

USING ROLE-PLAY TO ENHANCE THE ORAL COMMUNICATION PERFORMANCE OF NON-ENGLISH MAJOR FRESHMEN AT VAN LANG UNIVERSITY

● PHAM THI SONG THUYET

ABSTRACT:

Role-play method has recently been applied in speaking classrooms to help students improve their oral communication performance, since it is believed that role-play provides learners with opportunities to communicate freely, confidently and spontaneously in vivid and lifelike different situations (Ramos, 2002). However, few researches have been done on how to apply role-play successfully and take the most advantage of it in speaking class for students at tertiary education. This study aims to determine whether or not using role-play in speaking classrooms might enhance non-English major freshmen's oral communication performance at Van Lang University (VLU) and what are their attitudes towards this technique. Action research method was used in combination with various tools for data collection such as students' questionnaire, classroom observation, audio recording, and student's scores via pre-test and post-test.

Keywords: Role-play, oral communication performance, Communicative Language Teaching.

1. Introduction

Role-play has numerous benefits in language classroom. The most positive aspect is that role-play provides students with opportunities for practicing in class the language they need for interacting outside the classroom (Raz, 1985). In addition, Stern (1980) also found role-play to be an effective technique that it affects communicative competence, motivation and foreign language learners positively. Role-play, especially, helps create vivid and lifelike situations in which students can express themselves freely, confidently and creatively and stimulates students' interest in speaking classroom (Liu, 2010).

Vietnam is integrating into the international community, so students can take many great advantages of fluency in English communication nowadays. However, many Vietnamese students are good at English grammar and vocabulary, but not

communication skills. In the same way, students at Van Lang classroom today still feel hesitant to speak in English even though they may be very competent in grammar. From observations, the researcher realized that they lack the English environment outside the classroom in which they can practice their English. Therefore, how to make students engage in speaking periods, and how to help learners communicate well in real contexts, the researchers want to know what the most effective technique in speaking motivates and enhances students' oral communication. Besides, there is very little research examining how role-play affects the speaking ability of non-English student at tertiary level. For those reasons, this research reports on a study of applying teaching speaking, especially, using role-play technique, for first year non-English major students at Van Lang University.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Role play

There are numerous definitions of role play. The definition used for this study is from Doff (1988, p. 232) "role-play is a way of bringing situations from real life into classroom. When teacher does role play, they ask their students to imagine". In role-play, students may imagine a role, in other words, they pretend to be a different person (e.g. a farmer, a doctor, a customer). What more, they also imagine a situation, in other words, they pretend to be doing something different (e.g. planning a holiday, borrow money, make an appointment). It is concluded that role-play is a speaking activity in which the students play a role or act to be somebody else or put themselves into a variety of situations which they can be encountered in the real life.

2.2. Oral Communication performance

Oral communication performance is defined by characterizing it in two separate sub-terms, namely oral communication and communicative performance. Oral communication refers to an ability to understand meaning between two or more speakers (O'Maley & Valdez, 1996). Communicative performance is the actual use of language in real situation. (Chomsky, 1965)

2.3. Types and procedures in using role-play

2.3.1. Types of Role Play

In case of role-play activities, according to Don Byrne as cited in Jannah (2011), role-play can be divided into two forms: scripted and unscripted role-play.

a. Scripted Role Play

This type involves interpreting either the textbook dialogue or reading text in the form of speech. The main function of the text after all is to convey the meaning of language items in a memorably way.

b. Unscripted Role Play

In contrast of scripted role play, the situations of unscripted role play do not depend on textbooks. It is known as a free role-play or improvisation. The students themselves have to decide what language to use and how the conversation should develop. In order to do this activity, good preparation from teacher and students is really necessary.

For this paper's purpose, the researcher chose type of role-playing controlled through cued dialogues to design for role-play activities because the participants are just familiar to role-play

activities and this type is suitable to their level.

2.3.2 Procedure of teaching oral communication through role-play

Stage 1- Activities before role-play

In this stage, teachers should give some activities to stimulate student's interest such as pictures, games, realia, songs and movies. The other activity before role-play is conducted by introducing new vocabularies and structures in the compulsory textbook. Finally, a model dialogue presented native speakers should be played. After the students recognize the vocabularies and dialogue in role-play, they have a chance to practice the lines together with the whole class (River, 1987).

