

The Comparative Effect of Unscripted and Scripted Role-Play on EFL Learners' Grammar Achievements

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Abstract: *Since the traditional methods of teaching grammar is somehow frustrating for students, finding different methods for teaching it in a more interesting way can be helpful. This study was an attempt to investigate the comparative impacts of scripted and unscripted role-plays on EFL learners' grammar achievement. To fulfill the purpose of the study, 60 intermediate female EFL learners were selected from a total number of 100 through their performance on the PET test. The subjects who are one standard deviation above and below the mean will be selected for the purposes of this study. Consequently, the students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups with 30 participants in each. A grammar pretest was administered prior to the treatment aimed at measuring their knowledge of grammar at the outset of the study. A posttest was administered at the end of the treatment to both groups and their scores were compared through a one-way ANOVA, one within-subjects and one between-subjects factor. The result ($F = 35.094$; $P = .00$) led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, thereby demonstrating that using scripted role plays for improving grammar achievement was more effective.*

Key words: *Scripted, unscripted, role-play, grammar achievement, EFL learners*

Introduction

Teaching grammar has been the central part of foreign language teaching for more than 2500 years (Rutherford 1987). However, with the rise of communicative methodology in 1970s, grammar instruction had been downplayed and it was sometimes considered as unhelpful (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004).

According to Musumeci (1999), "the role of grammar instruction in the classroom has moved from a position of central importance to that of an "outcast," and is now being brought back into the classroom to aid students' communicative competence" (p. 52). In fact it is clear that no one should dismiss grammar instruction altogether, because there is no empirical evidence that doing so is ultimately more beneficial to foreign language learning.

Among the recent innovations in language teaching, task-based language teaching has drawn much attention from both second language teaching profession and second language researchers. Task is defined as "a piece of classroom work which involve learners comprehending,

manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning" (Nunan, 2006, p.10).

There are many different kind of tasks developed in task based language teaching method. One of these tasks is role-playing. Role-play is a task in which learners assume different roles and play a part in specific situation (Schelin, 2006).

Role-play is a good exercise for making the teaching and learning atmosphere animate. Role play gives learners the opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. It also allows students to be creative and to put themselves in another person's place for a while. Role play would seem to be the ideal activity in which students could use their English creatively and it aims to stimulate a conversation situation in which students might find themselves and give them an opportunity to practice and develop their communication skill.

Role playing authentic situations is one way leading to improved achievement in the target language. For the instructor, role play is a multipurpose activity in that it can be based on authentic listening passages, readings, or videos. For most learners, moving from structured activities to less structured activities allows them to proceed at their own pace while building confidence. Through role play, students will also learn the target language and culture. But the question is this to what extent role-play can effect on grammar achievement?

Review of Literature

Over the past decade, role-play activities have widely been used in attempts to improve the skills of students in EFL classrooms. According to Dorothy and Mahalakshmi (2011) the idea of play as a medium for instruction can be traced back to the Greeks. Probably the first role-play session was run when a master teaching a pupil, said to him: Act as if I am a customer and you are serving me (p. 2).

According to Ments (1999), role-play is defined as "the projection in real life situations with social activities" (p.3). He believed:

The concept of role acts as a short hand way of identifying and labeling a set of appearances and behaviors on the assumption that these appearances and behaviors are characteristic of a particular person and predictable within a given situation. In a role play each players act as a part of the social environment of the others and provides a framework in which they can test out their repertoire of behaviors or study the interacting behavior of the group. (p. 6)

Doff (1990) believes "role play is a way of bringing situations from real life into the classroom" (p. 232). In role play, the students are supposed to imagine a role and create a conversation. The context is usually determined, but it is on the part of the learners to develop the dialogue.

Livingstone (1983) stated that role play is a classroom activity among the students to practice language, the aspects of role behavior and the roles outside the classroom that they may need to know.

Role plays are generally of two types: scripted role play and unscripted role plays. Scripted role play requires the students to work in pairs or small groups. They receive the prompts, which are related to the target scenarios (Chotirat & Sinwongsawat, 2011).

The positive effect of role plays on students oral skills have been proved by some studies (Alwahibee, 2004; Magos & Politi, 2008). Allowing students to communicatively use the language other role play activities are considered as teaching aids in the communicative approach.

In order to maximize the outcome players have to take the responsibilities of their roles. Role play holds all the students attention, it can be fun, and it may result in better learning of language (Holt & Kysilka, 2006).

