

Exploring the development of social competences through role-plays in an English language subject in higher education

María Martínez Lirola
Universidad de Alicante and University of South Africa (UNISA)
maria.lirola@ua.es

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Abstract

Contemporary English teaching demands the use of methodologies that facilitate students' participation and protagonism in the teaching and learning process. This research article reports on a study that aims to explore the development of social competences in students who participate in role-plays in an English subject at university level. The objectives of this article are: 1. To explore the development of social competences in an English subject at university level by students' participation in role-plays and 2. To know students' opinions about the implementation of roles-plays in the classroom. The study uses a qualitative and quantitative research design by observing the students' performances in role-plays and by using a questionnaire at the end of the semester. The findings show that students acquire social competences, increase their interaction and improve their speaking skills by their participation in role-plays. Moreover, the study revealed that students become more aware of social situations. Consequently, role-plays are recommended as a teaching strategy framed within a cooperative methodology.

Key words: role-plays, social competences, cooperative learning, active methodologies, higher education.

Resumen

La enseñanza contemporánea del inglés exige el uso de metodologías que faciliten la participación y el protagonismo de los/as estudiantes en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje. Este artículo de investigación ofrece los resultados de un estudio que explora el desarrollo de las competencias sociales en estudiantes que participan en *role plays* en una asignatura de inglés en la enseñanza universitaria. Los objetivos de este artículo son: 1. Explorar el desarrollo de competencias sociales en una asignatura de inglés a nivel universitario mediante la participación del alumnado en juegos de rol y 2. Conocer las opiniones de los/as estudiantes sobre la implementación de juegos de rol en el aula. El estudio utiliza un diseño de investigación cualitativa y cuantitativa mediante la observación del desempeño de los estudiantes en juegos de rol y mediante el uso de un cuestionario al final del semestre. Los resultados muestran que los/as estudiantes adquieren competencias sociales, aumentan su interacción y mejoran sus habilidades orales mediante su participación en juegos de rol. Además, el estudio reveló que el alumnado se vuelve más consciente de las situaciones sociales. En consecuencia, los juegos de roles se recomiendan como una estrategia de enseñanza enmarcada en una metodología cooperativa.

Palabras clave: juegos de rol, competencias sociales, aprendizaje cooperativo, metodologías activas, educación superior.

Introduction

Innovative teaching leads to creative learning by implementing tools, content and methods that can enhance the students' learning process. Active methodologies favour students having a central role in the teaching and learning process at the same time that they highlight the acquisition of competences. Language teachers can help students to develop communication skills through activities that involve a stimulus, i.e., activities that intensify the desire to share and expand experiences. In this sense, oral presentations and role-plays were chosen to evaluate students' oral skills: they give students protagonism while they learn because they are active in the teaching and learning process. Oral presentations are "[...] one of the most useful tools to improve students' ability to communicate" (Li, 2018, p. 360), and role-plays facilitate interaction and critical thinking, which are key professional skills. In fact, dramatic techniques in general and role-plays in particular offer the possibility of teaching a language within a living context. At the same time, the participation in role-plays, debates or simulations gives students opportunities to communicate fluently in a real and contextualised situation.

This study is justified because there is not enough participation in English in university English classes (Fernández & Alcaraz, 2016; Moliní Fernández & Sánchez-González, 2019), which is mainly due to the high number of students enrolled. Role-plays were chosen as a technique to facilitate students' participation and interaction in the classroom, to contribute to the building of trust among students so that communication occurs in an effective and spontaneous way in a real communicative situation and to deepen the ability in social competences.

The role-play is a useful dramatic technique to make students think about the social challenges of the twenty-first century (Fernández Gavira et al., 2018). Participating in role-plays on global issues can contribute to the development of students' life competences. Thus, I will highlight that the use of role-plays is useful to motivate students to discuss social topics every week and to help them develop social competences and their knowledge of sociocultural aspects. This paper aims to report on a study for employing role-plays framed in a cooperative methodology in order to encourage students' participation and the acquisition of social competences in an advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) subject at tertiary education.

Role-play was selected because it is a technique that, apart from practicing the language with specific communicative functions, allows students to deepen understanding of role behaviours (some of the roles they represent in the classroom might be necessary outside the classroom). Another reason for choosing it is that students are completely involved in the activity, i.e., they have a central role in the teaching and learning process. The main hypothesis of this study is that the social and cooperative nature of role-plays will contribute to students' acquisition of social competences. The main research question of this study is: Can role-plays contribute to students' acquisition/development of social competences?

