

The Effectiveness of Using Role-Playing Games in Developing Discursive Competence in Karakalpak Groups

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Abstract: The article is to explore the issue of inculcating discursive competence using role-playing games as an inductive, interactive teaching methodology. The research was conducted using a quasi-experimental approach that involved an experimental group and a control group of general learning humanities students. The results of the study show that after implementing special role-playing games, students demonstrated improvement in coherence of their spoken discourse, they started using a greater range of cohesive devices and discourse markers and applied a more diverse set of strategies to develop interactional discourse. The study has proven that role-playing games are an efficient teaching methodology for inculcating the discursive competence at multilingual students' secondary school.

Keywords: Discursive competence, role-playing, Karakalpak students, cohesion, interaction.

Introduction: In recent decades, foreign language teaching has gradually shifted from a grammar-oriented approach to a communicative paradigm. Consequently, greater attention has been paid not only to linguistic accuracy but also to the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. In this regard, discursive competence plays a crucial role, as it enables learners to produce coherent, cohesive, and contextually appropriate speech.

From a theoretical point of view, in order to approach the concept of communicative competence, first Michael Canale and Merrill Swain systematically dealt with this topic and divided competence into several components, including linguistic, sociocultural and strategic competences, while discourse competence integrates these components and enables the organization of utterances into coherent discourse [2]. From a more practical perspective, Martin Bygate emphasizes that effective communication depends not only on grammatical knowledge but also on the ability to manage spoken interaction in real time [1].

Moreover, communicative language teaching highlights the importance of meaningful interaction. As

Sandra Savignon argues, communicative competence develops through the use of language in authentic social contexts [7]. Similarly, Jack C. Richards points out that learners need purposeful and interactive practice in order to improve both fluency and discourse-level skills [6, 261-277].

At the same time, recent studies conducted in the Karakalpak educational context confirm the necessity of interactive approaches in language teaching. In particular, Temirkhanova notes that students in Karakalpak groups often demonstrate limited speaking competence due to insufficient communicative practice and overreliance on traditional methods [8]. Likewise, Ibragimova highlights that role-playing activities significantly contribute to the development of sociolinguistic competence by creating realistic communicative situations and encouraging active learner participation [5]. These findings indicate that interactive methodologies are particularly relevant in multilingual learning environments such as Karakalpak groups.

However, despite these developments, many students still experience difficulties in organizing their ideas

coherently and maintaining interaction. On the one hand, traditional teaching approaches tend to focus on grammatical accuracy; on the other hand, they often limit opportunities for spontaneous communication. As Jeremy Harmer suggests, such approaches may lead to the development of linguistic competence without sufficient progress in discursive competence [4, 131-144].

Therefore, if greater emphasis is to be placed on learner-centered and interaction-based teaching, role-playing games can be considered an effective pedagogical tool. These activities provide a supportive environment for engaging in scenario-based communication, thereby promoting fluency, coherence, and real-time language processing. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of role-playing games in developing discursive competence among Karakalpak-speaking students at Karakalpak State University.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the study's objectives, a quasi experimental design was utilized. The participants of the study were 40 English Department students of philology section divided into two groups. Both experimental and control groups of the study were given a pre-test on the aspect of discursive competence prior to being exposed to treatment.

After that, the experimental group engaged in role-playing activities over a six-week period. The activities were designed to facilitate communicative situations such as job interviews, group discussions, business negotiations, and informal conversations. Each activity was intended to foster the development of particular language functions including opinion-giving, agreeing/disagreeing, clarifying and persuading.

However, a control group did go through the school year employing the usual modes of English teaching including worksheets on grammar and teacher-led exercises. Here, students learned accurate English use but interacted little in classroom conversation.

In addition to the collection of pre- and post-test data from the locus pupils, classroom interactions were observed and the discourse of a subsample of junior pupils was analyzed in order to assess their use of

coherence, cohesion and discourse markers.

RESULTS

The results of the present study clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of role-playing games in developing discursive competence among English philology students in Karakalpak groups. First and foremost, the comparison between pre-test and post-test scores indicates a significant improvement in the experimental group across all evaluated criteria. By contrast, the control group showed only minimal progress, which highlights the limitations of traditional teaching methods.

To begin with, coherence improved substantially in the experimental group. Initially, students' speech was often fragmented and lacked logical progression. For example, in the pre-test, a typical student response to a discussion topic such as "Advantages of online education" was limited to isolated statements like: "Online education is good. It is useful. Students study at home." However, after six weeks of role-playing activities, the same students were able to produce more structured discourse, such as: "Online education has several advantages. First of all, it allows students to study from home. Moreover, it saves time and provides flexible learning opportunities. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly popular." As a result, their speech became clearer, more organized, and communicatively effective.

Secondly, a notable increase was observed in the use of cohesive devices. In particular, students demonstrated greater use of conjunctions, reference words, and lexical repetition. For instance, instead of repeating nouns mechanically, students began to use pronouns and linking expressions appropriately. In the pre-test, a student might say: "The teacher gives homework. The teacher explains the lesson. The teacher helps students." In contrast, in the post-test, the same idea was expressed more cohesively: "The teacher gives homework and explains the lesson clearly. In addition, he or she helps students when they face difficulties." Furthermore, the frequency of discourse markers such as however, therefore, in addition, and for example increased significantly. Consequently, students' speech became more connected and easier to follow.

