

ROLEPLAY OR VLOGGING FOR EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILL DEVELOPMENT?

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Abstract

This study aims to compare the effectiveness of vlogging and role-play in developing different aspects of Thai learners' English speaking skills. The research participants consisted of 76 university students enrolled in an English conversation course. Divided into 35 pairs, the students were engaged in two task types: five lesson units with role-play and five vlogging tasks. The results showed that both tasks significantly differed in their capacity to maximize each aspect of the speaking abilities assessed. Vlogging assignments appeared to boost clarity of the students' language use the most compared to their interaction and content. Role-play, on the other hand, elicited their best performance in terms of content and interaction in social activities due to greater opportunities provided for producing and organizing turns with appropriate, meaningful expressions. Further studies should explore different ways to organize and implement each task to maximize its benefits for the development of EFL learners' speaking skills.

Keywords: English conversation skills, speaking tasks, vlogging, roleplay, Thai EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology enhanced language learning (TELL), or the use of online technology that is integrated in learning environments, has become an integral part of educators' strategies to improve learners' language learning. TELL has been shown to help EFL learners, in particular, not only to interact with their partners in class lessons with ease but also to boost their speaking efficiency (1,2). While enhancing collaboration within class activities, it also helps them to become more versatile with their autonomous approach to improving their English communication. Via TELL, learners are given a chance to develop their language through authentic interactions in real-life context (3), and recent methods such as YouTube vlogging have been recommended for teachers to boost their students'

speaking performances given their being topic and content-driven by nature (4).

In a recent study done by Brilianti and Fithriyani (5), vlogging, an online method of uploading videos, helped student learners to express their English language skills to the best ability they could to make their interactions meaningful and more engaging with their partners. In fact, vlogs have been proven for years on how they help students to boost their interactive performance in terms of the creativity with their speeches in discourses. With the flexibility of vlogging, learners are allowed to speak up in many ways and their heavy content requirements also urge them to come up with their own best opinions in response to a chosen topic (6, 7-8). Additionally, vlogging can make content driven conversations even more engaging when learners get used to the experience of expressing themselves and also increase their grammatical and vocabulary content range. Vlogging can therefore be seen as a method that can make learners become specialized through creative and unrestricted means of

expressing themselves about particular topics they choose.

However, despite the rise of authentic means of communication such as vlogging, role-play has undeniably been a method commonly used by educators due to its ease for learners to play out character roles in scenarios that are common in daily life, and it has been shown to help boost their speaking efficacy (9,10). With roleplay, learners likely speak more confidently given that their talk is often based on rote memorization of scripted conversations in which they already know how to come up with appropriate responses to each other's turns.

Like vlogging, role-play can involve two- or multi-party conversations regardless of who audiences are. Role-play is treated as a preferred method of assessing and teaching students' conversational skills due to its reliance on the usual conversational patterns that match up to social interaction scenarios (11). The main significant feature of roleplay is the use of character roles in an imaginary drama based on real-life interactions. Vlogging on the other hand involves free expression of speakers' opinions on various topics without any connection with these roles. The advantage of examining both of these task types is to reveal the benefits they can offer to the development of different aspects of EFL learners' speaking skills. It is through this comparison that teachers can make the best use of each task type available for the benefit of their learners' speaking skill development.

Given the dominance of role-play as the conversation teaching and assessing tools in the Thai ELT context and the increasing popularity of vlogging in today's digital landscape, it has become even more essential to determine how two-party vlogging and role play can differently impact our students' speaking performance. The significance of this study is thus to show which facet of speaking performance may be more effectively trained through role-playing and vlogging.

Research Questions

The following questions are addressed in the study:

1. Do students perform differently in two-party vlogging and role-play speaking tasks? If so, how?

2. Which aspect of speaking is trained more effectively through role-playing and vlogging?

II. METHOD

Research Design and Participants

Overview

Being part of one-group quasi experimental research, this study aims to address the questions as to (1) whether students perform differently in two-party vlogging and role-play speaking tasks and (2) which aspect of their speaking performance is better developed through role-play and vlogging. The participants were purposively sampled from an English conversation course, including two sections of students taught by the same teacher with an English educational background and a few years of experience in teaching the course. Students from both sections, treated as one group, were engaged in role-play speaking practice while they learned five-unit lessons during the first half of the semester whereas during the second half when they took the other five-unit lessons, they were involved in vlogging tasks to develop their speaking skills. A total of 76 student participants were divided into 35 pairs to do the assigned practice activities according to the lesson plans. This can be depicted in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Research Design