Stage 2- Activities during role-play

After the teachers guided students to apply the role-play that has been practiced, diving the students into pairs and having students modify the dialogues to produce their own dialogue based on role cards given. Learners should be allotted enough time for discussion, in which they become deeply engrossed in problem-solving, have the opportunity to try different ways of acting and making situations real (Chester and Fox, 1996).

Stage 3- Activities after role-play

There are two activities can be carried out in this stage, that is: checking students' comprehension and checking students' feedback (River, 1987). After choosing some groups to perform roles, the teacher asked for learner reflection on the performance. Then, she highlighted the strengths of each group and the extent to which they had achieved their learning goals. What needs to be implemented and improved was mentioned after that.

2.4. Relation between conversation and role-play

Arthur (1987) states that the main purpose of conversation is the exchange of information among people. While communicating, our students may find themselves in different social situations playing various social roles and the main task for language teachers is to prepare them for those real situations they might participate (p.5). Therefore, role-play is an appropriate technique providing such situations for students to practice.

2.5. Empirical researches and implications.

The effectiveness of role-play activities in improving students' oral skills has been demonstrated in a number of research studies.

The impact of role-play activity on the speaking skill is mentioned in the study carried out by

Alwahibee (2004). There were 30 students taking part in the study. They were all at the same level – in second level classes, came from the English Department and had no experiences learning with role-play technique before. They were divided into two groups: control group and experimental group. The study was conducted in ten weeks. Getting the results from oral interviews, open-ended questions, short surveys, the author confirmed that role-play technique is an effective strategy to improve speaking ability, to build students' self-confidence and should be used when teaching listening or speaking with more focus on speaking skill.

Graves's (2008) study emerges whether role – play is an effective method and makes learning more meaningful to students. These questions were explored by conducting a ten-week research involving 75 students at Paw Paw high school in Southeastern Ohio. Findings came from the analyses of the results collected from a questionnaire before role-playing project, project scores, Likert – type survey and interview. After conducting the study, it was concluded that role-play project helped students “better remember information”, enjoy working with their peers and it was preferred to traditional methods.

Feng Liu and Yun Ding (2009) aimed at proving the positive effectiveness of using role-play technique in English language teaching; and simultaneously, indicating ways to apply it successfully in English class. Using the experimental method and observation, the authors conducted two fifty – minute classes with the participation of 30 Chinese freshmen in the same class. What they found after this study was using role-play improved students' ability of memorization and application of new words, appropriate grammar usage in spoken English (“lifelike forms”) (p. 142), free and fluent communication in different situations.

Also focusing on how to make students interested in oral activities, Liu (2010) wanted to prove that role - play technique is more effective than English oral tests in motivating students to speak English. She decided to carry out a four-week study on two twenty-student groups, all of whom are freshmen from Xu Liu's two classes, at the same age and at the same language level. The participants were divided into Target group (using role-play technique) and Control group (using English oral tests method). By using observation notes, questionnaire and interview

analyses, Xu Liu found that role-play technique was more effective and more helpful than oral tests in making students feel interested in speaking English. Especially, role – play is considered more influential to the low-mark students than to the excellent students and to boys than to girls. Meanwhile, oral tests were believed to cause anxiety for freshmen and marked no great changes in motivating students' English speaking.

In a nutshell, all of authors mentioned above agreed that role-play is a beneficial language teaching tool that helps students a lot in enhancing their communicative competence, building self-confidence, letting them learning speaking actively and enjoyably and making them to realize the importance of teamwork. The researcher, nevertheless, has not found out a research about achievement of first year students 'oral communication performance after being taught with role-play in Viet Nam. It is fact that Vietnamese first year students from different background and have different level. They are shy and reluctant to speak in English class. It is really difficult to make them engage in speaking class. For this reason, the researcher would like to conduct this study to answer these following questions:

1. To what extent does the use of role-play enhance non- English major first year students' oral communication performance?
2. What is the students' attitude toward the use of role-play in teaching oral communication?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research goals

As mentioned above this study was motivated by the desire to examine (1) the effect of role-play on enhancing students' oral communication performance (2) student's attitude when taught role-play. For the research purposes, this study was carried out through an experimental speaking teaching designed on the basic of role-play activities. The experimental teaching, on the one hand, aims at getting learners actively involved in all steps of role - play process by engaging them in variety of collaborative activities. On the other hand, it tried to make learners eager to take part in this activity and feel active, confident and interested in role-play.

