by Pham (2020) in that role-playing develops students' fluency in speaking. Various language functions such as apologizing, greeting, offering are exercised in role play more than in any other activities. Participants are required to focus on the communication of meaning or to use speech to communicate socially.

According to Zhang (2010), role play has improved students' communication skills such as argumentation, the organization of ideas, group understanding, interpretation and inferring. Through role play, learners receive a good deal of opportunities to practice the target language, which results in their confidence in using English in contextualized environments (Duxbury & Tsai, 2010; Zhang, 2010).

Brown (2004, p.174) modifies that role play *"has the effect of lowering anxieties as students can, even for a few moments, take on the persona of someone other than themselves"*. Indeed, timid or shy students often have obstacles in sharing their experiences or expressing themselves verbally. Hence, pretending to be someone else makes them feel that their own personality is not involved (Ladousse, 1987).

According to Nation and Newton (2008), five possible causes inhibiting students from speaking English are insufficient lexical resources, lack of grammar and fluency, learners' shyness and lack of encouragement. Nevertheless, role play can enable teachers to create a safe learning environment, provide constructive and goal-directed feedback and strengthen students' ability to communicate (Jackson & Back, 2011).

Using role play in EFL classes can significantly involve learners in a fun environment (Gass & Mackey, 2006) in which rivalry and competition among participants are lessened. Apart from actively participating in spoken production, learners still enjoy themselves and have a good time together. Obviously, teaching and learning plans that deploy role play had added more excitement and newness to the atmospheres of the EFL classrooms as well as create more authentic situations for students to practice English (Huang & Shan, 2008).

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Settings

The research participants were 6 Math-majored students (3 males, 3 females) at the eleventh grade at Nguyen Thi Minh Khai specialised high school. All the six participants

were 17 years old. Regarding their English proficiency, one is supposed to be at upper-intermediate, three at intermediate, and two at lower-intermediate. The six students were coded from S1 to S6 to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Consent was obtained from all the participants.

3.2 Procedures

The role play activities were conducted in speaking classes with topics based on units 10, 12, and 16 in the mainstream English textbook for the eleventh grade students. The population received the role play treatment was 33 Math-majored students (56% males and 44% females). Their age range was 16-17 years old and their English proficiency was expected to be at pre-intermediate level. In the academic year of 2018-2019, grade-11 students had five English classes per week in which three compulsory classes following the national curriculum and two were chosen by the school. The two additional classes agreed by the school also heavily focused on learning grammar. However, the headmaster's policy was allowing teachers' flexibility in implementing the curriculum to optimize students' learning outcome. Consequently, the researcher was flexible in using the time budget for students to practice both scripted and unscripted role plays in speaking classes.

Since role play is time-consuming, the teacher used role play only when students had two successive English classes (45 minutes/class). Most role play activities were carried out in the second semester as the mandatory speaking tasks were either too boring or too difficult for students. Hence, they need to be redesigned in the form of role-playing. The researcher adopted the four stages of setting up a role play from Cherif *et al.* (1998) for her students. Firstly, the teacher prepared and explained the activity by giving clear guidance and linguistic input. Next, students worked in assigned group to prepare the activity. While students were working, the teacher circulated for facilitation and observation. The stages one and two usually occurred during the first class. Then, groups performed their plays. The final stage was for debriefing upon the completion of each role play. The lesson plans for the three role play activities are presented in the appendixes.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Face-to-face in-depth interviews have been adopted owing to their flexibility. The interview guide consisted of fourteen questions focusing on students' opinions towards role play benefits and its implementation in EFL-speaking classes, students' feelings and their difficulties while participating in role play.

Each interview with individual participant lasted around twenty minutes and was held in the office of the English Department at school. The six interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and recorded. Then the six-phase thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse the data. The six-phase guide consisted of familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

4. Findings

4.1 Findings from Interviews with Student Participants

To investigate to what extent role play can motivate EFL students to speak more English in their speaking classes, data from interviews have been analyzed based on three major themes:

1) Students' opinions on the benefits of using role play in their EFL speaking classes,
2) How students felt during the intervention, and
3) Students' difficulties whilst practicing role play.