According to Yousefi (2010) “the theory of communicative competence maintains that focusing on meaning rather than form does not mean that grammar can be ignored. Today the role of grammar in learning and using four skills of language is far beyond the doubt (Zhang, 2009).

It is argued that the students only slightly gain new elements of the target language or language use via role-plays. Therefore, just like in any other kinds of communicative activities (i.e., simulations), it seems to be unlikely that EFL students will be able to attain language accuracy, appropriateness and fluency when performing scripted role-play activities (Ding & Liu, 2009).

Role play activities are acceptable as teaching aids in the communicative approach since they allow students to use the target language to communicate and interact with each other. According to the literature, this facilitates the development of their communication skills and provides them with a wide range of opportunities for the improvement of their language ability (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Lier, Nakahama & Tyler, 2001). This can imply the improvement of grammar as well.

The bulk of previous research in the context of scripted and unscripted role plays has focused on the contribution of these role-plays to oral skills such as reading and speaking (Ments, 1999). There is a dearth of research, if any, on the role scripted/unscripted role-plays have in promoting grammatical knowledge of the language learners.

Research question

The present study aimed at answering to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between the effects of scripted and unscripted role plays on the EFL learners' grammar achievement?

Methodology

Participants

To accomplish the objectives of this study, 60 female students aged 15 to 18 at the intermediate level of proficiency were selected. These learners had been studying English at Sahand English School for at least two years.

Materials

All participants in both experimental groups received instruction based on *Grammar in Use* by Murphy and Smalzer (2012) and Richards's (2004) *Four Corners* as their course books.

Instruments

In order to assure that PET is appropriate for the target sample of subjects, PET was administered to a 30-member group in a pilot phase. The reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha. PET test is one of the proficiency tests administered by Cambridge University; therefore, the researcher was sure about the validity of the test.

Pretest

This test was devised by the researcher. The test included 40 items, allocating 30 minutes and one point was assigned for each correct response.

Posttest

In order to evaluate the effect of the treatment on grammar knowledge, another test with the same difficulty level of pretest was devised by the researcher and was administered.

Procedure

Initially, 100 students sat for PET (2006) proficiency test, the results of which were used to check homogenize the participants. The students who got one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected for this study. Then, the students were divided into two 30-member groups. A grammar pre-test devised by the researcher was administered immediately before starting the experiment to both groups to evaluate the learners' knowledge of grammar.

Both groups received the same amount of instruction by the teacher/researcher. The students attended a 30-session course, which lasted for 10 weeks, and each session was about 90 minutes.

One group received the written roles (scripted) and the other group received unscripted role play. The second group was taught the same grammatical points and participated in the role plays for 30 sessions. The students were required to take on the same roles as those used in the other group. However, they did not have any access to the scripts of the role plays. Consequently, they

were required to pair up before the role play and take on the roles. At the end of the 30 sessions, both groups sat for the same grammar posttest devised by the researcher. This test contains 40 multiple questions about tenses.

Data analyses

In order to analyze the data and test the hypothesis, a one-way Repeated Measures ANOVA was used. This procedure made possible the comparison of the pretest scores with those of the posttest (within-subjects) as well as the posttest scores across the two groups (between-subjects). In these two tests, students' grammar achievement through scripted and unscripted plays were measured.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the scores obtained at the pretest and the posttest phases.

Table:1
Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Scores

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
	Scripted Play	24.00	2.716	30
Pre-Test	Unscripted Play	24.10	2.964	30
	Total	24.05	2.819	60
	Scripted Play	29.77	3.298	30
Post-Test	Unscripted Play	25.93	2.876	30
	Total	27.85	3.626	60

The table shows that the mean and standard deviation of the test scores in pre-test for scripted role play group were respectively 24 and 2.716. The mean and standard deviation of the test scores in the pre-test for unscripted role play group were 24.10 and 2.964.

The mean and standard deviation of the test scores for scripted role play group after the treatment in the pre-test were 29.77 and 3.298. Furthermore, the post-test for unscripted role play group showed the mean and standard deviation of 25.93 and 2.876. This suggests that the scripted role

plays had more positive impact on the grammar achievement in comparison to the unscripted ones.

Investigating the Assumptions of the Repeated Measures ANOVA

The important pre-assumption of the Repeated Measures ANOVA, as a type of GLMRM, is that the Variance-covariance matrix must have the property of sphericity. The dependent variables of this study were only repeated twice; therefore, the shape of the variance-covariance matrix was spherical.

