



## **Increasing Vocabulary in Speaking through Roleplay**

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### Abstract

The study aimed to determine the impact of roleplays to learn vocabulary words in English. The action research shows the benefits of speaking skill development in Pre-A1 level, 8th-grade students from a public high school in Guayaquil-Ecuador. Quantitative and qualitative instruments were applied. The data was collected from online tests and surveys due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pre-and posttests measured the improvement of vocabulary, language, ideas, and interaction. Results demonstrated a significant difference between the pretest ( $M=8.00$ ,  $SD=2.33$ ) and the posttest ( $M=13.65$ ,  $SD=1.43$ ), with a large impact, Cohen's  $d= 2.92$ , while paired  $t$ -tests indicate the reliability of the study with a  $p=0.00$ . Students expressed positive comments of the innovation. They indicated that it improved their vocabulary and speaking skills. Also, they made progress in listening comprehension. The study is addressed to future researchers and teachers who want to implement strategies to increase vocabulary and improve speaking in beginner EFL students.

*Keywords:* vocabulary, speaking, roleplay.

### Resumen

El estudio tuvo como objetivo determinar el impacto de los juegos de roles en el aprendizaje de vocabulario en inglés. La investigación muestra los beneficios al desarrollar la habilidad de hablar en estudiantes de octavo grado de nivel Pre-A1 de una escuela secundaria pública en Guayaquil-Ecuador. Se aplicaron instrumentos cuantitativos y cualitativos. Los datos fueron recolectados de tests y encuestas en línea debido a la pandemia Covid-19. Los tests previos y posteriores midieron la mejora del vocabulario, el lenguaje, la comprensión y la interacción. Los resultados demostraron una diferencia significativa entre el pretest ( $M=8.00$ ,  $SD=2.33$ ) y el posttest ( $M=13.65$ ,  $SD=1.43$ ), con un gran impacto, Cohen  $d= 2.92$ , mientras que las pruebas  $t$  para muestras relacionadas otorgan la confiabilidad del estudio con un  $p = 0.00$ . Los estudiantes expresaron comentarios positivos de la innovación en las encuestas, ellos señalaron la mejora en su vocabulario y habilidades para hablar en inglés, también aumentaron la comprensión auditiva. El estudio está orientado a futuros investigadores y profesores que necesiten implementar estrategias para incrementar el vocabulario y mejorar el habla de los estudiantes de inglés en nivel principiante.

*Palabras clave:* vocabulario, hablar, juego de roles.

### **Increasing Vocabulary in Speaking through Roleplay**

The English language is the international bridge between people across the world, as indicated by Seargeant (2016). As Yavaşlar and Demirci (2018) indicated, English is considered a lingua franca because many people use it and learn it since childhood. Rao (2019) highlighted people require communication skills to achieve personal goals at the present time. Students must develop speaking skills as a tool to deal with real world situations (Brown & Yuke, 1983, as cited in Rao,2019). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standardized the proficiency of language level in many countries. The Council of Europe (2018) indicated that levels are between Pre-A1 and C2, they are defined by specific descriptors related to reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills.

In the meantime, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have difficulties to practice speaking for the reason that their mother tongue reduces the opportunities to use English inside and outside the classroom (Fadilah, 2016). Also, Leong and Ahmadi (2017) mentioned that learners recognize feeling inhibited and demotivated when they have to talk because it is hard to remember words or expressions. In addition, students have few occasions to include learned vocabulary words in dialogs; consequently, they forget the meaning and pronunciation of the terms (Khan et al., 2018).

In Ecuador, the National Curriculum of Education is designed according to the CEFR and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. The acquisition of EFL is better learned in interaction and communication rather than memorizing the content (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). The time established for English classes in public schools is between three to five hours. Then, students are limited in time to practice the target language and upgrade their proficiency level. Moreover, Ecuadorian students experiment with emotions like preoccupation or inhibition when they speak in

front of their classmates because they feel afraid to make mistakes (Coutinho et al., 2020).

Roleplay is suggested as a strategy to increase vocabulary in EFL students because they feel motivated to learn the language and use it in familiar situations (Alabsi, 2016). Yavaşlar and Demirci (2018) stated that students become active learners of vocabulary knowledge when they practice speaking in different performances. Furthermore, roleplays help students focus on a specific topic and accommodate the words for specific purposes (Fernández, 2017). In the different stages of the learning process, roleplay produces an improvement in oral competency because teachers become facilitators while students learn vocabulary, work in groups, receive feedback and opportunities to improve the activities (Tipmontreen & Tasanameelarp, 2018).