4.1.1 Students' Opinions on The Benefits of Using Role Play in Their EFL Speaking Classes

Table 1: Students' opinions on the benefits of using role play in their EFL speaking classes

Themes	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Students' opinions on the benefits of using role play in their EFL speaking classes						
- Practicing public speaking skill	x		x			
- Sharpening skills to research and select appropriate information to speak	x		x			
- Enhancing creativity	x					
- Exercising problem-solving skill	x					
- Increasing vocabulary and structures used in daily life	x	x		x	x	
- Improving vocabulary and pronunciation						x
- Improving vocabulary only			x			
- Learning different perspectives from other peers	x	x	x	x		x
- Using English flexibly in multiple communicative situations		x			x	
- Increasing confidence and interest to communicate with peers		x	x	x	x	
- Strengthening communication skill in English					x	
- Improving fluency in speaking English	x					x
- Exercising how to express feelings properly while speaking						x
- Practicing teamwork skill			x			
- Increasing mutual understanding and harmony among class members				x		
- Adding fun and newness to the classroom atmosphere	x					x

The views of students on the benefits of using role play in their EFL speaking classes are summarized in Table 1.

A good deal of skills necessary to improve the English-speaking proficiency has been strengthened through role play activities such as public speaking, researching, problem solving, communication, and teamwork skills, as stated by S1:

> *"Role play has, firstly, improved my public speaking skill. Second, my skills in researching and refining information to speak to the crowd have been sharpened. I have to think carefully before speaking, so in role play I learn to decide quickly what to say, which improves my fluency too."* (S1)

S1 also modified that role play helped enhance her creativity and problem-solving skills as "students can approach the same matter in many ways" or "express the same message in different structures". Besides, she could learn some vocabulary and grammatical points "to use in the daily conversations".

Enhancing vocabulary resources and structures used in daily communication through role play activities is also claimed by S2, S4 and S5. S3 thought that when role-playing with peers he learnt new words from them and also practiced brainstorming of ideas to discuss or debate with friends, but did not get much of language structures:

"On behalf of grammar, maybe I do not role-play frequently, I have not seen much improvement for it." (S3)

S6 added that when she role played with friends, they might help "correct pronunciation" and it was a good chance for her to practice "expressing feelings adequately" while performing different roles.

The most agreed benefit of using role play in speaking classes among the research participants is they can learn and share different perspectives on the same issue:

"I get to know how my friends are thinking about a matter or how to solve a problem." (S1)

Indeed, critical thinking has been developed as students involve in role play activities. They can discuss a variety of solutions for a problem or approach an issue from varying points of view. These activities not only sharpen students' mind in communication but also increase their confidence and interest to interact with friends:

"After doing the role play, I feel that I am more interested in speaking English with my friends." (S3)

Students also reported that role-playing, to some extent, made them more flexible when being put in different situations:

"Activities like role play will enable me to flexibly use a variety of language in different communicative situations such as getting on the bus, ordering food in a restaurant, etc." (S2)

Apart from the aforementioned significance of role play in improving learners' fluency, flexibility, confidence, interest and widen their perspectives in speaking classes, role play has created a safe and comfortable learning environment where learners can find mutual understanding, harmony, and enjoy the newness, as explained by these students:

"When role-playing together, we feel closer. The relationship among classmates is tightened." (S4)

"Role play helps change the atmosphere of the class. Since we do not need to sit silently to solve the quizzes, it is relaxing." (S6)

A multiplicity of role play's benefits for improving students' English-speaking ability has been claimed by research participants. The next theme will explore how students feel during their involvement in the role play activities.

4.1.2 How Students Felt during the Intervention

A variety of students' feelings during the intervention is summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: How students felt during the intervention

Themes	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
How students felt during the intervention						
A. When students role-played, they felt:						
- confident	x	x			x	
- joyful	x					x
- relaxed		x				
- proud			x			
- nervous			x	x		
- excited						x
B. When students watched their peers role play, they:						
- enjoyed the role plays	x	x	x	x	x	x
- laughed for funny role plays	x				x	
- paid attention to the role plays		x				
- learned mistakes from low-ability peers		x				
- learned from high-ability peers: accurate pronunciation, appropriate use of words and utterances					x	
- learned from peers' movements, facial expressions, messages in the role plays	x			x		x
- learned from peers' facial expressions, intonation						x
- felt embarrassed of one's low English ability			x			
- motivated to speak more English			x	x		

All the various emotional states reported by student participants have indicated their positive attitudes towards the use of role play in their EFL speaking classes.

Specifically, when students themselves performed the role play, the most common feelings they had were confidence, joy, relaxation and even pride.

"When I perform my role, I feel very much confident, I feel I'm living my role." (S5)

For S5, his level of confidence was so high that he did not think he was role-playing but regarded it as his real role in real life. This positive affective trait is also found in S2. Interestingly, S2's confidence is higher for role-playing in English than in Vietnamese. S2 clarified:

"I have a lot of confidence when role-playing in English. But if I do it in Vietnamese, I'm a bit worried. Friends may laugh at me if I make mistakes in Vietnamese, but in English not many people can spot it, so I feel easy." (S2)

It is surprising that for those who have good English ability, they feel safer to interact in this language. He did agree that he could make mistakes in using English; however, it was acceptable since English is the foreign language and he was on the way to learn it.