Tests of Within-Subjects and Between-Subjects Effects

The result of the Within-Subjects Effects test with the pre-assumption of the sphericity of the variance-covariance matrixes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Tests of Within-Subjects and Between Subjects Effects

Source	Type IV Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	Sphericity Assumed 433.200	1	433.200	131.022	.000
Time * Group	Sphericity Assumed 116.033	1	116.033	35.094	.000
Error(Time)	Sphericity Assumed 191.767	58	3.306		

Using the level of significance reported in the Table 1, it is possible to check the effect of each independent variable and their interaction. When the level of significance is below .05, the effect of independent variable on the dependent variable is significant.

According to the results in the first row of Table 1, ($F = 131$, $P = .00$), it is concluded that the effect of role-plays on grammar achievement was significant. In other words, there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, which means that using role-plays for teaching grammar was effective.

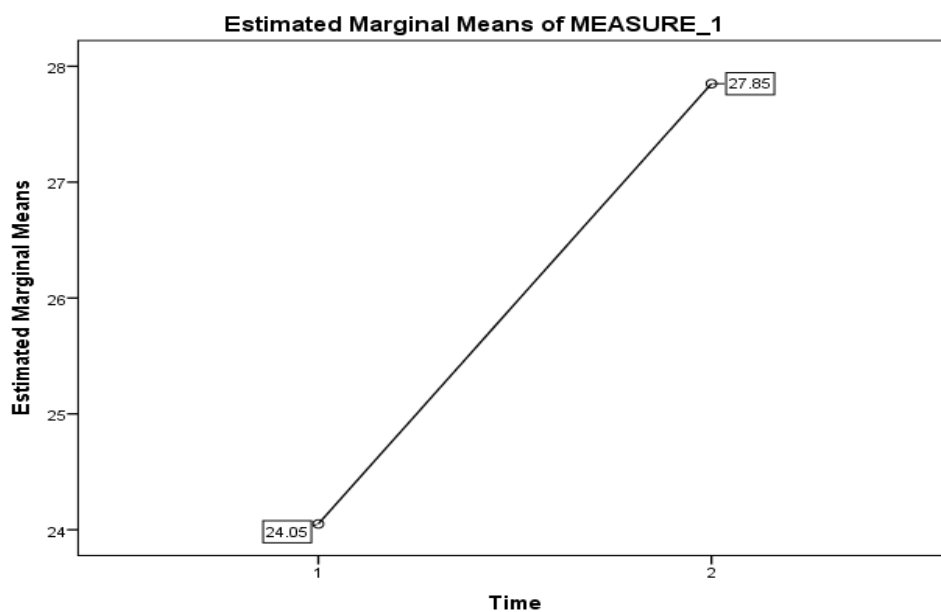
The second row of the Table 1 presents results concerning the interaction effect; that is, the effect of independent variable in relation to time. The results ($F = 35$, $P = 0.00$) indicate that the two role play types had differential impact on grammar achievement. It is concluded that the using scripted role plays had more positive effect that using unscripted role plays. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Therefore, the results of the data analysis revealed that participants who used scripted role plays had performed better than students who benefited from unscripted role play. In other words, using scripted role play has been significantly more effective than using unscripted role plays for improving grammar achievement.

Diagrams

In this part, there are two diagrams which can be helpful for better understanding of the effects of the two types of role-plays on the students' grammar achievement.