Different authors have used Roleplay to improve fluency or teach vocabulary for students from other school levels, ages, social status, and most of them have obtained favorable results using the strategy (Alabsi, 2016; Fadilah, 2016; Romero et al., 2020; Yavaşlar, 2018). Nevertheless, this study implements a roleplay strategy with the purpose to increase the vocabulary of Pre-A1 level who are first-year secondary students in Guayaquil-Ecuador.

Students follow *Aprendamos Juntos en Casa* (Learning Together at Home) Educational Plan regularized by the Ministry of Education for the Coast Region. The Educational Plan is applied due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students interact by social networks or video conference platforms, the parents have become their tutors, and teachers escort the learning process. For public schools and high schools, the main interaction between teachers, students and parents is via WhatsApp.

### **Literature Review**

In this section, theories of speaking skill and strategies to improve it are reviewed by different authors. Accordingly, the main concepts of the research consist of speaking, vocabulary, pair work and roleplays. Additionally, the features of Remote Learning for Ecuadorian students in the Coast Region are presented.

### **Speaking**

Chaney (1998, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) defined speaking as the creation of ideas and communication of them through words and body language in different situations. Speaking aids students at developing abilities to communicate and share information (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Namaziandost et al., 2018; Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019).

The main elements of speaking skill are fluency and accuracy. Galilard (2013, as cited in Nasri et al., 2019) considered to evaluate fluency by the total duration of the speech sample, words per minute, and pauses per minute while the percentage of errors corresponds to accuracy. Hedges (2000, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) indicated that fluency works when the learners provide information with phrases in a logical order, have clear pronunciation, and incorporate intonation. Accuracy benefits communication as long as students manage grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Mazouzi, 2013, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Each of these elements is part of the learning to speak a foreign language.

Speaking skill develops the interaction of the student with the society, and the task demands different challenges. Students feel anxious about preparing a discourse instead of having a natural interaction when they are involved in the conversation (Thornbury, 2006, as cited in Coutinho et al., 2020). Moreover, Aftat (2008, as cited in Al Nakhalah, 2016) observed that EFL learners feel afraid of making mistakes due to

the concern of being criticized by their classmates and obtaining an unfavorable evaluation from their teacher.

This study incorporates CLT principles in order to support the increase of vocabulary in speaking for students between 11 and 12 years old. The main objective of CLT is to develop communicative competence in students (Hymes, 1971, as cited in Brandl, 2007). Communicative Competence involves the active participation of students in the learning process of the target language (Canale et al., 1980 as cited in Brandl, 2007). As Ghofur et al. (2017) mentioned, CLT principles support the improvement in English speaking skills using a constructivist approach. In other words, students experiment with knowledge and comprehension.

Desai (2015) made a list of CLT principles and the following were considered for this study: the acquisition of the target language should start from the necessity to communicate with others, the primary purpose of the activities consists of the increase in communication, and the teacher assertively makes corrections during the learning process. The teacher designs situations to promote communication in a social context as drama or roleplays. In this way, students feel motivated to use the target language.

### **Vocabulary**

Alabsi (2016) stated that vocabulary is the recognition of words in print, understanding meaning, listening, or comprehension of words in a dialog. Afna (2018) emphasized that a varied vocabulary is the main root of speaking a foreign language because it is essential for developing the four skills. Students with a proficiency level between Pre-A1 and A1 need to know and practice vocabulary at the beginning of the target language learning.

Yavaşlar and Demirci (2018) reported that students become active learners of vocabulary knowledge when they interact and practice speaking in English across

different performances. Additionally, students are successful vocabulary learners when they recognize the meaning and pronunciation of the words (Nation, 1994, as cited in Yavaşlar & Demirci, 2018).

The vocabulary mastery increases the possibilities for the learners to communicate in the language. Afna (2018) discovered that the relationship between vocabulary and speaking affects some speaking aspects as fluency, self-confidence, natural expression of ideas and scores. Students have more opportunities to be successful in speaking when they learn vocabulary.

### **Pair Work**

Pair work refers to share ideas and make performances with the partner; then, teachers identify the level of the language production (Yulitrinisya & Narius, 2018). Production and autonomy are the results of pair work because the students communicate their ideas in a friendly environment (Rao, 2019). Cordeiro (2017) confirmed pair work generates opportunities to participate using the language and having meaningful learning.

The activities in pairs help students reduce anxiety about making mistakes and show self-confidence (McDonough, 2004, as cited in Cordeiro, 2017). Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019) found pair work encourages students to join and practice frequently. When the learners work in pairs, they enhance their confidence besides increasing the enthusiasm for participating in the activities and practice the language.