Similarly, another positive feeling is reported by S3 while role-playing:

"I like to role-play in front of the class as I enjoy the feeling of standing in front of the crowd, just like the provincial chairman is speaking to his people. I really feel proud, but a bit nervous as my English isn't excellent." (S3)

Inevitably, students of low English ability often feel worried about how to make themselves understood. If they fail to use the target language, they will lose motivation and be more reticent to express themselves in that language. S3 knows that his English is not good enough, but he is so brave and so enthusiastic to participate in role plays.

The same positive emotional patterns were found when students watched their peers role play. The prevailing feeling agreed by all participants is "enjoyable":

"I enjoy all the role plays of my friends. Maybe they don't perform excellently, but just watching the players move around, their gestures, their utterances, etc. is interesting enough." (S1)

"I love to watch the performances, especially Bach [pseudo-name] since he's very funny." (S5)

It is undeniable that watching friends role-play is not only joyful but also educational since students learn many things from the players' movements, gestures, facial expressions, messages embedded and even the intonation.

S2 explained that he was attentive to every role play performance since he could learn a lot from them, even from low-ability peers:

"I can learn from mistakes of the weak students to avoid them. Sometimes some performances are not easy to understand due to their language use, but I still pay attention to them." (S2)

Likewise, S5 admitted that watching friends' role plays is a good experience for him because:

"I also learn from good English-speaking friends such as their accurate pronunciation and their use of words and utterances." (S5)

Watching role plays also added motivation for students to speak more English as the case of S3:

"I actually feel a little embarrassed for my own English ability while watching excellent ones role-play, but they motivate me to speak as good English as them." (S3)

Role play has, so far, created positive attitudes and feelings for learners as well as added constructive learning experiences to learners' linguistic repertoire. Nevertheless, there are still some hindrances inherent in role play activities that learners have to deal with.

4.1.3 Students' Difficulties whilst Practicing Role Play

The obstacles faced by high school students during their practice of role play in EFL speaking classes are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3: Students' difficulties whilst practicing role play

Themes	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Students' difficulties whilst practicing role play						
- Disadvantages of group work: off-task chatting, disagreements	x					
- Use of Vietnamese in discussion		x				
- Unfamiliar and uninteresting topics	x	x				
- Lack of related vocabulary	x		x	x		x
- Lack of fluency in speaking			x			
- Lack of confidence				x		x
- Lack of ideas				x		
- Lack of accuracy in pronunciation						x

Most student participants reported of hindrances during their implementation of the role play activities in class. Those challenges are associated with the familiarity of role play topics, lexical resources, ideas, fluency, phonetic aspects, confidence, group work and use of the mother tongue.

Particularly, S1 admitted that working in group to prepare the role play might bring some drawbacks as some members tended to discuss off track or argued with each other due to different opinions:

"If we work in group, especially with our close friends in the same group, the pace of work will be slowed down owing to off-task chatting. Another problem is the opposition among group members as sometimes we have contrasting views." (S1)

Likewise, S2 complained about the prevailing use of Vietnamese of some peers while doing group work:

"While our group is preparing the role play, some prefer speaking Vietnamese, some like to talk in English. There is no agreement in using only English in discussion." (S2)

The problems students faced are not only inherent in the popular pattern of working in role play activities but also in the degree of familiarity and interest of the rehearsing topics. S1 expressed as follows:

"For some topics, I don't have any ideas or sufficient vocabulary to talk about. For some others, I'm not interested in discussing." (S1)

S4 also shared similar difficulties with S1 in practicing role play:

"I have problems in gaining confidence, lexical resources and ideas to speak. Sometimes I'm in a dearth of ideas to perform the role." (S4)

Contrasting to the obstacles faced by S1 and S4, S3 thought that he had enough ideas to present himself in role play; however, he also suffered from having inadequate vocabulary resource and more seriously lack of fluency in speaking:

"I know what I have to say, but I lack words to express them. I'm not fluent in speaking either. I don't practice speaking English frequently." (S3)

Inevitably, vocabulary in the related topic is the recurrent issue students have to deal with while role-playing. S6 also got the same problem in terms of lexical aspect along with pronunciation and nervousness:

"My difficulties involve a lack of words, accurate pronunciation and nervousness." (S6)

It is necessary to know that these obstacles vary across contexts and proficiency levels of students. They need to be seriously addressed so that role play can be more effectively used in EFL speaking classes.

