Perception of Gifted Students towards Role-Play in Speaking Activities

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Abstract: - This study attempts to explore the perception of role-play as a speaking activity among gifted students. The study intends to observe whether role-play motivates the gifted students to speak in English. The rationale for carrying out this study is to give useful information and understanding to the readers on the use of role-play activities in English language classrooms. The respondents of the study consist of fifteen form four students. The selection of the respondents was done by a teacher in Permatapintar to avoid any biasness. The study uses mix-method approach. The data was gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. After gathering all the completed questionnaires from the respondents, total responses for each item were obtained and tabulated. The qualitative data were analyzed and categorized into themes, whereas quantitative data is analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results suggest that students enjoy carrying out role-play activities and it does encourage them to speak in English to a certain extent. The results also reflects the perception of gifted students were positive towards role-play activities.

Key-Words: - role-play, speaking skills, gifted students

1 Introduction

This study attempts to explore the perception of role-play as a speaking activity among gifted students. The study intends to observe whether role-play motivates the gifted students to speak in English.

Currently, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) with the initiative of YAB Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor and YBhg. Prof. Tan Sri Dato’ Dr. Sharipah Habsah Syed Shahabudin together with other expert lecturers from UKM, started a programme known as Permatapintar Negara to accommodate gifted students [1]. The approval for the programme was given on 25th November 2008 [1]. Permatapintar has identified gifted students from all over Malaysia through conducting IQ test in UKM [1].

The conceptual framework of this research is based on Bryne’s Model (2000). There are main three major problems that students often face during speaking skills which are lack of linguistic competency, psychological motivation and cognitive competency [2]. The model has been adapted to focus on linguistic competency and psychological motivation only as cognitive competency requires experimental study whereas this study uses descriptive study. Bryne [2] stated that if the students can cope with these two problems, definitely they will not have any problems in speaking skills. The
researchers have made some modifications to Bryne’s model. The study intends to see how far role-play increases students’ linguistic competence and psychological motivation to speak in English. Through that the researchers would like to find out the students’ perception towards role-play as to whether it is suitable and enjoyable to learn.

This paper attempts to answer the following research questions, a) How can gifted students increase their linguistic competency through role-play?, and b) How do role-plays motivate gifted students to build up their speaking skills?

2 Literature Review

US Department of Education [3] defines gifted students as:

Children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

This definition is the most comprehensive about gifted students. The definition speaks of talent, which includes all areas of a child's life such as academic, artistic, athletic and social. Based on the definition above, it can be concluded that having talent alone is not enough as one must use that talent to achieve high levels.

One of the main advantages of role-plays is that it gives opportunities for learners to practise the target language that are used in real-life situation. Ladousse states that “a very wide variety of experience can be brought into the classrooms through role-play” [4]. This is evident through the various roles that learners can imagine themselves in as role-plays often exploit learners’ imagination through the use of the language creatively. Role-plays are quite simple to create as all the teacher needs are some role cards to write out learners’ roles.

Shangeetha & Saravanan [5] said that role-play activities also can motivate students to want to learn a second language without any fear or hesitation. According Hsu [6], Via [7] and Moulding [8], role-play is a “curative for the frustration and they facilitate acquisition of the target language as a result” [9]. Furthermore, Stern [9] explained that “language teaching has tended to kill motivation by divorcing the intellectual aspects of language (vocabulary + structure) from its body and emotions, limiting instruction to the former”.

Role-play activities are far more enjoyable and it requires students to get directly involved in the activity that was assigned to them. Role-play tasks demand the students to participate physically and mentally. Therefore, role-play techniques restore the body and emotions to language learning, thereby restoring motivation [10]. Furthermore, Rizauddin [11] stated that instead of a one-way and top-down transmission of knowledge from teacher to child, an appropriate learning environments could be used as ‘personal media’ to develop a different relationship that is knowledge in a new style of learning, which can account for personal variation in learning styles.

Besides that, Melor points out that while learning a new language can be a daunting and frustrating experience [12]. Therefore, students need to be exposed to an exciting lesson. The use of role-play is often argued to increase motivation and is frequently linked with learner autonomy [13]. Autonomy can be defined as “the freedom and ability to manage one’s own affairs, which entails the right to make decisions as well” [13].
3 Research Design

This mix-method study uses the survey method and semi-structured interviews. The study is carried out in Permatapintar, UKM. The respondents of the study consist of 15 gifted students from one class. The samples of the study were chosen by an English teacher in Permatapintar.

4 Findings

The following section will cover the finding of the study in detail. The researchers have divided the findings section into 3 sections which are, 4.1 Psychological motivation, 4.2 Linguistic competency and 4.3 semi-structured interview responses.

4.1 Psychological Motivation

Table 4.1 below shows that 14 of the gifted students strongly agree and 1 agree on the integration of role-play activities to teach English language. This implies that all of the gifted students have a positive perception towards role-play activities.

One of the male students said that: “I feel like more confidence when speaking in front of other people although I know I am lack of vocabulary. This role-play is fun and I think these activities will help me to know more about English.”