The objectives of the present study may be summed up as the following:

1. To explore the development of social competences in an English subject at university level by students' participation in role-plays and
2. To know students' opinions about the implementation of roles-plays in the classroom.

The next section offers the literature review. Special attention is paid to dramatic techniques, social competences and cooperative learning. Section three describes the methodology. Then, the analysis is presented. Sections 5 and 6 offer the discussion and some conclusions based on the study.

Literature review

This section is divided into two subsections. Attention will be paid to two areas that contribute to improving students' oral skills. The first one will be devoted to dramatic techniques and the second one to social competences and cooperative learning.

Dramatic techniques

Speaking is a key skill in any language because it is the most common and natural way of communication among human beings (Namaziandost & Ahmadi, 2019; Namaziandost, Shatalebi & Nasri, 2019). It is also a skill many people struggle with due to lack of self-confidence, shyness, fear of being judged, among others. In this sense, dramatic techniques in general and role-plays in particular contribute to overcoming the said difficulties and to helping students express their ideas, feelings or personality.

The use of dramatic techniques in the teaching of foreign languages was developed in the late 1970s, with the increasing prevalence of the Communicative Approach (Ashton-Hay, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 1990). However, most academic publications on drama in language teaching focus on its use in primary or secondary school (Alvarado, 2017; Boquete Martín, 2014). Holden (1981, p. 1) defines drama as “any activity which asks the student to portray a) himself in an imaginary situation or b) another person in an imaginary situation”, a definition which can be applied to most formats of drama in language teaching and includes role-play as a form of drama.

The literature offers abundant research studies about Applied Theatre. The works published both in the Anglo-Saxon world (Nicholson, 2005; Balme, 2008; Shaughnessy, 2012) and in Spain (Motos, 2013; Motos & Ferrandis, 2015) understand Applied Theater as a discipline inserted in the broader field of Theater Studies. Its mission is to address both the study and practice of a theater developed outside conventional theatrical institutions and strongly oriented towards public participation, conceived as a tool to achieve specific purposes outside the theater itself and generally associated with the transformation of the society.

Dramatic activities have potential to develop speaking skills due to the fact that they provide students opportunities to interact with their peers (Gabitova et al., 2018; Manurung, 2018). As Ulas (2008) comments, “although drama has existed as a potential language teaching tool for hundreds of years, it has only been in the last thirty years or so that its applicability as a language learning technique to improve oral skills has come to the forefront” (p. 877). Another benefit is that drama activities can motivate students because they are entertaining and fun; they can also stimulate imagination (Fleming, 2006; Gill, 2013) and give students the opportunity to express their personalities and emotions, which can help them to express the language more easily (Özbek, 2014; Salii & Bytyqi, 2014).

Role-plays can be defined as playful activities in which the participants interpret models that are not their own (Brell, 2006). Consequently, students have a central role in the teaching and learning process and experience all the situations being represented in the first person, which facilitates the acquisition of significant knowledge (Fernández Gavira et al., 2018). In fact, role-play is a versatile technique that can take place in different contexts in order to contribute to meaningful learning. Nowadays, all games used for learning based on situations from real life are also known as “serious games” (Michael & Chen, 2005).

Role-play allows learners to develop competences for group understanding, argumentation, problem solving, ideas organization, interpreting, and inferring. In addition, role plays facilitate the development of social competences because students have to cooperate and communicate so that their participation in the role play is effective (Gabino Boquete, 2014). In this sense, leadership is also promoted due to the fact that

students have to assume the identity of the character that they represent. Thus, they have a central and active role while they learn and they communicate in a fluent way at the same time that they are leaders (Nicholson, 2005).

Using role-plays in the classroom also facilitates putting language in context and making learning holistic and memorable (De Ponga Mayo, 2021; Soledispa, 2018). It is based on the pedagogical psychodrama and can favour emotional reactions, which calls for the teacher’s supervision (Perez, 2015) in an authentic communicative context because dramatic techniques reproduce real situations.