3.2. Research Participants

Participants in this study were from two classes, namely K24A1 and K24KA2 with the same number of thirty students in each class. These two classes

were randomly chosen as experimental and control group. The students are about 18 -20 years old and are studying English at post-elementary level in the first semester of their first year at university. Furthermore, as the students were required to take a placement test at the beginning of the course, and then were assigned to each class based on their results, their levels of English are nearly the same.

3.3. Research instruments

To increase the reliability and validity of the research, triangulation, or different methods combined, was used for data collection: pre-post tests, voice recordings, observation, and questionnaire.

In this research, it was designed to test whether an intervention (role-play technique) helps students improve their oral communication performance. Pre-test was carried out at the beginning of the experimental teaching. Participants had to do the speaking test individually in form of interview test. There were some questions based on topics in textbooks: American Jetstream- Elementary B by Revel, J. & Tomalin, M. (2016). The participants were asked some questions related to those topics. Purpose of pre-test was to ensure the level of control group and the experimental group is the same. In addition, pre-test would be compared with post-test to prove whether role-play can improve student's oral performance. Like pretest, participants had to take part in oral test of interview form in posttest. The purpose of taking posttest was to compare with pre-test to check the improvements of the students' oral communication performance during and after the enactment of role-play.

While students were engaged in role-play activities, the researcher observed to see student's feelings, and to know how they make process through each speaking period using role-play. The researcher designed an observation checklist to check students' engagement in role-play activities and to verify the improvement of the participants' oral communication performance after role-play instruction. The researcher, moreover, recorded students' performance at pretest and posttest to analysis all improvement of role-play characteristics

The researcher, finally, used the attitude questionnaire for experimental group (30 students). The questionnaire comprised of eight questions used to gain responses in non-face-to-face situations and the questions are focused on applying role-play

technique in teaching oral communication. All of them were close-ended questions and were written in both English and Vietnamese to avoid misunderstanding. The main purpose was to check how student's attitudes toward role-play technique. This questionnaire was supplied to the students personally. After getting the response of students, the data was compiled and converted to percentage.

3.4 . Procedures of the study

All participants were taught by the researchers in the 11-week course of General English 1 which met two times a week. After the first week of the course, students of both groups were asked to do the pretest to confirm whether the experimental group and control group had the same ability in speaking. The researcher also recorded student's performance of the experimental group at the pre-test. During experimental teaching, the teacher applied role-play as treatment for experimental group and other techniques for control group. At the same time, observation and audio records were made when students performed role-play to confirm that they were improving day by day.

At the end of the experimental teaching, there would be the post-test for both groups. As for experimental group, the researcher scored and recorded student's performance at post-test to check student's speaking improvement as well as to analysis how they convey information in each conversation. At the same time, an attitude questionnaire was conducted to experimental group, the result of questionnaire shows whether students like role-play technique or not.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Participants' performance at pre-test and post-test

As shown in Table 1, pair 1, Sig. value was 0.68 (> 0.05), which satisfied that the difference in mean scores of the two groups was not significant and can carry out the experimental teaching.

As illustrated in table 1, pair 2, participants in post-test got higher scores in the pre-test with $\bar{X} = 26.96$ (S.D.=3.77) and $\bar{X} = 26.40$ (S.D.= 5.19) respectively. However, the difference in mean scores of the two groups was not statistically significant because Sig. (2-tailed) was .288, it was larger than 0.05. Thus, the students did not improve oral communication performance in the control group after ten weeks with no special intervention.

We can see in table 1, pair 3, the participants'

Table 1: The T-test results of the scores

		Mean	N	Std Dev	T.value	p.value
Pair 1	Exp_pre	25.9000	30	4.58253	.403	.689
	Cont_pre	26.4000	30	5.19631		
Pair 2	Cont_pre	26.4000	30	5.19631	-1.085	.288
	Cont_post	26.9667	30	3.77173		
Pair 3	Exp_pre	25.9000	30	4.58253	-7.045	.001
	Exp_post	29.5000	30	4.22116		
Pair 4	Exp_post	29.5000	30	4.22116	2.631	.012
	Cont_post	26.9667	30	3.77173		

Source: Authors' calculation.

scores (= 29.50) in post-test was higher than that (= 25.90) in pre-test. Moreover, the Sig. (2-tailed) was 0.01 (<0.05), which showed that the difference in mean scores of the two groups was statistically significant. Undoubtedly, the student's oral communication performance was enhanced after adopting role play.

