

Challenges of Using Role Play Teaching Technique in Teaching Communicative Skills and Students Performance in Communicative Skill among Secondary School Students in Bungoma North Sub County, Kenya

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1026EDU0499>

Received: 27 March 2026; Accepted: 24 July 2026; Published: 10 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Communicative Skills teaching aims at improving students' communication so that they can express themselves in different situations and develop appropriately in speaking, listening, reading and writing. However, the problem is that students in secondary schools underperform in these skills. The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of teachers of English towards use of role play teaching technique on students' performance in communicative skills among secondary schools. This study applied the Vygotsky's Social Cultural Interaction Theory which emphasizes importance of social instruction in cognitive learning. The descriptive survey design was used where quantitative and qualitative data was collected from Bungoma North Sub-County. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques where 30% of teachers of English and 30% of Form Three students were sampled. Questionnaires, interview schedule and test items were used to collect data. The reliability and validity of the research instruments was done through piloting the instruments in selected secondary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County. The data collected from the respondents was analyzed using descriptive statistics and transcription and presented in form of charts, tables and discussion. With regard to the importance of role play teaching technique and students' performance in communicative skills, this study found out that use of role play helped learners improve in performance by mastering content, sharpening interpersonal skills, improving grammatical construction and active participation in lessons. This study on, perception of teachers of English on use of role play teaching technique and students' performance established that role play is an involving teaching technique and teachers of English avoided using the technique. This study recommends use role play because it helps learners improve, teachers should perceive of role play as better alternative technique for teaching communicative skills, the school administration and The Ministry of Education should help teachers of English overcome challenges and use role play teaching technique effectively in teaching communicative skills. This study will enable The Teachers' Training Institutions train teachers of English on effective use of role play teaching technique, inform The Ministry of Education to prioritize role play as key teaching technique while drawing curriculum and syllabi for teaching English language

Keywords: Communicative skills, Role play technique, English teaching techniques, Challenges in teaching Communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

Effective teaching helps students to think critically, communicate effectively, learn self-discipline and develop an understanding of the self and others. Communicative skills are fundamental of human life yet students face problems in practicing the skills. According to Whitelaw, (2022) Communicative skills have become the core pillars of global communication hence, the communicative skills are taught compulsorily to students in secondary schools for competence in communication. It is therefore important for teachers to use effective teaching strategies that enable learners practice the communicative skills. Effective teaching therefore, helps students overcome influence of first language in learning foreign language communicative

skills on one hand and motivating to aggressively practice the skills acquired in a natural way.

Role play is the best teaching strategy that provides learners with opportunity to practice these skills, develop decision making abilities, develop critical thinking and problem solving skills which are embedded in The National Goals of Education. The goals stipulate that students should be able to understand and conduct a certain length of everyday communication both orally and in writing at school and even at work place. According to Hattings, (2016) the role play seems ideal activity to stimulate creativity and conversation to practice communicative skills.

Examination is the major factor that affect role play activities in classroom, Crooks, (1988) points out that social comparison is central to competitive structures and this tends to result in severe discouragement for the students who have few academic successes in competing with their peers. It discourages students from helping each other with their academic work and threatens peer relationships, encouraging a mentality which tends to segregate the higher and lower achieving students according to Deutsh, (1979) cited in Crooks (1988).

The play-acting, the lack of grammar work, chaos in classes and lack of chances to play a part are the major challenges in applying role play in language classrooms. The role play activities should be clearly tied to the learning objectives in order to be aligned to the demand of the curriculum. Moreover, certain students may not be willing or possess the skills to participate, while more charismatic students are more skilled in role play and not in the learning engagement. Students need to be allowed to exercise their free will with respect to the direction in which the roles will evolve,(YenHou&Chang,2015).Role play was used by Chinese teachers to improve English speaking, Tran,(2016) and Krept,(2017).However, large class size of 50-60 students instead of recommended 35 students posed challenges to teachers as some were passive and others elusive participants,(MOE,2017).Tran,(2016)concluded that chaos in a crowded class is viewed as the biggest problem in conducting role play. On the other hand, the more the students are in one classroom, the more differences the teacher needs to cope with. This in turn aggravates the challenge of students' communicative skills proficiency difference.

Muhdsyahir, (2016) and Liu, (2010) have reported that implementation of role play as a speaking assessment helps students to be more confident as it arouses their motivation in speaking than using other teaching techniques. However, there are instances where timid students often fail when the important parts are assigned to them, thus, making the role play uninteresting especially when they act in front of the whole class for the very first time. Some students also prefer teachers to have a very low visibility as observers Halapi &Saunder, (2002).Other than that, it is also reported that students are likely to switch to their mother-tongue when the instructions are not clear.