Social competences and cooperative learning

The communicative nature of dramatic techniques such as role-plays is beneficial for the acquisition and development of social competences. The said competences are included in emotional competences, i.e., the ability of human beings to regulate emotions. Armstrong (2006) points out that there are five domains of emotional intelligence covering personal and social competences: personal competencies —self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation— and social competencies —social awareness and social skills. Tallón and Sikora (2011) categorise emotional competences as personal and social, as we can see in Table 1. The social competences: understanding others, political consciousness, communication, cooperation, leadership, influence and management of conflicts are contained within the category of social skills proposed by Armstrong (2006).

Table 1. Classification of emotional competences based on Tallón and Sikora (2011).

| Personal competences | Social competences |
|--|--|
| Self-knowledge, security, self-control, adaptability, sincerity, optimism, initiative, motivation to achieve a goal and resistance | Understanding others, political consciousness (which alludes to who has the power in a group), communication, cooperation, leadership, influence and management of conflicts |

Some authors have highlighted the importance of social competences in the last decade due to their importance for life in general and for the labour market in particular (Mikolajczak, Brasseur & Fantini-Hauwel, 2014; Peñalva-Vélez et al., 2016 among others). Social competences integrate feelings, thoughts and behaviours to accomplish interpersonal outcomes such as the ones of participating in role-plays in the teaching and learning process.

Social competences are not easy to measure (Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Wang et al., 2011), which is a challenge for teachers at all educational levels. It is also a need that requires choosing the appropriate methodology so that social competences are introduced in the teaching and learning process in a natural way. Thus, students will acquire social competences through the tasks proposed. The nature of the said competences means involving students while they learn.

The methodology proposed by cooperative learning (CL) favours the acquisition of social competences. The term Cooperative Learning was defined by Johnson et al. (1991), as a process in which “students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. [...] it produces higher achievement, more positive relationships among students, and healthier psychological adjustment than does a competitive method” (p. 5).

CL helps social relations among students through interaction in group members. Working cooperatively in the classroom can help students to be more cooperative in life (Anania & Rwekaza, 2018). The utility of CL has been proved in different subjects such as mathematics, literature or biology (Catarino et al., 2019; Dimililer et al., 2017; Yuduvanshi & Singh, 2018).

CL involves students working in small groups in order to accomplish a task, i.e., they work with a common objective. Johnson and Johnson (1999) point out that CL helps students to develop social skills and to control their learning. Different studies have pointed out the advantages of CL (Carson, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2015; Marashi & Dibah, 2013; Marashi & Khatami, 2017): CL favours students being active in the learning process and that they take a central role while they learn. When students interact, they learn to respect others' opinions, to ask questions and to be active listeners (Healy et al., 2018; Slavin, 2014a). Moreover, CL enhances students' English oral skills due to the fact that speaking activities can be motivating and give students satisfaction not only for participating in them but also from receiving feedback from the teacher (Meng, 2010; Pattanpichet, 2011).

CL offers opportunities to practice in an atmosphere where positive interdependence is essential to succeed. It has proven to have positive influences on effective learning and students' achievement. Positive interdependence plays a key role in CL because students have to see that individual success is tied to the success of others. Consequently, "[...] the learning task is based on interaction and reciprocal interdependence among the members of group and requires mutual help" (Meng, 2010, p. 702). Apart from positive interdependence, other characteristics of CL are face-to-face promotive action, individual accountability and personal responsibility, interpersonal and small-group skills and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Johnson et al., 1991). In addition, CL favours motivation and the use of group skills that will also favour the acquisition of individual skills and different types of competences (Escalona Pardo et al., 2020). According to Saragih and Utami (2020, p. 22), the "Cooperative learning model is one learning model that promotes learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together".

CL is acknowledged as an effective pedagogy at any educational level (Johnson et al., 2014; Slavin, 2013). Baloché and Brody (2017, p. 1) explain that cooperative learning "has the potential to effect positively students' achievement, motivation for learning, intergroup relations, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and a host of other well-researched outcomes". Furthermore, CL is supported by the social constructivist theories of teaching and learning and by a number of psycho-social theoretical frameworks (Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Slavin, 2014b; Topping et al., 2017).

Methodology

This study is framed within a qualitative research paradigm because it is based on the teachers' notes and the answers in a rubric on students' participation in role-plays in the classroom. However, some quantitative data are offered by presenting students' answers to the rubric contrasted with those of the teacher and by offering the results of a questionnaire that students completed at the end of the semester. Ethical considerations were taken into account (British Educational Research Association, 2018) because students gave their consent to complete the questionnaire and their answers were anonymous in order to respect their privacy.