4.2 Findings from the Teacher's Observation

As mentioned earlier in the study that Math-majored students were smart, active, good at English, favoured variety and challenges in their learning. These special qualities and learning styles require the researcher to implement the role play activities as a response to students' need. Through the intervention phase, mostly implemented in the second semester, it was observed that most students showed interest and motivation in doing role play. They often finished preparing the play in time and were always ready to perform right away. However, some performances had to be delayed until the next class due to time constraints. Since most topics were not too hard for students to role play in terms of familiarity and language use, students did not ask much for the teacher's support. Also, they were permitted to use online dictionary if needed. The most concerning issue here was too much noise and chaos sometimes demanded teacher's energy to control.

5. Discussion

Findings from interviews with the six student-participants and the teacher's observation have revealed that role play has increased students' motivation in speaking English at a significant level.

A wide range of crucial skills necessary to enhance the speaking skills of students such as public speaking, problem solving, information researching, team work and more importantly communication skills has been sharpened and fostered through the use of role play activities. These results mostly corroborate with studies by Gusmuliana, Apriani, and Syafryadin (2021), Hidayat (2023), Tran (2007), Ramos (2002), Su (1990), and Cho (2015) in that role play has the positive effects on improving learners' communicative competence specifically and learners' oral proficiency generally. Students gain more motivation and confidence in speaking the target language as role play helps lower their inhibition, nervousness and embarrassment level (Su, 1990). Since the role play activities are often organized in group or pair work, students can share and learn from different voices in the class, which increases not only student-student interaction (Vergara-Cabarcas, 2015) but also friendship and harmony among class members.

An atmosphere of joy and comfort has been created (Vergara-Cabarcas, 2015) as students find it interesting to play someone else's role (Kuśnierek, 2015). They do not have to sit silently to listen to the teacher or solve multiple exercises, instead they can move, jump, sing, or dance with their assigned character. Students' learning world is not limited to white chalk and black board but expands to another bigger one (Susani, 2007) in which they can rehearse for real-life situations, practice more negotiation of meaning and produce more communicative language. Most learners can overcome their fear of speaking (Kuśnierek, 2015), especially public speaking thanks to abundant time devoted to practice speaking in the target language and much team work in role plays.

It seems shy students gain more benefits through role play in terms of confidence and motivation since role play provides them a mask to play and imagine with their characters (Susani, 2007). Creativity enhancement, as perceived by participants in this study, occurs in this way. Role-playing in various situations with differing topics does provide students with new vocabulary in speaking (Tran, 2017; Ramos, 2002), which is also confirmed in this study. Specifically, participants indicated that vocabulary they learnt through role play are those used in daily life. Only one student claimed that she could gain some new structures although students tried to use correct grammar in role-playing (Villafuerte, Rojas, Hormaza, & Soledispa, 2018).

When students did the role plays, they gained a good deal of positive emotional experiences such as feeling confident, relaxing, joyful, excited, and proud. Only two students admitted that they were quite nervous when performing the play. Certainly, such a fun and relaxing environment will be conducive to better learning (Susani, 2007). Watching performances done by other peers is not only entertaining, but it is a good chance for students to learn from peers in terms of pronunciation, intonation, use of words, utterances, body language and facial expressions in communication.

However, some low-ability students perceived that role play is a hard practice and they may feel ashamed of their low language proficiency while role playing (Villafuerte *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, as students have to rehearse with different topics in different situations, a lack of vocabulary and ideas to interpret the roles is likely to occur (Ramos, 2002; Sagimin, 2009; Susani, 2007). Students also voiced that the content and familiarity of role-playing topics would affect their interest in implementing the activity. This finding is supported by the study of Liu (2009) in that the topic chosen should be real and relevant to make a successful role play. Ramos (2002) also claimed that the artificiality of performances and the animosity between students are among the limitations of role play. Indeed, group work for role-playing may cause more problems than benefits if it is not well organized. Students reported of unrelated small talks, disagreements among members and prevailing use of the mother tongue as hindrances of group working. Therefore, students' commitment to use the target language along with the teacher' role as monitor and facilitator in conducting role play should be strictly observed.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

Findings of this study indicate that using role play in the EFL classroom has increased students' motivation, participation, and enthusiasm in speaking the target language at a high level. Despite its time-consuming nature, unavoidable obstacles of group work and considerable energy demand, role play can be deployed to encourage high-school students to produce more language in the speaking classes. However, to implement role play successfully, a variety of factors such as when to conduct it, choice of topics, linguistic input, error correction, proficiency level of students, and role of teachers should be equally considered.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix 1: Lesson Plan for The First Role Play

Unit 10. Nature In Danger

Speaking Class

Aim of the unscripted role play activity: Students have to role-play as different members in an action group to build up a project for environment protection. They then present this project to a sponsor for financial support. The sponsor students will move from group to group to listen to the project presenters and decide how much they will sponsor based on project feasibility.