Table 1, pair 4, displayed that mean scores of the experimental group ($\bar{X} = 29.50$, S.D. = 4.221) was higher than that of the control group ($\bar{X} = 26.96$, S.D. = 3.77). Furthermore, Sig.value was .012 (< 0.05). It is available to confirm that there was a significant difference in mean scores of the two groups. Therefore, students' oral performance in the experimental is more improved than that in the control group. Using new treatment (role play) in teaching oral communication was effective.

In brief, it was not denied that there was some improvement in the control group, but this progress was not remarkable. In addition, the scores mean of the control group in post-test was not significantly higher than that in the pre-test. Unlike the control group, the scores on average gained by the students of the experimental group in the post-test was higher than that in the pre-test and the difference in mean scores of pre-test and post-test in the experimental group was statistically significant. Moreover, the mean scores of the experimental group in pre-test is significantly higher than that in the post-test. Therefore, using the new treatment in the experimental can improve participants' oral communication performance. Moreover, results from t-test in the experimental group showed that students could improve their fluency and lexical items in details. Pronunciation

and grammar were also enhanced but it is not noticeable.

4.2. Questionnaire data analysis:

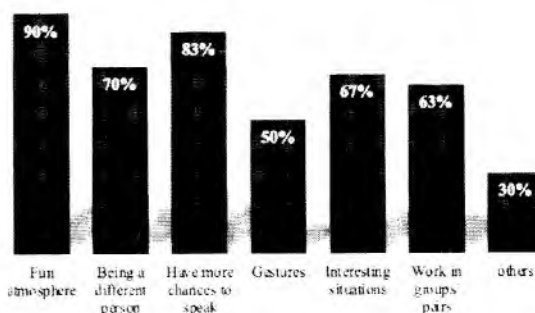
4.2.1 Attitudes towards role-play

73.3% students responded that they extremely liked role-play activities and wanted role-play to be used in speaking lessons. About 16.7% found role-play so-so while the rest of students considered role-play as a normal speaking activity, so they had no idea about whether they liked it or not.

How participants felt after taking part in role lay activities are investigated. The results displayed that all participants felt relaxed and 60% of them were motivated after learning by role play. Studying speaking through role play, they felt like speaking English.

4.2.2. Favorite elements of role-play activities

Chart 1: Favorite elements of role-play activities



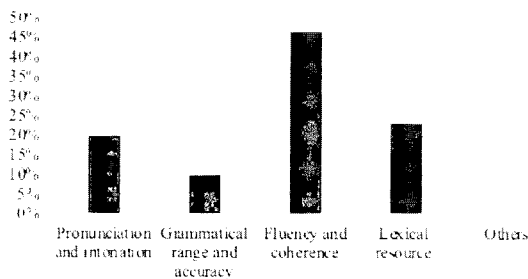
Source: Authors' calculation.

Most of students liked to use role play in teaching speaking because role play activities brought them funny atmosphere (90%) and gave them more chances to speak English in group (83%). Half of participants said that they could use many gestures in each role play activities. 70% students also showed their interests in being a different person in interesting situations (67%). Other reasons for preference were given by nine students (30%), that is, knowing how to role-play in real situations.

4.2.3. Improvements after role-play activities

Results from questionnaire showed that 76.7% students strongly agreed that role play made their speaking better. 46.7% believed that they had made process in fluency and coherence whereas 10 %

Chart 2: Improved areas after role-play



Source: Authors' calculation.

students supposed that their grammatical accuracy developed. 20% students thought that their pronunciation and intonation was better. 23.3% of them stated that they gained more knowledge of vocabulary. What more, most of them (81.3%) agreed that role play activities made their speaking lesson more enjoyable and less challenging and reduced their shyness and anxiety.

In brief, questions investigated participants' attitude to using role play in speaking class. They had a positive with using role play in teaching speaking in classroom. All students liked using role play in speaking classroom because it created different interesting situations, which gave students more chances to speak English. Moreover, working in pairs, students reduced their shyness and increase their confidence. Students also admitted that their speaking ability also improved after learning speaking by role play. They felt relaxed and comfortable after role play activities, so they really want to use role play in speaking class in future.