Context and participants

This study took place in the degree programme of English Studies at a Spanish University. The participants in the study were, on the one hand, the tutor of the subject,

who was also the researcher in this study, and, on the other hand, the 87 students enrolled in a core English Language subject during the first semester (September-January) of the academic year 2021-2022. They were 69 women and 18 men, whose ages were between 19 and 23. The purpose of the subject is that students develop the five skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing and interaction in English in order to acquire level C1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020), paying attention to reception, production, interaction and mediation. Social skills are also part of the curriculum, especially associated to speaking and interaction.

Instruments

The data were collected through the observation of students' participation in the role-plays that took place every week after the cooperative presentations based on social topics (see Table 2). In fact, students represented different roles because each student had the identity of a fictional character and a series of instructions on the individual task that they had to carry out according to their identity (Juan Rubio & García Conesa, 2013).

The teacher used a rubric during the observation to evaluate different aspects associated with social competences (see Table 3). Moreover, the attendance of students in a group tutorial after participation in role-plays and students' answers to the same rubric that the teacher had used while observing the role plays (Table 3) were part of the data.

The third instrument was a questionnaire (see Appendix) constructed by the tutor-researcher, whose purpose was to know students' opinions on social aspects associated with role-plays and oral presentations in the teaching and learning process, on the social competences acquired and other aspects. The questionnaire on Google forms consisted of 11 questions. There were two yes/no questions, one of multiple choice and eight that used the Likert scale (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree). The theoretical constructs underlying the rubric and the questionnaire are cooperative learning and social competences.

Procedures

The data were analysed manually by the researcher at the end of the teaching and learning process. Students enrolled in the subject were asked to create groups of five people in order to prepare cooperative oral presentations and role-plays to be presented weekly during the semester to deepen understanding of social topics. Each group was scheduled to present the two tasks requested on a set day of the semester.

The teacher took notes while students were participating in the role-play and completed the rubric prepared to observe how students acquire social competences (see Table 3). After that, the teacher had a group tutorial with the students who had participated in the role-play and asked them to complete the same rubric about their way of evaluating aspects associated with social competences. Finally, students completed an anonymous questionnaire at the end of the semester, paying attention to the main social competences they had acquired by participating in role-plays and other aspects associated with the social knowledge.

The teacher revised her notes, analysed her answers to the aspects associated with students' social competences and contrasted them with students' answers on the same issues (see the first subsection in the next section devoted to the analysis). Finally, the results of the questionnaire were analysed manually (see the second subsection in the next section devoted to the analysis).

Analysis and findings

This section is divided in two subsections. The first one concentrates on the evaluation of different aspects associated with social competences done by the teacher

and by the students. The second one offers the results of an anonymous questionnaire that students had to complete at the end of the semester.

Role-plays and social competences

The fact that students had to prepare a cooperative oral presentation and a role-play based on a social topic contributes per se to increasing students’ social competences because of the need to choose the social topic in the group they belong to, look for information about the topic, organise the information to prepare an oral presentation and a role-play to involve their classmates, among others. These two activities favour students’ integral formation (i.e., they go beyond the acquisition of contents) because, apart from learning vocabulary, practising grammar and integrating the different skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing and interaction, the social nature of the topics facilitates students growing as global and critical citizens, not only with knowledge of the topics selected but also with critical opinions that can have an effect on social transformation. Table 2 offers a list of the topics chosen by students to prepare oral presentations and role-plays every week.

Table 2. Social topics discussed.

| Topics | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Group A | Group B |
| Illegal migration and refugee crisis | Animal testing |
| Fighting against cancer | Tattoo or taboo |
| Drag as a cultural phenomenon | Social networks |
| Death penalty | Surrogate pregnancy |
| Marine pollution | Fashion |
| Animal abuse | Gender violence |
| Cyberbullying | Feminism |
| Women through history | Addictive substances in society |
| Social media | Women, the hidden face of history |

The social topics presented in Table 2 show that students re-created social and cultural realities through role-plays and oral presentations, which is an effective way for students to develop social competences and to advance in the process of being global citizens not only for using English fluently but also for establishing a relationship between the language and the social context.

