

**How to Cite:**

Bahriyeva, N. (2021). Teaching a language through role-play. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(S1), 1582-1587. <https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5nS1.1745>

# Teaching a Language Through Role-Play

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**Abstract**---This research examines the importance of role-playing in teaching a language. The technique of role-playing if used right could promote a positive atmosphere among the students in the classroom. After all, the goal of teaching any language is to get the students' attention by engaging their learning abilities successfully. Therefore, all aspects of teaching through role-playing are explored and guidance is provided on how to use them in the classroom.

**Keywords**---learning abilities, methodology, student, teaching language, through role-play.

## Introduction

Using role-play as a teaching strategy is an important part of learning any language. Role-play is a form of experiential learning (Russel & Shepherd, 2010). The students take on assigned roles and act out those roles through a scripted play. The role-play can be carried out one-to-one (individual role play) or as a group role-plays with each member in the group taking on a role or a character. The roles and rules for a role-play are clearly defined in the script. The role-plays can provide very powerful learning experiences for students by immersing them in simulated real-world situations in which students act out a particular role or a character in a safe environment (Ginaya et al., 2018; Menaka & Sankar, 2019).

## Literature review on teaching a language through role-play

The available literature on role-playing is abundant and has been used effectively to teach foreign and second language learning. The resources to use role-play illustrate many ways for teaching and learning the intended language (Starostina & Horytska, 2021; Atmowardoyo & Sakkir, 2021). It is important to note that this research article focuses on role-play as a teaching and learning strategy. Therefore, the intended audience of this research is an educational and academic setting.

Salies (1995), published an article titled "Teaching language realistically: Role-play is the thing." She writes that the role-playing is an ideal technique to teach language because it prepares learners for the unpredictable nature of real-life

communication. It also teaches appropriate language use, and boosts self-confidence. Salies reviews role-playing through theories that have paved the way for the current communicative approach to language teaching. She also outlines the rationale for role-playing, focusing on its effectiveness. The author argues that role-playing prepares learners for realistic communication, adding emotion, inventiveness, and listener awareness to language teaching. Moreover, the article contextualizes language use and exposes the student to conversational routines and cultural discussion (Salies, 1995).

Role-playing is also explored for online teaching that is very significant these days due to the COVID-19. Russell & Shepherd (2010), examine project EnROLE in their article "Online role-play environments for higher education." They write that role-play is a form of experiential learning where students adopt different personas and work through the provided scenario. In addition, they work together, interacting in their assumed roles. They assert that role-play is particularly effective for learning about complex social and human systems. In online environments, which are growing in number, diversity, and availability, students can interact anonymously, in the role (Milovanov et al., 2010; Cleave et al., 2010).

The EnROLE (Encouraging Role-based Online Learning Environments) project by Wills et al. (2009), brought together the experience of online role-play designs, environments, and tools going back to 1990. In universities, online role-play learning is part of a complex adaptive system. The project EnROLE uses the following specific definition of online role-play. The online (and blended) role-plays are designed to increase understanding of real-life human interaction and dynamics. The student participants assume a role in someone else's shoes or someone else's situation. They do authentic tasks in an authentic context involving substantial in-role human interaction such as collaboration, negotiation, and debate. The interaction between roles is substantially in an online environment. Learning outcomes are assessable and generate opportunities for student reflection (Wills et al., 2009).

When it comes to encouraging students to speak, one author explores the ways to teach speaking via role-play. Fadilah (2016), stresses the importance of role-play in teaching speaking because it allows students to practice communicating in different social contexts and different social roles. The article defines the role-play as the person whom an actor represents in a film or play (Fadilah, 2016). Undeniably, teaching speaking through role-play encourages the students to actively participate in the learning environment. Dalgarno et al. (2016), write about practicing teaching using virtual classroom role-play. Undeniably, due to the COVID-19, the school and universities are already using virtual teaching to reach out to students. Therefore, it is important to familiarize ourselves with tools on how to use teaching for virtual classrooms (Dalgarno et al., 2016). Liu & Ding, (2009), emphasize the importance of teaching the English language through role-play. The authors suggest incorporating role-play into the classroom adds variety, a change of pace and opportunities for a lot of language production, and also a lot of fun (Liu & Ding, 2009).