Role play sessions tend to increase the work load for the teachers and are difficult to prepare for and conduct, (Nakamura et al, 2011).The higher the player count, the more difficult it is to facilitate the sessions. The nature of role play also requires the facilitator to respond to prompts quickly since learners run the risk of being waylaid or stuck during the session, lowering its effectiveness (Nakamura et al, 2011).Implementing role play successfully will require instructors to be thorough with their preparations and account for the increase in the students' questions. Instructors may also need to seek assistance with facilitating the sessions.

According to Wudu, Tefera and Woldu, (2009) in a study conducted in Ethiopia, the challenges that affect use of role play can be attributed to student factors, teacher-factors, school environment and policy and lack of resources and equipment. Students related factors are the nature of students themselves especially their motivation, age level and interest with problem of English language and unfavorable attitude towards this method. Not all students are expert collaborators; others may bring personal issues to the learning context that effectively disrupt the learning experiences of others,(Robson,2004).Some students do not work well with others, loners may find it hard to share answers, aggressive students try to take over and bright students tend to act superior.

Teachers in Kabole schools in Zambia who had been exposed to child to child approach reported that a

child who is relatively unco-operative tries to show that his or her work is the best and is responsible for the group's achievements, (Murambi A. Nabwoba C. & Mutende R, 2023) Teacher factors include shortage of teachers, lack of short term training on refresher courses, lack of commitment and skills, (Wudu et al, 2009). Some teachers react negatively to the concept because they feel that implicit in the notion, is a devaluing of their own professional authority which requires standing in front of the classroom and lecturing students. School environment and policy include assigning teachers large classes and face budgetary constraints to purchase materials, (Wudu et al, 2009). At any level of education, shortage of books, learning materials, instructional materials, furniture and library make it difficult to use active learning methods.

There are too much paper work and workload for teachers in schools that focus on shortcut academic improvement over tedious student-centered activities. Due to this workload, teachers are finding it too difficult to involve learners in role play activities, cited in Okoruwa, (2017). Also in some schools in the world, learner centered activities have been abolished to ensure quiet environment for academic learning, (Stipek, 2006). Drani, (2018) found out that decline in academic performance in most of Uganda secondary schools is attributed to teachers reluctance to use learner-centered teaching methods like role play. According to Anguparu, (2018), role play technique requires a lot of time to plan, prepare and utilize in teaching, this poses a challenge to many teachers who would only pick the text book and rush to class during the lesson. The role play method of teaching can also mislead the learners and divert the teaching and learning process from the lesson objectives resulting to wastage of time and chaotic learning environment.

The teachers' lack of competence to use role play teaching technique affects their attitude to using it in classroom, Moraa, (2018) in the study "Influence of Task Based Instruction on English Speaking Skills among Mixed Public Day Sub County Secondary School Learners in Gucha-South Sub county Kisii, Kenya." Found out that teachers can make role play situations difficult for learners who would only pretend to be someone else, which can make the role play session fail. Lack of teacher motivation and fun in teaching using role play make learning experience a total mess. These findings are also in line with the findings of Qiangba (2005) and Thongpubai, (2010) who said that learner-centered techniques may fail in classroom due to low motivation and low confidence of learners who feel extremely exposed in a role play setting. This can make them reluctant to act or give an opinion in front of the whole class. The challenges reviewed above are enough to confirm that teachers find it hard to use role play teaching technique in classroom hence, disadvantaging learners in performance of communicative skills.

Statement Of The Problem

The National Goals of Education advocates for core competencies like critical thinking and problem-solving skills are achieved with when learners are equipped with effective communicative skills. Role play teaching technique is an alternative teaching technique as it is participatory and engages learners in the learning process, a learner discovers as the teacher guides and simulates learning process. Jeruto (2006) reiterates the importance of learner centered teaching techniques in improving learners' communicative skills.

Learner-centered teaching methods are rarely used in Kenyan secondary schools Murungi (2018) where traditional teacher centered methods have dominated. Due to reduced chances of learner-to-learner interaction and active participation in learning activities, there is poor performance in communicative skills hence, learners cannot express themselves as required or hold dialogue in English language. Communicative skills need to be enhanced and improved to raise the students' ability to communicate and perform well in examination, Kembo (1994) and Wambua (2018). This study sought to establish the challenges faced in using role play teaching technique and students' performance in communicative skills in secondary schools in Bungoma North Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya. The locale has poor infrastructure, lack of exposure, rampant mother-tongue influence and poor reading culture. Many secondary schools students fail to pursue their dream courses in tertiary and higher learning institutions due to low scores in English. Further, majority fail on communicative skills competency tests during their career life Fadilah (2016). This study sought to determine role play and students' performance in communicative skills among secondary schools' students.