Data Collection and Analysis

The students were taught ten units, including "Greeting and introducing yourself" (Unit 1), "Introducing others and making small talk" (Unit 2), "Making an Invitation" (Unit 3), "Mak-

ing an offer and a request in a service encounter” (Unit 4), “Making a request to friends” (Unit 5), “Making a suggestion” (Unit 6), “Giving and returning a compliment lead-in activity” (Unit 7), “Giving and asking for opinions” (Unit 8), “Making a complaint” (Unit 9), and “ Delivering bad news” (Unit 10). In the first five units, they were engaged in role-play tasks while in the rest they were given lessons with vlogging tasks. The lessons were all presented with PowerPoint slides and practice activities to help the students to be accustomed to the unit content and tasks.

After the first 5 unit lessons, students participated in role-play test assignments of the topics related to these units. The roleplay were assessed with the rubric consisting of turn constructions in language (clarity), turn delivery (interaction), and the overall structure (content). The language used in turn constructions includes pronunciation, accuracy (pitch, stress and intonation), vocabulary expression, grammatical accuracy, and nonverbal language (gestures and body language). The allocation or turn delivery consists of smooth delivery turns with natural pauses and fillers and smooth turn transitions to the previous turns. Lastly, the overall content structure means sequential organization of turns, organized conversation, and meaningful content. The total score of the test assignments is 40 points.

Similar to the role-play lessons, vlogging lessons include assignments of all the units and their total score is 75 points. The vlogging assignments consist of 3-5 minutes of video about the topics related to each unit (6-10). The scoring criteria are clarity, engaging interaction, and overall content. The clarity aspect focused more on the understandability of the conversations. The interaction itself is based on the smoothness of the interactions in an appropriate and creative manner. Content focused on the general knowledge of the topic or the fulfillment of the instructions from each unit assignment.

The students were also interviewed right after the completion of all the role-play and the vlogging assignments via post-role-play, and post-vlogging interviews. These interviews were to elicit the students’ overall experiences and perception with the respective task types. Furthermore, questionnaires about the role-play and vlogging tasks implemented were also administered to the students to show their overall expe-

riences with these two methods. These surveys consisted of questions that showcase the students’ perception of strengths and weaknesses of these two task types.

To address the question as to whether students perform differently in two-party vlogging and role-play speaking tasks, the pairs group t-test was run to compare the students’ scores in clarity, content, and interaction aspects of both role-play and vlogging performances.

III. RESULTS

Table 1. Students’ Scoring on Content, Clarity and Interaction in Role-Play and Vlogging

Scoring Items	n	Mean	S.D.	t	df	p-value
Role-Play Content	76	93.95	10.72	13.034 **	75	0.00
Vlogging Content	76	76.68	11.60			
Role-Play Clarity	76	70.44	4.91	-2.484 *	75	0.02
Vlogging Clarity	76	74.42	10.69			
Role-Play Interaction	76	88.95	12.34	6.990 **	75	0.00
Vlogging Interaction	76	80.21	8.61			

Remark: * significant at 0.05 level, ** significant at 0.01 level, ns non-significant

Based on the average score results in Table 1, it is noticeable that the students performed differently in two-party vlogging and role-play speaking tasks. Vlogging assignments apparently boosted clarity of the students’ language use the most compared to their interaction and content while role-play elicited their best performance in terms of content and interaction in social activities. This can be due to how vlogging assignments require a clear understanding of conversing topics in order to successfully complete the tasks (12). Such understanding allows them to better articulate their ideas about the topics in response to each other using linguistic resources available, making their interaction interesting and more engaging. Furthermore, the vlogging requirements and criteria may have encouraged the students to construct their responses based

on their understanding of the unit content and conversations they make. However, the scoring in the content in vlogging was the lowest compared to the one in role-play. This may be due to the fact that the students found certain topics they were instructed to talk about difficult and novel for them, making them struggle to come up with creative and compelling responses to their partners in order to keep the discussion interesting. Therefore, although vlogging is well known for a content driven task (13), the organization of prompt relevant responses to their partner related to the content assigned apparently is the most challenging aspect for most students, and this must have led to the lower scores in content and even interaction.