- **Stage 1**: Teacher gives a warm-up to introduce the topic, then explains the activity.
- **Stage 2**: Students sit in assigned group (from 3-4 members) and prepare the assigned role play, ranging from topics 1 to 9 as follows:
  1) You are going to build a sewage treatment plant in your locality, but your budget cannot afford. You would like to have some financial support from the city council.
  2) Installing trash cans in all schools in your locality.
  3) Supporting the volunteer team to collect garbage at the beach at weekend (eg: clothing, hat, raincoat, shoes, masks, a vehicle to carry the rubbish…)
  4) Organizing a game show on local TV to publicly voice about the benefits of protecting environment.
  5) Planting more trees in the coastal protection forest (buying seeds, hiring labor, paying forest rangers…)
  6) Supporting forest rangers in terms of training (how to deal with forest fires, poachers, make sure that people obey laws relating to fishing, hunting, camping…), salary, and equipment (clothing, guns, vehicles…)
  7) Producing free paper bags for consumers at the supermarket every weekend.
  8) Producing educational materials (movies, leaflets, books, posters…) to teach students how to protect the environment.
  9) Improving the public transportation system (eg: bus, subway…) to reduce the use of private transportation.

- **Stage 3:** Members present their project to receive the sponsorship.
- **Stage 4:** Discussion: How much is sponsored for each project? Which project receives the highest/ the lowest? Why?, etc.

Appendix 2: Lesson Plan for The Second Role Play

Unit 12. The Asian Games

Speaking Class

Aim of the unscripted role play activity: Students have to role-play as different members in the sports committees of different ASEAN countries (Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Brunei) to prepare a project to win the right to host the upcoming Asian Games.

▫ **Stage 1**: Teacher gives a warm-up to introduce the topic, then explains the activity. Language input can be provided at this stage:

Preparations for The Asian Games	
Build	More National Stadiums, sports buildings, car parks, etc.
Upgrade	National Sports Centres and local stadium (since they are not in good conditions)
Widen	Training areas and roads to sports buildings
Equip	Hotels, guest houses with modern facilities (also special services for disabled athletes)
Promote and Advertise	Preparations for the Asian Games on the radio, TV, websites, etc.
Recruit	Volunteers to serve the Games (university teachers and students with good English)
Hold	Competition to choose an official song

▫ **Stage 2**: Students sit in group of the assigned ASEAN country (from 3-4 members) and prepare the role play.
▫ **Stage 3:** Members present their project to be the host nation.
▫ **Stage 4:** Discussion.

Appendix 3: Lesson Plan for The Third Role Play

Unit 16. The Wonder of The World

Speaking Class
Aim of the unscripted role play activity: Students have to create their own situation to role-play such as tourists visit a tour agency, students want to study abroad and a consultation company, teacher asks students about the old lesson, etc. They have freedom to design their own play at home, but the embedded content should provide basic information about an ASEAN country in terms of location, culture, foods and drinks, scenic spots, entertainment. The content of the role play will be presented with the support of PPT presentation.

- **Stage 1**: Teacher gives a warm-up to introduce the topic, then explains the activity.
- **Stage 2**: Students in group of the assigned ASEAN country (3 members) work at home to prepare the role play and the PPT file.
- **Stage 3:** Groups perform the role play in the upcoming class.
- **Stage 4:** Discussion: Which country would you like to visit? What is special about this country? When is the best time to visit that country? Etc.

Appendix 4: Interview Questions to Students

1) Do you think role-play activities help you to improve your English-speaking skill? If so, how do they help you?
2) What types of role-play do you like to practice?
3) Who do you like to role-play with?
4) In what ways do you like to act out your roles?
5) How do you feel when you are performing your roles?
6) How do you feel when your classmates are performing their roles?
7) In what ways do you want your errors to be corrected? Why?
8) Do you think role-plays are similar to a real interaction? Why/why not?
9) Do you find it difficult to do role-plays? Why?
10) What do you like about role-plays?
11) What can teachers do to help you practice role-playing effectively in the classroom?
12) Are you more motivated to speak English when your teacher uses role-play activities in your speaking classes? Why?
13) Do you like to have role-plays in your English classes in the future?
14) Do you have any suggestions regarding other techniques or activities to improve your speaking ability?