According to Lahbib (2023), Iranian Health Centers Education System use the traditional teaching methods highlighting lecturing and presenting issues to students and in most educational centers. The method poses different disadvantages such as passive learning, lack of attention to learners' needs, poor problem solving skills, lapse in creative thinking and high level cognitive skills despite its advantages such as providing a large volume of issues to a lot of individuals in a little time simultaneously. However, role play allows learners to practice situation very close to reality and be aware of their different reactions during performance of duties. This study seeks to ascertain challenges on the use of role play teaching technique on students' performance in secondary schools in Bungoma North, Bungoma County as no study has been done in the area before.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey research design to determine the challenges facing role play use and students' improvement in performance of communicative skills. Orodho (2004) assert that descriptive research design allows collection of vital data through questionnaires, interview schedule and test items from the selected sample of respondents. In this regard, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide scientific knowledge and understanding of challenges facing role play teaching technique and improvement of students' performance in communicative skills in secondary schools Mugenda (2012) Furthermore, the data collected through descriptive research design was used by the researcher to explain the possible meanings of the results obtained and generalize the findings Orodho (2004). The stratified sampling technique was used to sample Extra County, County and Sub County secondary schools to ensure each category of schools was selected for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers of English from sampled secondary schools because they are trained to use role play as a technique to teach communicative skills. The purposive sampling technique was also used to select Form Three students because they have learned most of topics in English and have been introduced to Literature in English which are key to overall performance in communicative skills. Simple random sampling was used to select schools from each category for study. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents from every category of selected schools to ensure all respondents have equal chances of being selected for the study. From the schools sampled, 88% of English teachers indicated that they encounter challenges when using role play technique in teaching.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the field was systematically organized for analysis. The researcher assembled the entire instrument for quantitative data for editing and coding. This was for identifying and correcting errors and inconsistent codes for accuracy of the data, Abudullahi, (2014). All the questionnaires were checked to ensure they have all been correctly filled. To determine the challenges of using role play technique on communicative skills amongst secondary schools, respondents were required to give their views regarding certain statements on the questionnaire

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This study sought to determine the challenges of using role play teaching technique in teaching communicative skills and students' performance in communicative skills in secondary schools. The respondents gave their opinion using a 5 Point Likert Scale where, 1 represented Strongly Agree, 2 Agree, 3 Don't Know, 4 Disagree, 5 Strongly Disagree

Table 1: Teachers are overworked that they hardly use role play

		Frequenc y	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	26	49.1	50.0	50.0

	Agree	18	34.0	34.6	84.6
	Don't Know	2	3.8	3.8	88.5
	Disagree	5	9.4	9.6	98.1
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	52	98.1	100.0	
Missi ng	System	1	1.9		
Total		53	100.0		

From Table 1, 50.0% of the respondents strongly agreed that teachers are overworked that they hardly use role play teaching technique, 34.6% agreed, 3.8% did not know, 9.6% disagreed and 1.9% strongly disagreed. Therefore, majority of the respondents (50.0%) strongly agreed that teachers are overworked that they hardly use role play teaching technique in teaching communicative skills in secondary schools.

Table 2: Traditional beliefs interfere with role play in classroom

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	6	11.3	11.5	11.5
	Agree	15	28.3	28.8	40.4
	Don't Know	10	18.9	19.2	59.6
	Disagree	14	26.4	26.9	86.5
	Strongly Disagree	7	13.2	13.5	100.0
	Total	52	98.1	100.0	
Missi ng	System	1	1.9		
Total		53	100.0		

From Table 2, 11.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that traditional beliefs interfere with role play in classroom, 28.8% agreed, 19.2% did not know, 26.9% disagreed and 13.5% strongly disagreed. Therefore, majority of the respondents (28.8%) agreed that traditional beliefs interfere with role play in classroom.

Table 3: Lack of class control discourages teachers to use role play

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	20	37.7	38.5	38.5
	Agree	19	35.8	36.5	75.0
	Don't Know	3	5.7	5.8	80.8
	Disagree	8	15.1	15.4	96.2
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	52	98.1	100.0	

Missi ng	System	1	1.9		
Total		53	100.0		

From Table 3, 38.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of class control discourages teachers from using role play, 36.5% agreed, 5.8% did not know, 15.4% disagreed and 3.8% strongly disagreed. Therefore, majority of respondents (38.5%) agreed that lack of class control discourages teachers to use role play teaching technique in teaching communicative skills in secondary schools.