Thanks to the interactions in role-plays, students used grammar and vocabulary in a contextualised way. Vocabulary is associated with the semantic field being discussed. Thus, learning vocabulary on social topics is already a way of ‘social gain’. Learners do not learn vocabulary in lists to be memorized, but they acquire new vocabulary by reading on the topic selected and by participating in role-plays that involve the use of vocabulary in context.

Speaking English fluently to re-create the different social topics present in role-plays promotes students’ reflections on the roles being represented and on their relationships with the social context. In addition, students’ interactions in role-plays

favours the development of social skills and equal relationships in the classroom, which encourages self-confidence and overcoming fears.

The teacher prepared a rubric for students and herself to evaluate aspects associated with social competences, once the students had prepared and participated in the oral presentations and role-plays (see Table 3 below). Moreover, she prepared a questionnaire to know students' opinions on the implementation of role-plays, the development of social competences and other aspects (see subsection Results of the questionnaire and the Appendix).

Once the teacher had completed the observation rubrics shown in Table 3 in the classroom, she had a group tutorial with the students who had prepared the role-play that week and asked them to self-evaluate aspects associated with social competences by completing the same table. At the end of the semester, when all groups had presented, the teacher analysed the results of her answers to the aspects evaluated in the rubric in Table 3 and compared them to students' answers to the same rubric. Of the two lines with the percentage next to each item evaluated, the first one corresponds to the average obtained from the teacher's responses while the students performed the oral presentation and role-plays, and the second line offers the average of the students' responses in group tutorials.

Table 3. Rubric to measure students' social competences with a Likert scale.

| Likert scale | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Aspects to measure students' speaking skills and social gain | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Teacher | | | | |
| | Students | | | | |
| Vocabulary and idiomatic expressions on social topics | 0% | 0% | 12,08% | 32,96% | 54,94% |
| | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 21,97% | 71,42% |
| Constructive interactions in the role-plays (Group cooperation) | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 49,45% | 43,95% |
| | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 43,95% | 49,45% |
| Prosocial attitudes, values and perspectives | 0% | 0% | 8,79% | 43,95% | 47,25% |
| | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 47,25% | 54,94% |
| Managing social conflicts in the groups/classroom | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 49,45% | 43,95% |
| | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 36,26% | 57,14% |
| Cooperation/harmony in the groups | 0% | 0% | 8,79% | 39,56% | 51,64% |
| | 0% | 0% | 8,79% | 34,06% | 57,14% |
| Equality in task division | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 39,56% | 53,84% |
| | 0% | 0% | 8,79% | 34,06% | 57,14% |
| Involvement in the role-plays of other groups | 0% | 0% | 8,79% | 39,56% | 51,64% |
| | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 36,26% | 57,14% |

| | | | | | |
|---|----|----|-------|--------|--------|
| Active listening (Referring to other people's comments) | 0% | 0% | 6,59% | 43,95% | 49,45% |
| | 0% | 0% | 8,79% | 47,25% | 54,94% |

Measuring social competences is not an easy thing to do. Thus, I consider it more valid if it is approached from two angles. It has a linguistic side that can be observed in the way students use vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and grammatical structures where we can see clear references to social topics (the first item in Table 3). It also has a behavioural aspect, because when students develop social competences there are attitudes and behaviours where social commitment can be observed (all the items in Table 3, except the first one). The difficulties in measuring some of the items in Table 3 justifies the necessity of students' self-evaluation in order to complete the analysis of social competences presented in this section, i.e., the triangulation of data adds validity to the study.

Generally, the average of the answers of the teacher and the students are quite similar, i.e., they have a similar percentage in the Likert scale. This is the case of items 'Constructive interactions in the role plays', 'Prosocial attitudes, values and perspectives', 'Involvement in the role plays of other groups' and 'Active listening' (it was observed if students made reference to what other students said) where the number of answers 4 and 5 on the scale offer a similar percentage. It is noticeable that students offer a slightly higher number of answers in number 5 on the scale, which shows that they are evaluating their social gain in the items selected through the whole teaching and learning process, whereas the teacher concentrates on the implementation of the activities in the classroom.