On the other hand, Table 4.2 shows that 14 of the gifted students strongly agree and 1 agrees that they learn better through role-play activities. This finding is supported by statement given by Via [7]. He states that drama or role-play could help in building students’ self-confidence.

Besides that, Table 4.2 below shows that all of the gifted students strongly agree that they feel motivated to learn English after the role-play session. It shows that role-play activity serves as purposeful activity for them.

Table 4.2: Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel motivated to learn English after the role-play session?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gifted students will only be motivated if the activity is purposeful and meaningful for them. Thus, gifted students feel motivated after the role-play session. One of the male students said that: “Role-play helps me to communicate with other person confidently and it is a fun activity.” In addition another female student said that “This activity is so fun and I will not easily get bored with this activity. It also makes me feel more confident to speak in English in front of my friend.” These findings are supported by Shangeetha & Saravanan [5]. They stated that role-play activities can motivate students to want to learn a second language without any fear or hesitation.
4.2. Linguistic Competency

Table 4.3 below shows that 12 of the gifted students strongly agree and 3 of them agree that they have enriched their knowledge on vocabulary through the role-play activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think you have enriched your knowledge on vocabulary?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They feel that role-play activities enable them to familiarise themselves with new words. They noticed the differences within themselves after the role-play session. They felt that they can use the language freely as role-play does not restrict them to have perfection in grammatical aspect. Furthermore, teacher also does not interfere to correct them during the role-play session. Therefore, students feel free to use the language and at the same time they can develop and enriched their vocabulary.

On the other hand, Table 4.4 shows that 11 of the gifted students strongly agree and 3 agree that they are able to construct grammatically correct sentences. On the other hand, only 1 disagrees on the above statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think you can construct grammatically correct sentences?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This implies that the students feel that role-play enables them to be better in terms of grammatical aspect. This is due to the practice they do during the role-play activity. Therefore, role-play not only helps students to excel in speaking skill but it also helps them to improve their grammar. One of the male students said that: “The activity guide me to construct grammatically correct sentences in English.” Role-play activities enable them to construct grammatically correct sentences as they are able to use the language without any hesitation. It is because the conversation is only among with their peers and teacher acts as facilitator.

4.3. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The gifted students were also interviewed based on the research questions of the study. The responses from the participants are as follows:

4.3.1. Linguistic Competency of Gifted Students

Students found the experience positive because they gained extensive writing and reading experiences in the English language. They also described the role-play as “an exciting way to work with English”. In that sense the role-play was very enriching and stimulating.

Gifted students also enjoyed the activity because it turned out to be an interactive experience. In addition, they viewed the lesson as highly positive. Through the interview session the researchers found out that the gifted students felt that role-play is a very positive tool to improve their English language. The students incorporated new vocabulary into their repertoire as they worked through the simulation. Some learners reported to have experienced improved fluency in their writing and reading comprehension skills after having participated in the role-play. One of the
female student said that “I realized that my fluency in English increased with the practice”.

4.3.2. Psychological Motivation of Gifted Students

On the other hand, participants showed overall positive attitudes towards this medium of instruction, being aware of the great potential that role-play pose in the field of English language learning. They liked working in this learning environment because they found it “engaging” and “challenging” as they were immersed in the activity.

They described their experience in this instructional medium as “rewarding” in the sense that they realized that they were able to communicate in English in order to accomplish meaningful objectives, as they did in real life with their mother tongue. Some of the students responded that: (“I found it very positive because you get to see that you are able to communicate in English in order to accomplish a series of objectives”, “It was like real life”). Thus, students gained awareness of their proficiency level in English, which resulted in an increased self-confidence in the usage of the language.

5 Conclusion

The findings of the research show that role-play does encourage gifted students to speak in English. The respondents like the activities carried out in the role-play very much. They feel that they can practice speaking in English among their peers freely in role-play activities.

Role-play not only helps students to excel in speaking skill but it also helps them to improve their grammar. Role-play activities enable them to construct grammatically correct sentences as they are able to use the language without any hesitation. It is because the conversation is only among with their peers and teacher acts as facilitator.

Based on the findings, respondents felt that role-play enabled them to communicate in real-life situations. Therefore, role-plays play an important role in students’ life as it imitates the real world. Besides that, the teacher can provide task-based role-plays for shy learners where information transfer activities are conducted in the form of role-plays. Gifted students prefer role-play activities as it is conducted in fun way of learning. Gifted students need an activity which is challenging for them if not they will get bored easily. Role-play provides such an avenue for them to enjoy the lesson. Gifted students will only be motivated if the activity is purposeful and meaningful for them. They liked working in this learning environment because they found it engaging as they were immersed in the activity. Thus, gifted students feel motivated after the role-play session.

Furthermore, it is difficult to encourage gifted students to speak in English as their learning capacity and learning approaches are different compared with normal children. They need challenging and interactive activities in order for to stay focus and learn a particular subject. Therefore, teachers have to design and adapt activities that are interesting and meaningful such as role-plays to encourage gifted students to speak in English.

References:


