

Using role-play as a technique to improve the tenth graders' speaking skills at an upper-secondary school in Dong Nai province - Viet Nam

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ABSTRACT

This action research aimed at improving students' speaking proficiency by implementing role-play technique. This research study used Classroom Action Research (CAR), which was done based on Kurt Lewin's design (1946), to collect information from the students at Thanh Binh upper-secondary school in Dong Nai province, with 42 tenth grade students. The study used the mixed method in which the qualitative data were gained by analyzing the observation results, and the quantitative data were obtained from the students' tests (fifteen- and forty-five-minutes tests) and their speaking scores of pre- and post-task survey questionnaires. The findings from these instruments revealed that, when the teacher implemented role play in teaching speaking skills, the students had a chance to be cooperative and active in learning speaking skill. Furthermore, they even motivated themselves to speak English in the class, which led to the improvement of their speaking skill. It is recommended that teachers should use role play to motivate students in learning English language.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On the way of globalization, English has become an international language. With a lot of advantages, English is widely used, and is the official language in many countries. It takes the role as a bridge for relationships and international cooperation. Since Vietnam is a developing country, the vital requirement to learn English is rapidly increasing. English is a compulsory subject in most of upper secondary schools. The educators pay more attention to improving the four skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) equally. Since 2006, new English textbooks for students at grades 10, 11, and 12 have been officially used in schools in Vietnam. Good speaking skill now plays a more and more important role in helping learners communicate well. This skill is also one of the most difficult skills which the new textbooks require students to master.

Since the elements of teaching speaking skill are various, many problems occur in the teaching learning process. In learning English speaking skill, students often face with some problems. The author has found that these problems are also confronted by the 10th graders in learning speaking skills at Thanh Binh upper secondary school in Dong Nai province. The problems with students' speaking skill can be caused by a lot of different factors including students' interest and attitudes towards learning English, the material, and even teachers' monotonous and inappropriate use of teaching techniques, which makes students bored and unmotivated in speaking lessons, and unconfident about their speaking skill. Hence, it is crucial to propose appropriate techniques to overcome the students' low speaking ability: "It is the responsibility of the teacher to find out an effective technique in order to stimulate the students' positive attitude towards the speaking class and their speaking skills." (Burns & Joyce, 1997, p.10).

To help students learn how to speak in the best way possible, the researcher decided to choose role-play activities as an effective teaching technique. The effectiveness of role-play activities in improving students' speaking skill has been demonstrated in several research studies. Specifically, role play has an important role in speaking teaching because it offers students a chance to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. In role play activities, students act to be someone else in the actual world situation that is brought into the classroom. "By bringing the outside world into the classroom, we can provide a lot of useful practice that would otherwise be impossible in cafés, shops, banks, etc." (Scrivener, 1998, p.363). Besides, for the shy learners, according to Ladousse (1989), role play supports the confidence of shy learners because here they are provided with a mask where learners with difficulty in conversation are liberated. They learn how to interact with other peers without being afraid that their mistakes might cause some misunderstanding. In brief,

role play is indeed a useful teaching technique which should be applied by English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers more often in the ESL or EFL classrooms.

For all several reasons above, the author finds that it is both meaningful and practical to carry out the research with the title *“Using role play as a technique to improve 10th graders' speaking skill at an upper secondary school in Dong Nai province.”*

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the aims mentioned above, the researcher decided to use the Classroom Action Research (CAR), using Kurt Lewin's design (1993) with two cycles in which each cycle contained four phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. If the results were less satisfactory, researchers could perform the cycle once again to achieve the criteria that have been determined. To address the two research questions, both qualitative and quantitative methods were exploited in this research. The data were collected via classroom observations, and pre and post-task survey questionnaires. The latest SPSS software was used for data analysis and calculation.