Table 4: Inadequate time hinders use of role play in lessons

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	26	49.1	50.0	50.0
	Agree	17	32.1	32.7	82.7
	Don't Know	3	5.7	5.8	88.5
	Disagree	3	5.7	5.8	94.2
	Strongly Disagree	3	5.7	5.8	100.0
	Total	52	98.1	100.0	
Missin g	System	1	1.9		
Total		53	100.0		

From Table 4, 50.0% of the respondents strongly agreed that inadequate time hinders use of role play in lessons, 32.7% agreed, 5.8% did not know, 5.8% disagreed and 5.8% strongly disagreed. Therefore, majority of the respondents (50.0%) strongly agreed that inadequate time hinders use of role play in lessons to teach communicative skills in secondary schools. Most respondents said lack of time hindered use of role play teaching technique in classroom. The forty minutes allocated to a lesson in secondary schools without double lessoning posed a serious challenge to sufficiency of time. Most teachers therefore, preferred traditional teaching methods because there were no much preparation and needed little time to use in teaching communicative skills. Also, learners' sluggishness was seen as great threat to effective use of role play; during change over, most respondents said they wasted a lot of time moving slowly and only settled fully when time had been spend, taking the floor was also time consuming unless the teacher properly prepares for the lesson and also posed the challenge of failure by the teacher to achieve the objectives of the lesson since time is key to implementing the planned lesson objectives. This study agrees with Anguparu (2018) that role play is time consuming and is a challenge to teachers who are used to picking a text book and rushing to classroom without lesson preparation.

More so, the assessment of the achievement of role play in class was problematic and most teachers were ill-equipped with assessment tools and rubrics, the end results being entertainment of participants without learning communicative skills. Also subjective point of view of the role play might give wrong impression of learners and the teacher on the effectiveness of role play as a teaching technique to improve performance in communicative skills.

As well, role play might be boring technique to some learners in classroom who perceive it as waste of their precious time, they would prefer faster and straight forward technique rather than tedious and time consuming one. Some respondents said that the administration would interfere with their lesson plans of role play since disinterested students reported them to school administration for wasting students' time in

classroom. Also, some teachers of English perceive use of role play as a waste of time to prepare and utilize it in teaching communicative skills.

Also, some classes in most of secondary schools lacked co-operation to make role play a success. Students did not agree altogether to take up roles, research and prepare the role play activities to present a given concept in class. The interested ones would end up discouraged and the objectives of the lesson based on role play activities fail to be achieved. There was also a group of learners who categorized themselves as scientists and engineers who really disliked acting and saw it as waste of their time, they would even prefer to engage in alternative activity like solving a mathematical problem than concentrate on role play during the role play lesson.

Furthermore, role play faced the challenge of ineffective preparation and delivery because learning and teaching resources were limited and even those that were available were inadequate for effective teaching. Also, the syllabus in most parts failed to capture role play as preferred teaching technique to most of the topics in communicative skills, this also gave rise to a gap that gives teachers an escape goat to using role play. Ineffectiveness in lesson preparation and teaching due to lack of teaching and learning resources wasted a lot of students' time even if some of the role play lessons were taught. This study agrees with the findings of Moraa,(2018) who said that lack of effective preparation by teachers made most of them fail to utilize role play teaching technique.

In addition, most respondents said factors like cultural and religious beliefs and practices were barriers to use to role play teaching technique in schools. For instance dressing codes of some religious groups discourage exposure of some parts of human bodies and if role play was to be effective, a learner needed freedom of movement on stage and utilization of non- verbal cues which arise from use of various body parts. Teachers were also reluctant to use role play since they were not ready to conflict with the school administrations and to a greater extend, the parents. There were challenges that learners in particular faced when role play was used in classroom. Some of respondents said that disinterested learners resorted to making noise and disturbing learners who had interest and were preparing and role playing in classroom, at the end, the serious learners needed a lot of protection, support and guidance from the teacher in order to have role play succeed in teaching communicative skills.

Most respondents said some learners were shy and could not manage stage fright therefore unable to role play before others in classroom, they would keep off and even some resorted to crying if forced to take part in role play. Also, some respondents said that the mother tongue influence made most of learners see performance of role play as humiliation to them because there were learners who make jokes of those affected by mother tongue influence. This caused mispronunciation and poor articulation which scared them, they were then laughed at for making unnecessary mistakes. Therefore, they shied off and crippled total participation of learners in communicative skills.