### **Roleplay**

Roleplay strategy has the main purpose of promoting saying, acting, and communication among students while interpreting specific roles (Altun, 2015, as cited in Alabsi, 2016). Roleplay is a learner-centered strategy. Byrne (1986, as cited in Fadilah, 2016) pointed out that roleplays are generally classified in scripted and



unscripted roleplay. Scripted roleplays are performances, scenes, and dialogues read by students from a textbook. Unscripted roleplays when students improvise the conversation using a central topic provided by their teacher.

Teachers consider the strategy benefits students to obtain better abilities besides stimulating the predisposition to express their ideas in English (Villafuerte & Romero, 2017, as cited in Castro & Villafuerte, 2019). Rao (2019) considered that roleplays help speaking skills when students interpret roles related to modern situations.

Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019) observed that students feel excited about acting roles and creating a conversation with their friends to present to the whole class. The practice of vocabulary words about a specific topic through the implementation of roleplays offers the learners the opportunity to provide the correct information (De Wolf, et al., 2017).

### **Motivation**

Motivation is intangible, but the behavior is visible. For teaching purposes, motivation is the students' attitude and interest when they desire to learn (Wingo & Morse, 1986, as cited in Ihsan, 2016). The mission of the teacher is to be a facilitator in the classroom and lead the learning process in an environment of motivation (Alamri, 2018). According to Brown (2000), when students are allowed to make decisions in the activities, they are intrinsically motivated. Besides, a student better learns when he feels inspired about the culture which speaks the target language. The extrinsic motivation comes from the desire to interact with the society that speaks the language of inspiration (Leaver, 2005, as cited in Ihsan, 2016). Motivation is support for success in speaking English.

### **Remote Learning**

Social Distancing has been implemented in communities around the world due to COVID-19. Consequently, some countries have adopted remote learning as an education modality to prevent virus spreading (World Health Organization, 2020). The Ministry of Education in Ecuador elaborated a contingency plan that included guides with varied activities for all the educational sub-levels from elementary to high school and the curriculum assignments in the different levels of education (Ministerio de Educación, 2020).

Aprendamos Juntos en Casa (Learning Together at Home) as a plan has had the primary purpose of working in autonomy at home and developing projects that motivate students to continue learning (Ministerio de Educación, 2020). The students keep the activities in a portfolio because it is the evaluation instrument scored through specific criteria in a rubric.

This research aimed to analyze the effect of roleplay strategy to increase vocabulary in speaking activities for eight-course, Pre-A1 level students. The specific research questions were:

1. To what extent will students increase their vocabulary by using roleplays?
2. What are student's perspectives of this innovation?
3. What challenges do students face during the process?

### **Innovation**

For the implementation, students were required to interpret different roles related to real situations, and the objective was to increase the vocabulary of students as well as to motivate them to practice the language. The CEFR descriptors considered for the design of the lesson plan were "Can understand and use some basic, formulaic expressions such as "Yes", "No", "Excuse me", "Please". "Thank you", "No, Thank you", Sorry. Can recognize simple greetings. Can greet people, say his/her name and

take leave of them” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 85). For students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the projects to develop are the ones that correspond to the basic superior level. Projects two, three, and four included topics related to public places, routines and schedules for English assignment. The unit title of the lesson plan designed for this study was My Community. In this way, the students related the content learned in the regular classes to the activities implemented for the innovation.

The lesson plan was programmed for thirty hours. The innovation started in the second period of the school year with ten volunteer students as participants from 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a public high school, and their English level was Pre-A1. Due to Covid-19, the implementation was through WhatsApp, in which students received schedules and links. The classes were held on the Zoom platform, and the resources were shared by email. Other activities were developing using educational apps like Voki, Kahoot, and InShot.

First, students received a Pictionary with the vocabulary words to use in each roleplay. The learners then developed a roleplay with a semi-guided script with a specific theme of conversation as buying something, asking for schedules of a movie, or describing symptoms and relating to the corresponding public place.

Next, they created an unscripted performance in pairs with simple conversations like ordering food, asking for simple information, greeting, and introducing themselves to someone. The role of the teacher was to monitor and provide feedback to students. Additionally, the teacher presented short explanations and review of topics as how to tell the time, numbers, days, simple grammar structures. After that, the teacher promoted the incorporation of the content in the roleplays.

At the end of the implementation, there was a posttest in which students included and transferred the learned vocabulary through a virtual oral presentation. They prepared a performance in pairs. Students worked in pairs. They acted as an

investor; then they exchanged to act as a community helper. The test was about creating a conversation with an investor interested in the community; in this way, he would decide to invest the money to support the growth of the city. The students worked together to determine the questions asked by the investor and prepared their answers individually according to the specific community helper role they were acting. The teacher was attentive to the process. Students presented the roleplay in a Zoom session recorded by the teacher and evaluated with a rubric. After that, students could repeat the performance with their parents and share the video of the recording.