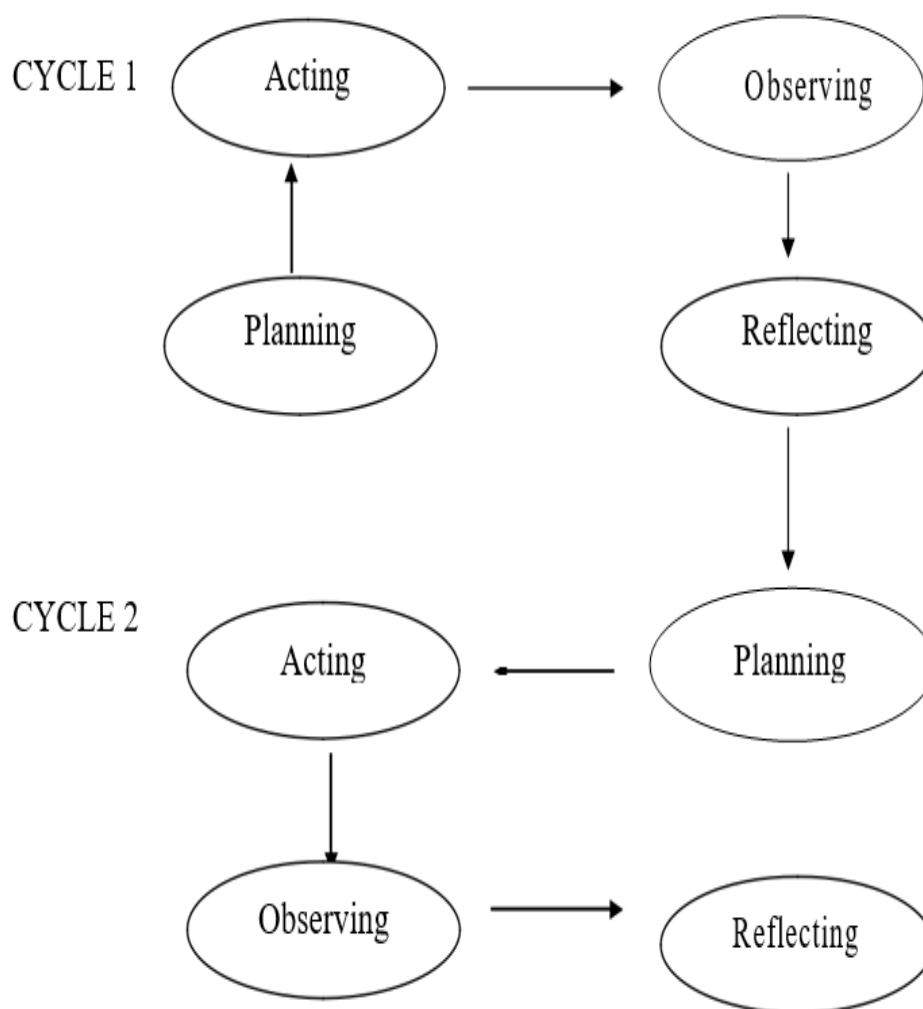


Figure 1: Kurt's Lewin's Action Research Design

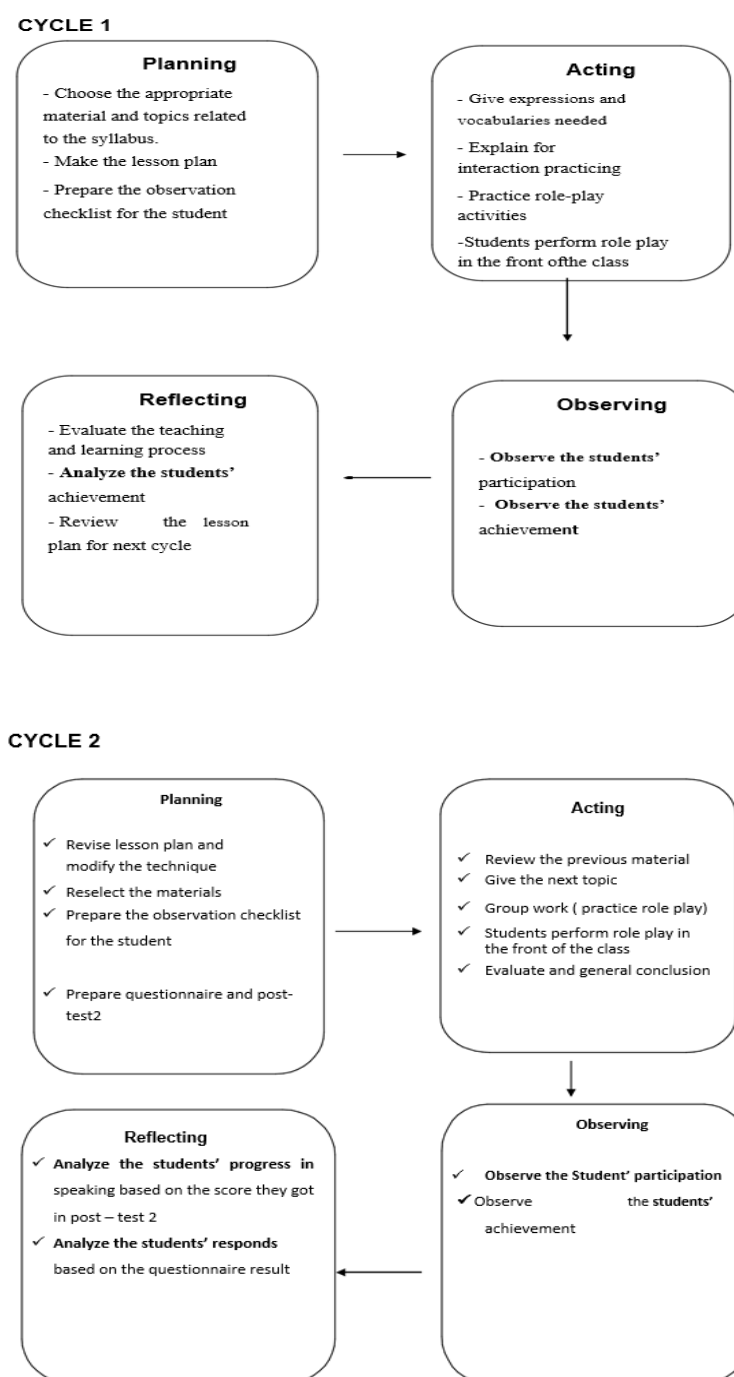


Figure 2: The Phases of Classroom Action Research that modified by the author
(Adapted from Kurt Lewin's Action Research Design)

2. Phases

(1). Planning Phase

Planning phase was the first step of the research procedure which was considered the most important one during the study. It helped the researcher recognize the problems in the conduct and find out the solutions for those problems.

There were two types of plans, general planning, and specific planning. The general planning aimed at organizing whole aspects referred to Classroom Action Research while the specific planning was formed into lesson planning based on the current used syllabus.

(2). Acting Phase

Arikunto (2007) states that the acting phase should be implemented at least two cycles continuously, and the time for each cycle depended on the material needs that existed in the semester or annual program designed by the teacher. In this study, the researcher took the action phase during two weeks within two cycles in which each cycle consisted of two meetings in action, in the phase, the researcher collaborated with the teacher to carry out the planned action. The teacher used the determined strategy as she was teaching while the researcher observed the class condition during teaching and learning activity.

(3). Observing Phase

Observing was the activity of collecting data to supervise to what extent the result of acting reached the objective. It was carried out to find and obtain the development of the learning process and the effect of the action. The data being taken were quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data covered the students' progress (the students' score) while the qualitative data comprised the students' interest and students' response.

(4). Reflecting Phase

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the data of teaching learning process. Then, the researcher reflects himself by seeing the result of the observation, whether or not the teaching and learning process of speaking using role play technique was good to imply in teaching and learning process at class. If the first plan were unsuccessful, proven by students' achievements, the researcher would make the next plan to solve students' problems and to get a better score in order to achieve at least 75% students who passed the score of 65 (sixty-five).

2. Questionnaire

In doing research, questionnaires are used to support research studies, so questionnaires are the most widely used technique for obtaining information from subjects. A questionnaire is relatively economical, has the same questions for all subjects, and can ensure anonymity. In this study, the researcher used questionnaires to get information for the preliminary study. He provided a questionnaire with four or five questions for the 42 students of class 10A5 to recognize the use of role play technique in teaching speaking skill, the students' feelings on their speaking lesson, and the elements influencing their speaking competence; and to discover their desires to accomplish better speaking skill. (See Appendix 1)

3. Test

To survey the students' speaking ability, the researcher gave oral tests to the students. The learners were scored through their performance according to five criteria. They were pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, based on Heaton's scale rating scores (1994). After that, to get the mean, the scores from all criteria were totalized and divided into five. The pre-test was done before implementing role play technique. Then, the post-test was implemented after using role play technique. There was a test held on every second action of each cycle. Here are the rating scores of oral test by Heaton in Table 1.

6	Pronunciation good - only 2 or 3 grammatical errors - not much searching for words - very few long pauses-fairly easy to understand -very few interruptions necessary - has mastered all oral skills on course.
5	Pronunciation slightly influenced by L1 – a few grammatical errors but most sentences correct – sometimes searches for words – not too many long pauses – general meaning fairly clear but a few interruptions necessary – has mastered almost all oral skills in course
4	Pronunciation influenced a little by L1 – a few grammatical errors but only 1 or 2 causing confusion – searches for words- a few unnatural pauses- conveys general meaning fairly clearly- a few interruptions necessary but intention always clear – has mastered most of oral skills on course
3	Pronunciation influenced by L1- pronunciation and grammatical errors – several errors cause serious confusion- longer pauses to search for word meaning – fairly limited expressions- much can be understood although some efforts needed for part – some interruptions necessary–has mastered only some of oral skills on course.
2	Several serious pronunciation errors- basic grammar errors – unnaturally long pauses – very limited expression- needs some effort to understand much of is – interruptions often necessary and sometimes has difficulty in explaining or making meaning clearer – only a few of oral skills on course mastered
1	A lot of serious pronunciation errors – many basic grammar errors – full of unnaturally long pauses – very halting delivery – extremely limited expressions – almost impossible to understand – interruption constantly necessary but cannot explain or make meaning – very few of oral skills on course mastered

Table 1. Heaton's scale rating scores (1994)

III. RESULTS

1. The results of the pre-tests, post-test 1, and post-tests 2

Here the researcher inputted the result of data including the pre-tests, post-test 1, and post-test 2 into Table 2 as follows.

Student number	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
S1	60	63	70
S2	36	40	50
S3	35	50	55
S4	56	55	60
S5	45	50	58
S6	46	48	63
S7	65	70	83
S8	46	60	70
S9	53	55	63
S10	43	50	65
S 11	60	63	68
S12	55	60	65
S 13	68	70	73
S 14	35	45	50
S 15	45	50	53
S 16	45	48	58
S 17	48	55	60
S 18	60	60	65
S 19	53	58	65
S 20	60	63	68
S 21	45	45	50
S 22	55	60	58
S 23	65	62	68
S 24	63	65	80
S 25	50	55	68
S 26	53	58	68
S 27	63	65	78
S 28	56	60	58
S 29	60	63	65
S 30	55	55	50
S 31	44	55	65
S 32	73	80	90
S 33	65	68	80
S 34	40	46	50
S 35	65	68	75
S 36	35	40	53
S 37	50	58	65
S 38	35	40	55
S 39	55	60	68
S 40	45	50	63
S 41	40	55	65
S 42	65	70	75
Mean:	51.09	54.59	63.00

Table 2: The Students' Speaking Score of Pre-test, Post-test 1, Post-test 2

From that calculation, the class percentage is 57.14%. It means that in the cycle 2, there were 24 students who passed 6.5 points and especially, all the students participating in the survey got the score above 4.5 points as well as above 5.0 points. The class percentage of post-test 2 showed big improvements from the

previous test for the low level students. The number of the students that were above 6.5 points increased from 6 students (14.28%) in the pre-test and 7 students (16.6%) in the posttest 1 to 24 students (57.14%) in the post-test 2. However, the noticeable number that the researcher really wanted to emphasize here is the number of the students with the points above 5.0. The result noted down indicated that all students were above 5.0 points. It was a successful survey, so the researcher decided to stop the research because he got the achievement. To be clearer, the chart below would tell the improvement of the students after applying role-play technique.