Another challenge was that some learners were so mischievous that they never wanted to commit themselves to taking roles and acting, they could decline and even some taking up the roles but failed to perform, they remained helpless unless another interested one took over, in fact most of learners who had the ability to act could not co-operate leaving the teacher disappointed in classroom. Since the teacher could not punish such a learner, it became a challenge to use role play while teaching communicative skills. Most learners in most schools in the locality were slow achievers and had difficulties comprehending the content and devising a role play to bring out the message from what is role played. Most respondents said that they had it rough to train a learner who could not explain a concept or demonstrate for the purpose of learning.

Most respondents said role play is rarely used in secondary schools as a teaching technique because it consumes a lot of time preparing and using it in classroom. One respondent said," It requires a lot of time yet the lessons takes 40minutes."In addition, there was no free lessons or time at the teachers and students' disposal, even remedial time was not enough. This presented a great challenge to use of role play as a teaching technique. This study agrees with that conducted by Anguparu (2018) who said role play requires a lot of time to prepare and utilize in classroom.

Also, the pressure on teachers to cover the syllabus within a short period of time does not allow them to prepare and use role play teaching technique. Teachers preferred their centered teaching methods to survive. Also, learners wanted to move faster in communicative skills and even be ahead or at par with other subjects in the school. This competition among learners based on subjects in schools to complete the syllabus challenge use of role play teaching technique.

As well, most students' lack interest in acting, they would prefer straight forward teaching methods that do not involve and tax them, they are only comfortable with sitting in class, reading, listening to a teacher and writing. Even during free time, most learners would be seen loitering or lying about with no interest to act a role in any one of the communicative skills.

Furthermore, congestion in classrooms due to over enrollment in most secondary schools pose a challenge to effective use of role play teaching technique. The space in classroom is usually insufficient, many learners become uncontrollable and the class could turn out chaotic if the teacher is not fully prepared to control it. These issues really discourage most teachers and even learners to use role play teaching technique. This agrees with Tran(2016) and Krept(2017) who said that overcrowded classrooms posed challenges to teachers because learners turned out chaotic and uncooperative.

Another challenge of role play is disruption of other classes by students who role play because sometimes, actors may over project their voices to march the character- role played or make noise in the neighborhood, this can resulted into conflicts and failure to achieve the lesson objectives. Most respondents said they experienced a lot of confusion in class because of disorganization that come along with role play, most learners could not get instructions and follow them to make role play successful in class, some learners might take advantage to be mischievous and have fun instead of learning. One of the respondents said, some learners like jokes in class." Also, respondents said the video recording of role play in class is costly, the equipment to record were not be accessible in most cases and storage of the material was not done according to majority of respondents. One of them said, 'We cannot afford the video recorder in school, what we act ends in classroom.' This is in agreement with Fox (2020) who said that video production cost hindered schools from venturing into video recording and use of online role play in teaching and learning.

Some respondents said that there were some learners who kept off from role play lessons even when present in the lesson, they would pick other reading materials and read instead of following the role play in classroom, some would go ahead to doze off if the teacher is not keen to notice and reprimand them. The teacher would be forced to police learners in class to ensure lesson objectives are met.

Also, some learners easily become emotional when corrected or criticized for mistakes done during acting, they lose interest easily and even step out of stage, this, in most cases kill the lesson especially if they are the main role players. Also, some actors would want to be treated in a special when they are key pillars of role play classes in the school. It would force the teacher to plead with them to perform which in most cases is counter -productive in teaching and learning. This agrees with the study conducted by Jennifer(2023) who said that children emotional support was fundamental in achieving lesson objectives during role play.

The discussion on the challenges of role play teaching technique in improving students' performance in communicative skills in secondary schools showed teacher workload, crowded classrooms, lack of class control by teachers and uncooperative learners were the challenges that hindered utilization of role play in secondary schools. These challenges however, can be overcome by teachers and students in order to utilize role play teaching technique to help learners improve in performance in communicative skills.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings on the challenges of using role play teaching technique were that teachers of English in secondary schools had heavy workload and therefore could not have time to prepare and use role play teaching technique in teaching communicative skills. Teachers who used role play had challenges of managing large classes, time constraint, disinterested learners and even lack of self- motivation and commitment to using role play teaching technique in teaching communicative skills in secondary schools.

The study determined the challenges and found out that there was a correlation between teachers' use of role play teaching technique to overcome the challenges and students' performance in communicative skills in secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers of English should look at role play teaching technique as a strength and use it in teaching and learning to improve performance in the communicative skills in secondary schools

Teachers of English should be encouraged to use role play teaching technique to teach communicative skills because role play teaching technique is an important alternative technique to teaching communicative skills in secondary schools.

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