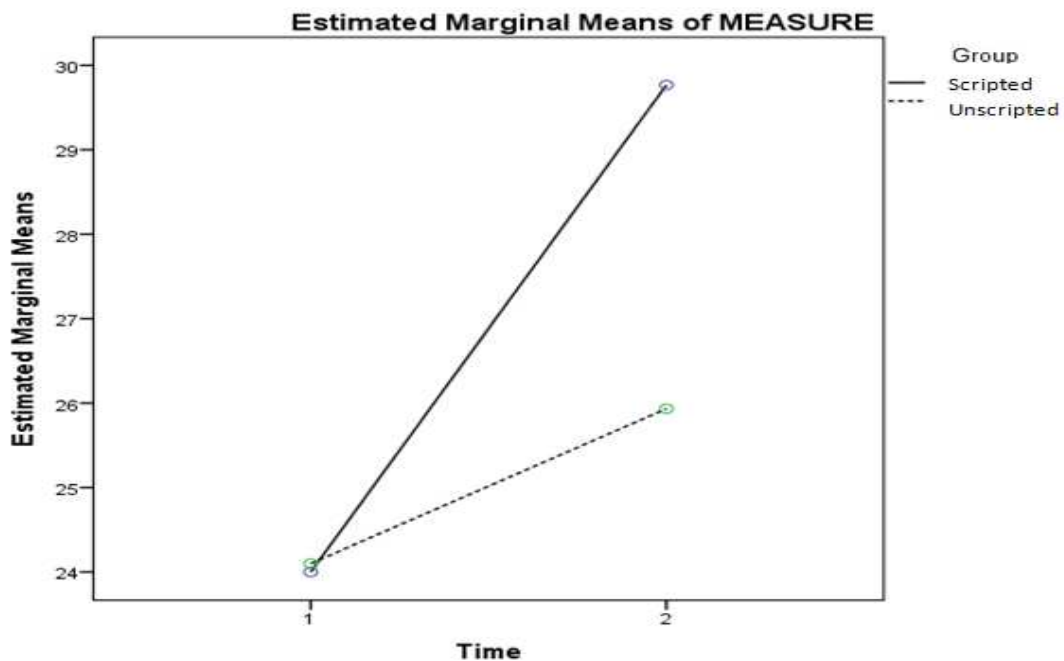
Figure: 1



The Liner Diagram of the Pre-test and Post-test Means.

The horizontal axis shows the pre-test and the post-test and the vertical axis shows the mean scores on the test. The slope of the line in the diagram shows that using role plays for improving students' grammar achievement has been effective and the students had a better performance in the post-test.

Figure: 2



The Liner Diagram of the Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores in Scripted and Unscripted Groups.

The horizontal axis shows the pre-test and the post-test phases and the vertical axis shows the mean scores on the test. The mean score of the scripted group is shown by a line and the dashed line shows the mean score of the unscripted group. Comparing the two lines, it is easy to infer that although the post-test scores of both groups were higher than their scores in pre-test, the students in scripted role play group had a better performance in the post test, which means using scripted role plays for improving grammar achievement was more effective.

Conclusion

Comparing students' performance in pretest and posttest showed that using role-plays for improving students' grammar achievement have been effective and the students had a better performance in the post-test. By comparing the two groups' performance in the posttest, it was revealed that the students in scripted role play group had a better performance in the post test, which means using scripted role plays for improving grammar achievement had been more effective.

As Chomsky (1982) maintains human beings are endowed with a cognitive ability that allows them to establish relations about linguistic entities and to absorb the target language through reasoning and analogical undertaking. In the same vein, it is argued the world is regular, and people are efficient regularity detectors. GCRTs (grammar-cognition raising tasks) help learners

discover the rules for themselves, build up their explicit knowledge, and promote their grammatical accuracy

Hymes (1972) maintained that drawing the learners' attention to the linguistic patterns and providing them with the underlying rules and principles can enhance the learning process since learners usually try to discover rules from the language data for themselves. So, even though teachers do not provide learners with grammatical rules, learners will look for the rules for themselves. This individual endeavor, however, is time-consuming and too demanding upon learners. It is likely to be confusing for it may lead learners to deduce wrong hypotheses about the complex structures of the target language.

GCRTs accommodate students who study grammar as a subject grammar; that is, those who want to learn about grammar for academic purposes, and not those who want to use the language for survival or pure communication, as is the case with people who want to use the language for the sake of trade or tourism.

GCRTs are quite compatible with Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and how people learn languages. They are in tune with Krashen's comprehensive input hypothesis (1981) in their Endeavour to expose learners to meaning rather than to submit them to Traditional Grammar Lessons (TGLs). They are compatible with Long's interaction hypothesis (1983) which emphasizes interactional activities among learners to allow them to negotiate meaning through the use of comprehension checks and clarification requests. They are also in conformity with Swain's output hypothesis (1985) which acknowledges the role of comprehensible output for promoting grammatical competence, expressing efficient meaning, developing syntactic processing, and testing out hypotheses about the target language. These hypotheses complement each other, present real opportunities for learners to work in groups and to interact in order to gain accuracy as well as fluency in the target language. GCRTs are also corroborated by skill-building theories which insist on the move from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge or from knowing to using (Bialystok, 1982).

Suggestions and Recommendations

Not examined in this paper, the following issues are worth being explored in further studies.

1. The study included female participants and it seems to be necessary to do the same research for male participants to see if there is a difference between the two groups.
2. The students at intermediate level cooperated in the study. Students at other language proficiency level may show different results.
3. The participants of the study were teenagers. It is needed to check if language learners at different age groups show the same result.

4. Investigating the effect of role plays on other language skills can give us a better insight into the advantages of using these activities in language classrooms.

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