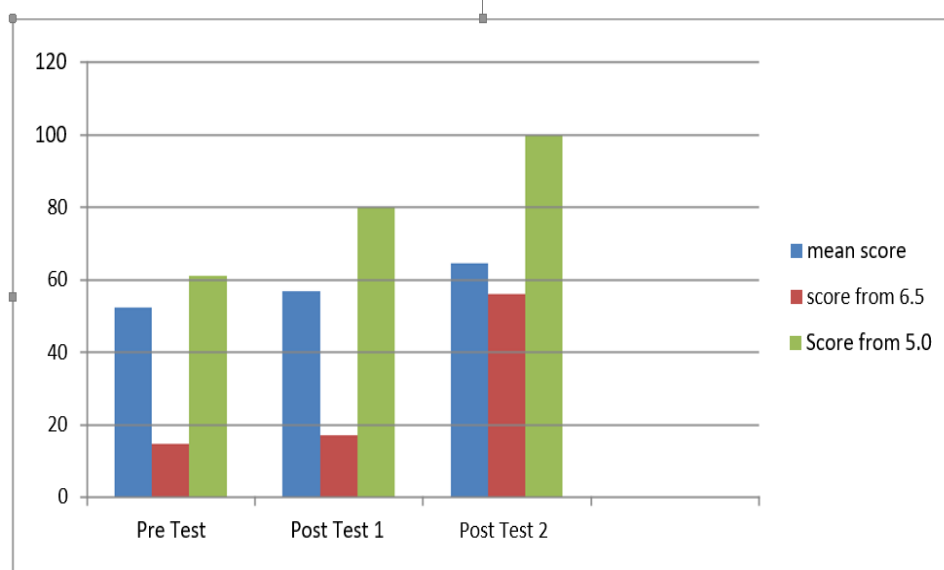


Figure 2: The improvement in the students' self-confidence through role play activities

The chart shows that the mean scores of the students increased gradually (pre-test: 51.09; post-test 1: 54.59; post-test 2: 63.00). So, the result of post-test 2 rose to 11.91. Although this mean score was not very high, it indicated that the students paid more attention to their lesson than before. Maybe, the use of the pair works or group works technique excited their spirit of learning speaking skill. The considerable number that the writer really wanted to recommend here was that the number of students that got scores above 6.5 and above 5.0 grew remarkably. In post-test 2, the number of students with the score above 6.5 doubled in comparison with post-test 1 and pre-test. In term of the score above 5.0, the students achieved the points from 5.0 changed completely. None of them got scores under 5.0 points.

To be brief, the results collected were satisfactory, which proved that most students were excited about the technique, and the role-play was suitable in teaching speaking skill.

2. The results of Questionnaire

Based on the questionnaire with five questions that was given to the students after accomplishing the second action of cycle 2, the students' responses toward the learning process using role-play technique in speaking were gained.

In explicit, question 1 (Appendix 1) was about the rate of using role play technique by the researcher in teaching speaking skill; questions 2, 3 were about the students' attitude towards learning speaking skill; question 4 in the students' survey questionnaires was intended to get some information about the troubles the students at Thanh Binh upper-secondary school faced in the learning process; question 5 asked about the improvement of the students' speaking skill through applying role play activity. So, the results for the questions were exhibited in the level of the options picked.

The response is presented in the following table:

Q1- Options	% of Ss
A. Usually	78.6
B. Sometimes	14.3
C. Rarely	7.1
D. Never	0

Table 3 a. The use of role play technique
(Please refer to question 1 in Appendix 1)

From the data collected and question 1 taken out from the questionnaire in Appendix 1, the researcher found out that the teacher concentrated on teaching speaking skill by using role play technique because the result of the survey showed that 33 students chose option **A. Usually**, making up 78.6%; 6 students chose option **B. Sometimes**, making up 14.3%; only 3 students chose option **C. Rarely**, making up 7.1%. None of the students (it means zero percentage of the students) gave the answer **D. Never**. Most of the students said that they were taught speaking lessons with the implementation of the role-play activities. It proved that the role-play strategy was noticed by the teacher.