4.3. Observation data analysis

From observation of behavior, students had positive with role-play activities. At stage before role-play, all of the students were engaged in tasks, 87.5% students took notes what the teacher presented. Few students (12.5%) sometimes asked questions when there are some contents not clear. When the role-play began, 100% students shared their roles, helped each other, and discussed immediately. Furthermore, most of them laughed and used body language a lot while they were working with role-play. 90% of pairs wanted to perform their roles in front of class. Most of their performance made their friends pay high attention. When one pair performed, audiences listened carefully, sometimes laughed, or shouted some

sounds like “yeah”, “wow”. Finally, role-play ended, students smiled a lot and still talked about some plays in the role-play conversation.

4.4. Analysis of audio recordings at pretest and posttest.

4.4.1. Promoting language fluency and coherence

Audio recordings at post-test showed that participants spoke with little pauses, had ability to link simple sentences, gave complex communication, and maintained flow of speech. They were willing to speak at length, used a range of connectives, and discourse markers. Some participants spoke fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar. Others knew to develop topics coherently and appropriately.

4.4.2. Improving lexical resource

With respect to lexical items, participants knew apply items taught, for example, they can use some words about food such as mixture, sweet, bitter, flavor, ect, used vocabularies with flexibility to talk about a variety of topics (about food, friends, travel, and family). Especially, they had a wide enough vocabulary resource to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear. Furthermore, there are some used paraphrase effectively as required, vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics, and idiomatic language naturally and accurately.

4.4.3. Enhancing grammatical range and accuracy

Participants made few mistakes in grammar and could produce basic sentence forms (correct tenses) with reasonable accuracy and some correct simple sentences easily. Some of them used a range of more complex structures like “if condition” and a mix of simple structures such as “I like”, “I am into”, and “would rather” naturally and appropriately with some flexibility.

4.4.4. Developing pronunciation

Pronunciation was also improved after training with role-play, which was proved clearly that they could produce some acceptable features of English pronunciation, used of intonation to emphasize important meaning, able to vary speed of delivery to affect meaning and used a wide range of phonological features to convey meaning effectively. The examiner could fully understand everything clearly and easily.

In conclusion, results and audio recordings of pre-test and post-test showed that participants' oral

communication performance was improved. Apart from enhancing in fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, role-play helped participants improve conversation skills. They had more chances to interact and support each other. They know how to take their turns, keep their talk, minimize overlap, pause, or interrupt and limit repetition.

5. Conclusions

After the treatment, the experimental group's posttest score was better than control group's posttest score. There were significant differences between the students' oral communication performance of the experimental group applied role-play and students' oral communication of control group received other methods. It indicates that role-play could improve the students' oral score better than normal method.

It is proved that the student's oral communication was improved in some elements; fluency and coherence, vocabulary, grammar and accuracy, and pronunciation. After the treatment was applied, the students in the experimental group pronoun more accurately, speak more fluently, and use more vocabulary and correct grammar.

Moreover, from the role-play observation checklist and audio recordings taken during ten weeks, they showed that role-play activity could develop students' conversation skills. Thanks to practicing with role-play, students could use turn taking clues or adjacency pairs to control and increase their turns. In addition, strategies which made conversation smooth and natural also applied successfully.

On the basis of the data analysis gained from questionnaire and engagement observation checklist, it displayed that role-play activity could increase the student's motivation in joining speaking class. The results from questionnaire representing the matters of students' opinion about English subject, speaking skill, and role-play technique, indicated that most of students agreed that role-play made the learning process become more enjoyable and fun. The students' responses also showed that role-play has a strong effect on improving student's speaking skill. Furthermore, role-play could increase students' confidence in speaking English as they felt relaxed and comfortable when practicing with role-play.

Besides, student's motivation was reflected in their efforts in three stages of role-play. For

instances, they asked their friends and also teacher about the lesson at the before role-play stage. They started to practice immediately and needed more time to practice their roles. They gave positive behaviors such as smiling and laughing, nodding, shaking head, hand movement, so on. They wanted to volunteer to perform their roles in front of class. after the role-play stage, they still talked about it and discussed some mistakes their friends made. Students' motivation improvement could be seen from their interest and enthusiasm in participating in role-play activity.

In conclusion, role-play was effective in enhancing oral communication performance of first year non-English student at Van Lang University.