### **Methodology**

Teachers and other school collaborators conduct action research to solve problems, develop skills and improve teaching practice, for this purpose, they do investigations and reflections with specific strategies (Efron & Ravid, 2019). Action research was conducted to implement the roleplay strategy in order to enhance vocabulary production. Correspondingly, there are qualitative and quantitative methods that help to determine the progress of the study (Yurtseven & Altun, 2015, as cited in Romero, 2020).

Qualitative and quantitative instruments were applied to collect data during the seven weeks of the innovation. To begin with, students provided personal information in a Google form, also they reflected and explained their experience learning English as well as the difficulties to develop the skills and practice the language. Additionally, they completed an online free placement test to determine their proficiency level.

After that, the researcher designed a pretest to identify the speaking and conversation skills of students. Students knew the purpose of the test. The teacher presented the rubric where students observed the criteria to evaluate. Students developed the pretest following the instructions.

Furthermore, qualitative data focused on the students' perspectives in learning English and their experiences speaking the target language. The researcher obtained the information from a pre-survey and a post-survey completed by the participants.

Finally, the researcher prepared a summative performance assessment task. The development of the students in this performance was considered to determine the quantitative results of the implementation. A rubric instrument evaluated the process during the pre-and posttest.

Efron and Ravid (2019) indicated that research questions are based on problems or observations relevant to the professional. For this study, the research questions were:

1. To what extent will students increase their vocabulary by using roleplays?
2. What are student's perspectives of this innovation?
3. What challenges do students face during the process?

### **Participants**

The method included a sample of ten Ecuadorian volunteer students, conformed by 7 females and 3 males. Their ages ranged between 11 to 12 years old. Their native language is Spanish. Students considered for this research were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and studied in a public high school located in a southern area of Guayaquil, Ecuador. Due to the pandemic, the researcher considered implementing the study with a group of ten volunteers. It is essential to highlight that sixteen students were invited, and ten decided to participate. They were pre-teenagers with Pre-A1 as proficiency level and had limited opportunities to practice speaking in English.

According to the answers provided in the survey, the group of students was able to use the WhatsApp application and Zoom platform because they had Internet access at home. Additionally, they owned laptops or desktops besides their cellphones.

### **Instruments**

The instruments presented in this section collected the information to develop the study.

#### **Demographic Survey.**

Viteri (2019) elaborated a demographic survey which was duplicated in a Google form for this study. The purpose was to obtain a description and background information from the participants. The students answered the questions and provided the information requested; at the end, they sent the form.

#### **Proficiency level test.**

Students took an online free placement test on EF Standard English Test Academy's website, where they evaluated their input skills (reading and listening). At the end of the test, participants received a percentage as a score, and the online system assigned them to a proficiency level. The alignment between CEFR and the EF SET indicated that the students were Pre-A1 level.

#### **Pre- and post-survey.**

Before and after the implementation, the researcher used a Likert scale from Viteri (2019). The instrument was beneficial to determine the quantitative perspectives of the students about speaking English. Additionally, there were three open-questions in which students included extra information about their positive and negative experiences learning English, working in pairs, and the limitations to practice speaking. It is important to mention that students were asked in the pre-survey about their difficulties developing the four English skills to explore previous experiences, then in the post-survey, they were asked about their perceptions of learning to speak English using roleplays.

#### **Pre- and posttest.**

There was a pre-test in which students orally answered two questions about familiar topics and one activity to develop. One student asked first the two questions, and the paired student had 40 seconds to prepare their answer and 60 seconds to tell the answer; there was a final activity where students had a short conversation as waitress and customer in a restaurant, then the customer student ordered food and the waitress student took the order, after that, they changed roles.

In the end, there was a post-test where students pretended to be an investor and a community helper, the last one described the job and answer questions. The results of the pretest and posttest were compared at the end.

### **Rubric.**

The speaking skills were measured through a rubric. The score was over four for each category. There were four categories: vocabulary, language, use of complete sentences, and interaction. The researcher recorded the performances practiced during the pre and posttest to evaluate students.

### **Teacher's journal.**

Structure or unstructured teacher's journal is a research instrument, and it is used as a reflexive practice to change or modify teaching methods (Wiegerová, 2013). An unstructured journal was used to take notes of the observations done in each class, also the researcher wrote about the limitations of students to participate or practice. Some information was taken from videos, presentations, and voice recordings.