As for the questions 2 and question 3 about the attitudes of the learners toward learning speaking skill at school in Appendix 1, the results were shown in the table below:

Q2- Options	% of Ss	Q3- Options	% of Ss
Very much	28.6	Really like	31.0
Much	57.1	Like	54.7
A little	9.5	Like a little	9.5
Not at all	4.8	Dislike	4.8

Table 3b. Students' attitudes towards speaking skill.
(Please refer to questions 2&3 in Appendix 1)

From the table above it was known that when being asked about the responses towards role-play technique, most students had good feedback about this activity. The large number of the student said that they got more interested in using role play technique to improve their speaking skill. The majority of the students liked learning speaking or felt excited about learning speaking skill through the roles in dialogue. There were 85.2% (28.6 + 57.1 = 85.2) of the students who chose "like" and "like very much" when they were asked "How much do you like speaking skill?", and there were 85.7 % (31.0 + 54.7 = 85.7) of the students whose answers were "really like" and "like" to the question, "Are you interested in joining role play activities?". This indicated that most of the students found it important to pursue English speaking skill through social roles and many of them loved learning it. However, a small number of the students had the answer of dislike (4.8%). Although this number was not bothering, it implied that the teacher needed to be more active in her teaching period and be more attentive to low level students so as to help improve their speaking skill.

Q4- Options	% of Ss
lack of confidence in pronunciation	16.7
lack of vocabularies	23.8
lack of ideas to develop the topics	26.2
all of them	33.3

Table 3c. Students' difficulties in learning English speaking.
(Please refer to question 4 in Appendix 1)

From the collected data above, it could be found that there were a lot of problems that prevented the students from presenting their ideas in speech, such as the shortage of vocabulary, the problems in pronunciation or no ideas to develop their thinking. By analyzing the data, the researcher learned that the large number of the students had difficulties in all of items surveyed, the number of this item is up to 33.3 % with 14 students. Many of them felt that they could not express their ideas because they could not find out their own opinions to expand. Therefore, it is essential to use the role play strategy to with model dialogue and explained vocabularies for students to join in.

As observed above, before utilizing role play in teaching speaking skills, 35.7% of the students conceded that their low self-confidence was one of the fundamental obstacles for communicating in English in the class. However, the students' self-confidence also improved from 54.8% of the students who fulfilled the initial four of five indicators of high self-confidence in the first cycle to 83.3% in the subsequent cycle. In view of the information above, it may be inferred that there was a significant improvement in the students' speaking performance and their fearlessness using role- play activities in English speaking classes; and the results of the

second cycle had satisfied the criteria of achievement. In this manner, it could be expressed that the research was fruitful.

IV. DISCUSSION

From the data collected from observation, questionnaire and the two tests and by using Classroom Action Research supported by Kurt Lewin (1993) as the study method, the researcher found that role-play method really improved the tenth –grade students' speaking ability in a mountainous upper-secondary school in Dong Nai province. Furthermore, the results that the researcher achieved from this study answered three research questions mentioned above. The researcher used the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method to identify the problem with students' speaking ability. It was initiated through the observation with the participation of 42 students from the class 10A5 of Thanh Binh upper-secondary school in Dong Nai province, whose speaking ability is low. The author implemented Kurt Lewin's design (1993) which consisted of four phases in this Classroom Action Research: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The data were collected from the observation, the tests (pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2), and questionnaire with 5 questions. From the result of the survey, there was 11.1% (63.0 – 51.09) improvement of students' mean scores from pre-test to post-test 2. There were 6 students who got over 6.5 points in the pre-test. Meanwhile, from the result of post-test in Cycle 1, there were 7 or 16.6% students in the class who got the points over 6.5. This number increased in comparison with the pre-test. Next, based on the result of the post-test in cycle 2, there were 24 students (57.14%) in the class who passed 6.5 points considering their mean score of 63.0. This time, from the result of post-test 1, the researcher made some changes in choosing the techniques of role play and also focused on helping the inactive students. With the results achieved, 42/42 students got the points over 5.0.