There are some items in Table 3 that are evaluated in a higher way by students. This is the case with 'Vocabulary and idiomatic expressions on social topics', where the fact that more than 17% of students than the teacher chose 5 shows that students are aware of having learned vocabulary in the social aspect being studied, but the teacher expected even more linguistic items during the role-plays.

The average answers of 5 in the scale in 'Managing social conflicts in the groups/classroom', 'Cooperation/harmony in the groups', 'Equality in task division' is higher in the students' answers than in the ones offered by the teacher; the percentage of the teacher's answers in number 4 is a bit higher. These differences are justified because the item 'Managing social conflicts in the groups/classroom', was observed by the teacher only at the time students were active in the classroom. The only times the teacher was aware of conflicts in the group were when two students informed the teacher about a conflict associated with the lack of involvement of two group members.

Similarly, 'Cooperation/harmony in the groups' could only be observed while students were performing in the role-play or participating in the oral presentation. In this sense, the questions associated with cooperation in the questionnaire show how students evaluated that aspect. Moreover, 'Equality in task division' was evaluated by the teacher observing the number of times and the time they spent talking when they participated in the oral presentations and role-plays.

Moreover, the fact that numbers 1 and 2 in the scale were not selected by the teacher and by students in any of the items, and the fact that the higher percentage in number 3 is 12,08% shows the effectiveness in the development of the social aspects evaluated.

Results of the questionnaire

In question number 1, when students are asked if they are more aware of social situations after participating in the preparation of the oral presentation and role-plays based on a social topic, it is surprising that the great majority (97,6%) answer yes, and

just 2,4% answer no. When they are asked to justify their answers, the great majority say that doing research, preparing and carrying out the oral presentation and role-play give them many opportunities to be aware of social issues, and how these issues affect society, for example, some students say: “The research I had to do to prepare the oral presentation and the role-play gave me opportunities to deepen on the social topic that my group and I had chosen and I could learn a lot about the topic” or “When I was doing research on the topic of the oral presentation, I could see that I was studying a social topic that was affecting society”. Having more information about the topic after doing research is a crucial point for students to understand it, how it can affect people in other countries, and to broaden their points of view. Students also mention that the discussions in the groups to prepare the topics have opened their mind to other realities and perspectives to see social topics. In addition, students mention the importance of listening to their classmates’ presentations and the involvement in the role-plays that other groups have designed.

In question 2, students were asked if they considered it important to evaluate social competences in the teaching and learning process. The great majority, 92,7%, offered a positive answer and just 7,3% a negative one. This result shows that students are aware of the relevance of social competences in the cooperative methodology that frames the activities done, and therefore they agree with the evaluation of these types of competences.

When students were asked about the main social competences that they had developed with the preparation and participation in oral presentations and role-plays in question 3 (in this case students could choose more than one competence), the results show that the most chosen competences are cooperation (79,3%) and communication (78%), followed by empathy (57,3%), conflict solving (36,6%) and leadership (25,6%).

The answers to questions 4 to 11 are presented in Table 4, so that it is easier to see the percentage obtained using the Likert scale. The table will be followed by some paragraphs commenting on students’ answers.

Table 4. Students’ answers to questions 4-11.

| Likert scale | | | | | |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Questions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Up to what extent have role-plays contributed to the development of your oral skills? | 0% | 0% | 10% | 20,6% | 69,4% |
| 5. Up to what extent do you consider that participating in activities with social content, such as oral presentations and role- plays, can help you become a more global citizen? | 1,2% | 3,7% | 20,7% | 45,1% | 29,3% |
| 6. How much did you care about the other group members during the | 1,2% | 0% | 6,1% | 40,2% | 52,4% |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| preparation of the oral presentation and role-plays? | | | | | |
| 7. How much did you cooperate with the other group members during the preparation of the oral presentation and role-plays? | 1,2% | 0% | 8,5% | 28% | 62,2% |
| 8. How much did you communicate with the other group members during the preparation of the oral presentation and role-plays? | 1,2% | 0% | 7,3% | 31,7% | 59,8% |
| 9. How much did you empathize with the other group members during the preparation of the oral presentation and role-plays? | 0% | 3,7% | 12,2% | 30,5% | 53,7% |
| 10. How would you evaluate your leadership in the group? | 3,7% | 7,3% | 28% | 32,9% | 28% |
| 11. How much have you contributed to making the oral presentation and role-play effective and successful? | 0% | 0% | 13,4% | 34,1% | 52,4% |

It is outstanding that in questions 4 to 11, more than half of the students choose number 5 in the scale, with the exception of questions 5 and 10, which shows that they did not see such a clear relationship between the role-plays and oral presentations on social topics and their development as global citizens and leaders. Although the answers in these questions were somewhat different, adding 4 and 5 in the scale is more than 60% in both cases. This contrasts with the answers to the other questions (4, 6-9 and 11), where the sum of 4 and 5 in the scale is 90% or more in some cases (questions 4, 6, 7, 8) and more than 80% in questions 9 and 11.