Table 1. Development of Discursive Competence

Criteria	Pre-test (Exp.)	Post-test (Exp.)	Pre-test (Ctrl.)	Post-test (Ctrl.)
Coherence	48	82	49	54
Cohesion	45	85	46	50
Discourse markers	42	88	44	47
Interaction strategies	47	90	48	52

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group achieved considerable gains in all aspects of discursive competence. For instance, coherence increased by 34 percentage points, while interaction strategies improved by 43 percentage points. In contrast, the control group demonstrated only slight improvements, particularly in grammatical aspects rather than discourse-level skills.

Moreover, the results indicate that students in the experimental group became more active participants in communicative tasks. They showed improved ability to initiate conversations, respond appropriately, and sustain interaction. For example, during role-playing activities such as “job interview”, students were able to ask and answer questions more naturally:

- **Pre-test example:**

Interviewer: Why do you want this job?

Student: I like this job. I need work.

- **Post-test example:**

Interviewer: Why do you want this job?

Student: I am interested in this position because it allows me to develop my communication skills. In addition, I believe my qualifications match the requirements of this job.

Additionally, in role-play situations such as “solving a problem in a group”, students demonstrated improved interactional competence:

- “On the one hand, we can choose this solution because it is cheaper. On the other hand, it may not be effective. Therefore, I suggest we consider another option.”

Such examples illustrate that students not only produced longer utterances but also engaged in meaningful negotiation of ideas. Furthermore, their speech became more fluent and less dependent on memorized structures. Instead of relying on fixed phrases, learners began to construct their own responses in real time.

In addition, qualitative observations revealed that students displayed increased confidence and willingness to participate. For instance, previously passive learners began to take initiative in discussions, ask follow-up questions, and express opinions more freely. Consequently, the classroom interaction became more dynamic and student-centered.

Overall, both quantitative data and qualitative evidence confirm that role-playing games significantly enhance discursive competence. Not only do they improve linguistic organization and cohesion, but they also foster interactive and pragmatic skills essential for real-life communication.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this study can be interpreted within the framework of communicative language teaching and discourse theory. First of all, the significant improvement in coherence suggests that role-playing facilitates not only language production but also cognitive organization of discourse. In other words, learners are encouraged to think in extended units of meaning rather than isolated sentences.

Furthermore, the increase in cohesion and use of discourse markers confirms that role-playing provides meaningful contexts for language use. As learners engage in simulated communicative situations, they are naturally required to connect ideas and structure their speech. This finding is consistent with the views of Canale and Swain, who emphasize the importance of discourse competence as a core component of communicative competence [2].

In addition, the development of interactional strategies highlights the importance of social interaction in language learning. According to Savignon, communicative competence emerges through active participation in meaningful communication [7]. Similarly, Richards argues that learners need authentic interaction to develop fluency and pragmatic awareness [6]. The present study supports these claims, as students engaged in role-playing demonstrated improved turn-taking, responsiveness, and conversational management.

Moreover, the findings can also be explained from a motivational perspective. As Dörnyei suggests, engaging and interactive activities increase learners’ motivation and reduce anxiety. In this study, role-playing created a supportive learning environment, which encouraged students to participate more actively and take risks in communication. Consequently, their confidence and willingness to speak improved significantly.

On the contrary, the limited progress observed in the control group indicates that traditional methods are insufficient for developing discursive competence. Although such methods may improve grammatical accuracy, they do not provide enough opportunities for extended discourse production or interactive communication.

Thus, the findings of this study confirm that role-playing is not merely an engaging classroom activity but a pedagogically sound method grounded in communicative and cognitive principles. Furthermore, its effectiveness is particularly evident in multilingual contexts such as Karakalpak groups, where learners benefit from contextualized and interactive language use.

CONCLUSION

The article summarizes the findings of a school-based experimental study on using role-playing games (RPG) in teaching English to students of Karakalpak ethnic groups studying English as a foreign language. The research aims to explore the effectiveness of role-playing games as a highly engaging and motivating tool to enhance the linguistic and communication skills of English philology students. The results reveal that using RPGs contributes to significant increments in both linguistic and affective discourse dimensions, specifically in aspects of coherence and cohesion, discourse markers and interaction strategies on the one hand and motivation, confidence and task engagement on the other hand. Therefore, it has been found that interactive communication approaches are as effective as traditional methods for achieving higher levels of linguistic competence. In addition, the article discusses some pedagogical implications of its findings and offers some suggestions for effective implementation of role-playing approaches in English language classrooms and coursebooks, recommending English language teachers integrate role-playing tasks into their lessons in order to facilitate learners' communication skills at discourse level. Furthermore, curriculum developers are recommended to include a greater number of communicative tasks and learning activities to enhance the interaction between students. Some limitations of this study have also been presented, calling for further research. Above all, further studies need to investigate how role-playing activities can affect learners' academic achievement and their performance at different stages of language learning. Incorporating digital RPGs or virtual simulations within language teaching and learning can be other promising avenues of research that this article is open to.

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