The number really satisfied the researcher because the number of students that had low level of speaking skill was no longer. Therefore, in the second cycle, he tried to pay attention to the students with low points more than before with the hope that the fantastic situation of the context can attract them to join in speaking activities. It is shown that the students had significant improvement which can be seen from the score that got higher and higher, from pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2.

Based on the findings and discussions of the study, it can be concluded that using role-play technique can significantly improve the tenth-graders' speaking skill in an upper secondary school. By correlating the result to the observation, questionnaires and the tests that the researcher achieved while using Classroom Action Research of Kurt Lewin (1993), and role-play technique supported by Littlewood (1994), it can be proved that students' speaking ability has been improved incredibly by the score they got. By using role play strategy, the researcher also stimulates the spirit of the learners during teaching and learning process. The students are more interested in taking a part in the role that they were given. The number of the students that got the scores over 6.5 has increased.

The study result strongly confirmed that role play can be a powerful category that helps the students improve their speaking skill, especially the students in a mountainous area who have low level in English. Moreover, they have a little chance to communicate to native speakers as well as to approach to modern facilities in learning English – a global language. It can be concluded that the students like role play technique. In addition, the observation checklist showed that the students seemed braver and more confident in speaking. It is proven by their participation in the class conversations, discussions, perform in the front of the class, pronunciation, fluency and feeling confident about speaking.

Implications

Based on the results of the data analysis of using action research to enhance the students' performance of role-play activities, it was reported that the researcher was moving in the right direction to achieve the goals of the report. Consequently, this study has some practical implications as follows for teachers and students at Thanh Binh upper-secondary school.

Firstly, it is applying various types of role-play activities. This technique could be applied at a more frequent level in teaching the foreign language, particularly the English speaking lessons. Students will have more opportunities to practice communicating, and will have more confidence and trust in their oral presentation.

Secondly, from analyzing the data collected, the researcher found out the difficulties that the students often had when they were in speaking classes. She implemented some suitable techniques to her students. Therefore, the author felt it necessary to give some implications as follows:

For Teachers:

➤As a conductor of a teaching and learning process, teacher should choose the most suitable and interesting technique to a certain topic in a speaking class.

➤It is very necessary for the teacher to create and innovate to use various techniques and present the language in an enjoyable, relaxed and understandable way.

➤The teacher also needs to redesign the dialogues so that they are suitable to the level of the students that they are teaching. The students will be more attracted to such an interesting context.

For Students:

➤Student should not feel shy, nervous or be afraid of making mistakes in acting out their role.

➤Students should open themselves to have more chance of self-development in speaking.

➤Students should be studious to equip their knowledge with an amount of vocabulary and practice their pronunciation so that they can feel more confident in speaking lessons.

V. CONCLUSION

Although the researcher has tried her best to conduct this research, because of the impediment of knowledge, teaching experience and time as well, errors and shortcomings are unavoidable. First of all, the researcher was also the teacher in the process of implementing role-play activities, so the data collection through observation was limited. Next, survey questionnaires were perceived by the students. In addition, the result of some tests may not be their real ability. Thus, they were simply seen by the students and the researcher.

In this study, the researcher would like to give some suggestions to be considered by English teacher as follows:

- Role play technique would be very helpful to improve students' ability in speaking, so the teacher needs to maintain using role play technique as alternative technique of the teaching process of students in grade 10 as well as students at all grade at a high school.

- The teacher should give clear explanation and instruction in directing her students using role-play.

- The teacher should control the students' activities.

- The teacher should be an active director and creative continuously in order to encourage involvement from the large number of students in class.

Finally, the writer realizes that this research still has some weakness and mistakes. Therefore, the writer would like to accept any constructive suggestions to make this research better.

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