The fact that most students have chosen 4 and 5 in the scale show that the cooperative methodology that frames the teaching and learning process has been effective in working on the social competences mentioned in the questions, such as cooperation and caring for others (questions 6 and 7), communication and empathy (questions 8 and 9) and leadership (question 10).

It is observed that number 3 in the scale got between 6,1% (question 6) and 13,4% (question 11), with the exception of questions 5 (20,7%) and 10 (28%), where the relationship between the activities, global citizenship and leadership is not as noteworthy as the other social aspects mentioned in the questions. Moreover, it is significant that no student chose number 2 in the scale in most questions (4-8 and 11), and the highest percentage given to 2 is 7,3% in question 10, i.e., there are students that evaluate their leadership in a low way, and 3,7% in question 5 and 9, those connected with global citizenship and empathy. Similarly, number 1 in the scale was chosen by none (questions

4 and 11) or by very few students, specifically, 1,2% in questions 5 to 8 and 3,7% in question 10, which shows that some students do not see themselves as leaders at all.

The percentages of number 3 in the scale and the small number of choices in numbers 1 and 2 corroborate the fact that most students consider themselves highly successful in the aspects being evaluated. Consequently, they have observed that learning through role-plays and oral presentations has given them many opportunities to cooperate with others and to acquire the competences involved in the process of cooperation, and that is why they have chosen the highest numbers in the scale.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that role-plays are an entertaining and fun way to practise speaking and to develop speaking skills at the same time that social competences such as communication, cooperation, conflict solving and leadership are developed (Gabitova et al., 2018). In fact, this study has shown that oral presentations and role-plays allow students to develop a deeper understanding of current social issues that humanity faces. The social content shared in the said activities in the core English Language subject under study give students the possibility to reflect on global issues that need improvement through social transformation. For instance, asking students to prepare role-plays on any of the topics presented in Table 2 motivates them to participate because they can see practical connections between the topics, real life and their interests. Consequently, role-plays integrate oral skills, interaction and listening with different social competences, where communication and cooperation have a central role due to the characteristics of this drama technique (Manurung, 2018).

This study has found that the cooperation and communication among students while they are participating in role plays facilitates the acquisition of social competences because students need to organise themselves, solve problems while they are active in the role plays, and so on (Gabino Boquete, 2014). In fact, the use of role-plays in teaching EFL makes possible that students use the language in authentic and meaningful communicative situations (Fernández Gavira et. al., 2018). This is possible because role plays can reproduce real situations, which increases motivation making learning holistic (Perez, 2015; Soledispa, 2018). Consequently, grammar, vocabulary and idiomatic expressions are contextualised and associated with the social topics chosen for the oral presentations and role plays (see Table 2). In this sense, fluent communication is given more importance than perfect grammar and pronunciation. Thus, students can use different registers at the same time as they foster their socialization and critical thinking (Aldavero, 2008).

The fact that the role plays used in this study are associated with real life situations and the cooperative nature of role-plays promote students' centeredness in the teaching and learning process, giving them opportunities to reflect on certain situations that happen in real life (Soledispa, 2018). In this study, the content of the social topics being discussed are assimilated from a first-person experience. At the same time, each group is given autonomy to choose and organise the social topic selected. Moreover, cooperative learning encourages respecting the differences among students considering abilities, language level, and social background, among others.

Students are more involved in the classroom by participating in role-plays. Taking the role of a fictional persona makes students feel protected and less afraid of making mistakes. In this sense, it is essential to warm up the class because students have to feel safe before they start participating in the role-play, i.e., improvising requires some preparation. While participating, students can deepen their understanding of social and

cultural contexts different from their own as they develop social competences (Ning, 2013).