In role-play, it can be observed that students significantly improved their content and interaction due to the advantage they have of being exposed to social greetings the students are familiar with. This led to a greater amount of producing and organizing turns with appropriate expressions. Unlike vlogging, role-play conversation is actually based more on the traditional greeting etiquette and according to (14), interactions of the social scenarios in role-play are reflected and reinforced in their real-life social interactions. This in turn helps make the students more accustomed to the requirements of the role-play assignments since they are based on the daily social tasks. For instance, in one of the unit 1-5 role-play cue cards, the partners were told to make 2-3 minute conversations about inviting a friend to a birthday party at the weekend and how they should be clear about the venue and time which is related to a unit 3 topic of "Making an Invitation". The content of this assignment is clearly based on a social situation most students are used to and the simulated interaction required is very similar to their real-life interaction, thus helping make their turns sound more natural and boosting their performance in these aspects.

To answer the second research question as to which aspect of speaking is trained more effectively through role-playing and vlogging, both the overall survey results and the interview responses also lent support to the fact that certain aspects like content, clarity, and interaction may differ in terms of development promoted by these two types of tasks. The survey results showed that role-play can specialize in helping

students to improve in their interaction skills within the content. This can be due to how they were taught and accustomed to the norms of the social situations in the role-play classes. Given that advantage, they were able to make their language organization of turns (interaction) and the overall content more engaging and relevant to the situations. Interactions within role-play are trained more effectively and can help the learners to modify their responses to fit in the scenario or a situation that can help them be more competent or confident in communicating with others. This in turn can make them create their responses to help make the conversations more relatable and understanding for their partners and help enrich the social content or information in a character role scenario. Rahmatillah (15) stated that role-play improved students' understanding in how to respond to social situations, which boosted the potential of the interaction training for students to practice speaking English. It involves scenarios in imaginary situations which can serve as social scaffolding tools for EFL learners to use the conversational etiquettes from those scenarios so that they can apply them in their best and suitable responses in their interactions. After all it is emphasized that role-play can provide students' understanding of dialogue and proper expressions in social situations (16).

On the other hand, the student respondents in the survey and interview all agreed that the vlogging gave them the experiences to improve their oral understanding of the conversations and to use the language patterns, vocabulary, and grammar based on the content they were given in classes more effectively. The student interview results also implied that vlogging can be engaging and beneficial in boosting their vocabulary and grammar usage despite the difficulty to produce content. Chen and Hashim (17) argued that students gain their grammatical and vocabulary repertoire in vlogging due to their repeated experience in comprehending each other's responses. The students' improvement in clarity can happen in the vlogging if they keep on practicing their language comprehension and constructions since repeated vlog performances help boost their speaking participation in interactions regardless of the flaws the students make with content production (18). Interaction in conversation is considered an important outcome from

oral comprehension or clarity in vlogging due to how it can be an accumulation of the exposure and understanding of the responses within the content-driven discussions. In other words, clarity can be trained more effectively since repeated exposure leads to better expression in interaction and content delivery. Overall, one aspect can be the result of many specific factors since the ways to improve on that aspect can vary for any student.

IV. CONCLUSION

Both role-play and vlogging showed different results when it comes to the enhancement of learners' speaking performances and the varied results implied how the tasks needed to be redesigned due to their specialities. The different speaking improvement in these two task types showed they are very unique in their own ways of contributing to improving EFL's speaking skills. Vlogging is not necessarily a replacement to role-play but rather an extension that helps broaden specific aspects of students' ability to interact with others. Both tasks had their own advantages when it came to training particular aspects of speaking such as clarity, content, and interaction. Although students struggled with vlogging when it came to content, they did better in interaction. Clarity in vlogging was done the best compared to clarity in role-play due to the amount of language constructions and accuracy it required to produce the content despite how limited their content knowledge is.

Further studies should not only address how the performance assessment criteria should be consistent and detailed for all the discrete items assessed such as clarity, interaction, and content, but also how the numerical grading with the rubric can be made more concrete and fairer. Also, there can be further research on a specific training course to maximize the benefit of each task in training on the aspect of speaking performance not fully explored, especially how to improve content clarity of vlogging and satisfying the audience's needs. Since vlogging is a content and audience-driven method, learners need to understand how to effectively tackle the content of the partner's turns and make the entire vlog more engaging for the audience. On the other hand, role-play is more of social activity-driven interaction, so learners will benefit more from the lesson

content that targets the improvement of their creativity and appropriacy in constructing turns in interaction with different partners and that raises their awareness of various social norms and etiquettes in different social settings to make their interaction more effective. Both of these two tasks should be utilized to maximize its benefits for improving different aspects of speaking skills students struggle with.

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