5.1. Implications

5.1.1. Implications for English teachers

The researcher would like to suggest some implications for English teacher. Role-play requires well-organized teaching materials, the teacher should be well-prepared before conducting the role-play activity. The teacher should choose the appropriate topics that are suitable to the students' ability as well as the language functions that have been mastered by the students. During the implementation of role-play technique, the teacher should help actively students to solve their problems. While students practiced with role-play, the class became little bit noisy, the teacher should be patient. Moreover, the teacher should walk around class to prevent students from using mother tongue a lot. Besides, the teacher should manage time efficiently and effectively since role-play sometimes takes much time. Finally, the teacher should make sure that the students have fully understood and have the information they need.

5.1.2. Implications for students

Many students are not willing to speak English because they are afraid to make mistakes and their friends laugh at them. They feel shy and nervous when speaking in front of crowd or class. Role-play not only helps students increase their self-confidence but also makes them feel comfortable to speak English. The students can train themselves by using role-play. They are demanded to imagine getting fun in role-play activity. Besides using role-play to improve the oral communication, the students should eliminate their fear to make their mistakes.

Another important implication is related to pairing students. Some students may not get along

well, this, so, is a chance for them to take part in interactions with classmates.

5.2. Limitations of the study.

Although the aims of this current study were achieved, there remained some limitations. Firstly, the limitation lies in the sampling method used in this research i.e. nonrandom purpose sampling. In this sampling method, the researcher did not have the opportunity to pick the participants randomly, but she had to work with two assigned classes. However, the results of the pre-test showed that the control group and the experimental group had nearly the same proficiency level or in other word, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant.

Secondly, the limitation concerns the sample size. Specifically, the results of this study were drawn from the two classes with only 30 participants in Van Lang University. Therefore, the findings are just restricted to this research site and no generalization for a larger population can be made.

Lastly, the time limit for implementing role-play is also taken in consideration. As mentioned earlier,

under the specific context of Van Lang University, the researcher could only teach 1 speaking lesson in two periods in a week. Therefore, during the process of adopting role play to teach speaking, the researcher did encounter much difficulty in relation to the time pressure. Hence, it cannot be guaranteed that the result will be the same in case of the unlimited time.

5.3. Recommendations for Further Research

It can be said that role-play is a successful technique in improve students' oral communication. For further study, it is suggested some research possibilities. One project would be conducting similar studies with different levels and other schools, particularly with high levels of proficiency. In addition, further studies should explore the use of other kinds of role-play with different group of learners. For example, with students who have advanced level, the researcher can apply role-playing in the form of debate or discussion or roleplaying controlled through situations and goals. Furthermore, there does not seem to be much research on using role-play with other skills; listening or reading skill ■

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Received date: November 1, 2020

Reviewed date: November 12, 2020

Accepted date: November 22, 2020

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SỬ DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP ROLE-PLAY ĐỂ NÂNG CAO HIỆU QUẢ GIAO TIẾP CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM NHẤT KHÔNG CHUYÊN TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC VĂN LANG

● PHẠM THỊ SONG THUYẾT

Trường Đại học Văn Lang

TÓM TẮT:

Phương pháp Role-Play hiện đang được áp dụng trong các lớp học nói để giúp học sinh cải thiện khả năng giao tiếp của mình và sẽ giúp người học có cơ hội giao tiếp tự do, tự tin và tự phát trong các tình huống sống động, sát với thực tế (Ramos, 2002). Tuy nhiên, hiện có rất ít nghiên cứu về việc làm sao để áp dụng thành công phương pháp Role-Play và tận dụng tối đa phương pháp này trong lớp học nói dành cho sinh viên thuộc bậc đại học. Nghiên cứu này nhằm xác định liệu việc sử dụng phương pháp Role-Play trong lớp học nói có thể giúp sinh viên năm nhất không chuyên tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Văn Lang nâng cao hiệu quả giao tiếp hay không và phản ứng của các sinh viên này đối với phương pháp giảng dạy này. Phương pháp nghiên cứu hành động được sử dụng kết hợp với nhiều công cụ khác nhau để thu thập dữ liệu cho nghiên cứu này như bảng câu hỏi đối với sinh viên, quan sát lớp học, ghi âm và thu thập điểm số của sinh viên qua các bài kiểm tra trước và sau khi áp dụng phương pháp giảng dạy.

Từ khoá: Phương pháp Role-Play, giao tiếp, giảng dạy ngôn ngữ giao tiếp.