The teacher's role is that of a facilitator, because she does not direct the activities. It is students who design the role-plays and who are involved in pair and group communication during the teaching and learning process, which makes it clear that the lesson is learner-centred. Students have to feel confident and free to participate in the role-play. Priority is given to the expression of opinions and feelings: grammar mistakes are not corrected during the activities but at the end of them, so that communication and fluency have a central role. Consequently, students are active while they learn, and they are given freedom to re-create different registers and language styles while they perform.

The cooperation and helping attitude that predominates in role-plays favours this dramatic technique contributing to group cohesion. The role-play is a group activity that requires mutual collaboration involves interaction and the development of oral skills to communicate in the social situation re-created in the role-play (De Ponga Mayo, 2021). In this sense, fellowship is encouraged in a cordial atmosphere, which helps disinhibition and self-control at the same time as it promotes trust in each other and concentration in the development of tasks.

The fact that students have to choose the topics of the oral presentations and the role-plays associated with them stimulates creativity because language is only one component of role-plays and spontaneous creation, cooperation and imagination have a key role so that this technique is effective in the teaching and learning process. In fact, the exposure of students' personalities and the integration of oral skills and different types of competences such as cooperation, communication, leadership and conflict solving goes beyond the practice itself and gives students a central role while they learn. The exposure is essential in the active methodology that frames the use of role-plays in an EFL classroom.

The main limitations of this study are the following: firstly, the results are limited because they are based on just one subject and on the students enrolled in it in just one academic year; and secondly, the fact that the only dramatic technique considered is role play is also a limitation because there are other techniques that can also be implemented in the classroom. In this sense, some recommendations for future research are the following: it would be convenient to use more than one dramatic technique in other studies to observe up to what extent they are as useful as role plays to allow students to develop social competences and to improve their speaking skills. In addition, it could also be very interesting to study if personal competences such as confidence and initiative are also developed when dramatic techniques are used in the teaching and learning process.

Conclusions

Dramatic techniques in general and role-plays in particular mean not only that students communicate in the target language fluently, but also that students develop comprehensive training while learning. In fact, students' participation in the role-plays involves critical thinking: they have to be critical about the topic being discussed and express their personal opinion. Moreover, role-plays are a way to practise the English language in a contextualised situation, where social competences such as cooperation, leadership, and communication have a central role. In this sense, this dramatic technique involves students developing social competences that will be requested in the labour market.

The potentialities of role-plays used in English classes are wide. Therefore, it is concluded that role-play is a teaching and learning strategy that supports the EFL acquisition process in higher education. Students have to use English grammar and

vocabulary to re-create the social situation of the role-play. Moreover, supporting role-plays with cooperative learning strengthens students' team work by developing teamwork skills such as sharing out and assuming a series of tasks within the group and by participating in the role-plays designed. In fact, respect for group action and cohesion and a cooperative attitude are encouraged through the teaching and learning process.

After the use of role-play in a university English subject and after analysing the responses that the students offered to the questionnaire, it is clear that students have a positive opinion of this dramatic technique and they are clearly aware of the way this dramatic technique has contributed to the development of social competences during the teaching and learning process. In fact, working with social issues has increased their social competences and has enlarged their perspective and knowledge of global issues.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on oral presentations, role plays and social competences.

1. After participating in the preparation of the oral presentation and role play based on a social topic, are you more aware of social situations? Yes / No
Why? Please specify and justify your answer.
2. Do you think that it is important to evaluate social competences in the teaching and learning process? Yes / No
3. Which of the following social competences have you developed more with the preparation and participation in oral presentations and role plays?
 - Communication
 - Cooperation
 - Leadership
 - Conflict solving
 - Empathy
4. Up to what extent has the oral presentation and role plays contributed to the development of your oral skills? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
5. Up to what extent do you consider that participating in activities with social content such as oral presentations and role plays can help you become a more global citizen? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
6. How much did you care for the other group members during the preparation of the oral presentation and role plays? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
7. How much did you cooperate with the other group members during the preparation of the oral presentation and role plays? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
8. How much did you communicate with the other group members during the preparation of the oral presentation and role plays? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
9. How much did you empathize with the other group members during the preparation of the oral presentation and role plays? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
10. How would you evaluate your leadership in the group? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
11. How much have you contributed to making the oral presentation and role play effective and successful? (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)