## Statement of Research

Role-play is an effective technique to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interests of learners, and make language acquisition impressive ([Chilingaryan & Zvereva, 2017](#); [Goodnough et al., 2009](#)). So, this research mainly focuses on how to apply it successfully and take the most advantage of it in any classroom. This research demonstrates that there are four crucial factors for its success. The first one is that the chosen topic must be real and relevant. The second one is for the teacher to need to 'feed-in' the appropriate language. The third one is to correct errors properly. And, the last one to remember is that the teacher's role is to be a facilitator, or a spectator, or a participant. Incorporating role-play into the classroom adds an interesting variety, a change of pace, and opportunities for a lot of language production and also fun ([Häfner et al., 2013](#); [Newport, 1990](#); [Zavolzi, 2021](#)).

## Challenges of role-play

One of the biggest challenges of the role-playing technique is to get all students to participate and be truly engaged. The instructors must consider means of increasing the likelihood of strong student participation ([Kepinska et al., 2017](#); [Van Heugten & Johnson, 2010](#)). The instructors also need to offer incentives or bonus point rewards to increase student participation. It is important to find ways to increase student awareness of the role-play they are actively participating so they are familiar with the context.

## Advantages of role-playing

Students immediately apply content in a relevant, real-world context. They take on a decision-making persona that might let them diverge from the confines of their normal self-imposed limitations or boundaries. They can also transcend and think beyond the confines of the classroom setting and see the relevance of the content for handling real-world situations. Moreover, the instructor and students receive immediate feedback about student understanding of the content. The students engage in higher-order thinking and learn content more deeply. The instructors can create useful scenarios when setting the parameters of the role-play when real scenarios or contexts might not be readily available ([Hamdani, 2018](#); [Wishart et al., 2007](#); [Suryasa et al., 2019](#)). Most importantly, the students seem to remember their role in these scenarios and the ensuing discussion long after the semester ends.

## How to use role-play—a step-by-step process

Step 1: Identify the Situation. To start the process, gather people together, introduce the problem, and encourage an open discussion to uncover all of the relevant issues.

Step 2: Add the Details.

Step 3: Assign the Roles.

Step 4: Act Out the Scenario.

Step 5: Discuss What Your Students Have Learned As a Result.

### Steps and tips for using role-play technique/methodology

- Offer a relevant scenario to students. This scenario should include the role the student must play, the informational details relevant for decision-making in this role, and a task to complete based on the information. This information might be provided on the screen through powerpoint or by using a handout. It is highly recommended that the instructions be provided in writing so it is clear to students what they must do and how?
- Give students five to ten minutes to complete the task. The instructor might have students do this alone or in small groups or follow the think-pair-share format in which students work individually and then discuss their results with their partners.
- Find a way to process student deliberations. The instructor might ask students to write their replies to submit or this might be a very good lead-in to a larger class discussion where students can justify their differing outcomes or opposing views.

### Summary and Conclusion

Role-playing is a learning structure that allows students to immediately apply content as they are put in the role of a decision-maker who must decide on a policy, resource allocation, or some other outcome. This technique is an excellent tool for engaging students and allowing them to interact with their peers as they try to complete the task assigned to them in their specific roles. This work can be done in groups and students can maintain the persona of their role throughout the class period. Students are more engaged as they try to respond to the material from the perspective of their character role. This research illustrates all available tools to teach any language through the role-play technique and methodology. It is important to be aware of these tools so we could effectively use them in teaching any language. Therefore, this research provides the techniques, guidance, and methodology to use role-play in learning and teaching a language.

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