### **Data Analysis**

Details of the sample were collected in an Excel spreadsheet. There were two different charts, the pretest and posttest grades, and the grades of each category were displayed in Excel to facilitate the analysis. Then, the information was transferred to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program. The purpose was to obtain the

mean, standard deviation; the effect size was calculated with that information. The information provided the results to answer research question #1.

The information provided in the pre-and post-survey was considered for the analysis in the study. Students filled three Likert scales. The Likert scales were used to determine the perspectives of the learners about the innovation. The SPSS program measured the significance, the information's results gave the answer to the research question #2. The most significant indicators were presented in tables for the results section.

Students answered an online survey. They were asked three questions before and after the implementation. The opinions provided by the students were classified into categories and the number of times in a table. Specific quotes from students were included in the results section. In this way, the researcher determined the challenges of the participants to answer research question #3.

### **Ethical Considerations**

For this project, all ethical considerations were considered. For the recruitment process to participate in the study, the parents were asked about the consent by exposing the purpose and benefits of the innovation in a Zoom meeting. They filled a Google form to permit their children to join the project because students were minors. The research respected the protection and integrity of each participant, for this reason, the study omitted personal information from the students.

### **Results**

The analysis of the results is presented in this section. The quantitative and qualitative results were based on the three research questions. The study was focused on determining to what extent students increase their vocabulary by using roleplays. Then,



the researcher analyzed student’s perspectives and challenges produced during the innovation.

*Research Question #1 To what extent will students increase their vocabulary by using roleplays?*

A paired t-test in the SPSS compared the difference in the scores between the pretest (M= 8.00; SD=2.33) and posttest (M=13.65; SD= 1.43) when analyzing the sample;  $t(9) = -18.92, p = 0.00$  with a large impact ( $d=2.92$ ). In conclusion, the difference analysis showed a significant difference in how much scores changed from pre-implementation to post-implementation in the sample. The general results obtained from evaluating the rubric in the pretest and posttest are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Pre- and Posttest Results*

Test	N	M	SD	Min	Max	Sig. (P)	ES
Pre	10	8.00	2.33	4.50	11.50	0.00	2.92
Post	10	13.65	1.43	11.50	16		

Note: N=Sample M= mean Sd= Standard Deviation Min= Minimum Max= Maximum Sig (P)=Significance Es= Effect Size

The evaluation considered language, ideas are understood, interaction and vocabulary criteria in the rubric to score the results of students obtained in the pre-and posttest. The researcher applied a paired t-test to compare the results by criteria. Table 2 demonstrates that students made significant progress in the four aspects, particularly ideas are understood with  $d=3.39$  and language with  $d=2.38$ .

Table 2

*Rubric Criteria*

	N	Pretest		Posttest		ES
		M	SD	M	SD	
Vocabulary	10	2.05	0.83	3.43	0.44	2.10
Language	10	1.80	0.75	3.30	0.48	2.38
Ideas are understood	10	1.20	0.42	2.90	0.57	3.39
Interaction	10	2.95	0.60	3.90	0.32	1.98

Note: N=Sample M= mean Sd= Standard Deviation Es= Effect Size

*Research Question #2 What are student's perspectives of the innovation?*

Table 3 presents the different perspectives of students when they speak the English language. The results indicate that the study positively impacted the students' diverse perceptions between the pre-survey and post-survey when developing a conversation.

Table 3

*Student's Perceptions*

Indicators	Pre-Survey		Post-Survey		Sig. (P)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Can continue the conversation and use vocabulary	2.30	0.67	4.00	0.66	0.000
Understand what the other people is saying	2.60	1.17	3.90	0.88	0.039
Speak spontaneously	2.40	0.84	4.10	0.88	0.001
Consider you speak correctly	1.70	0.67	3.80	0.79	0.000
Can interact with the interlocutor	2.10	0.57	3.70	0.95	0.001

N=Sample M= mean Sd= Standard Deviation Sig.(P)=Significance

Table 4 demonstrates students increased their activities to practice the English language. The results evidence the study had an encouraging influence in certain

activities of the students between the pre-survey and post-survey to practice the language.

Table 4

*English Language Practice*

Indicators	Pre-Survey		Post-Survey		Sig. (P)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Oral practice with vocabulary of personal interest	2.80	0.92	4.10	0.73	0.004
Written practice with vocabulary of personal interest	3.10	1.10	3.90	0.56	0.053
Oral pair work activities in the classroom	2.90	1.10	3.60	1.07	0.01

N=Sample M= mean Sd= Standard Deviation Sig.(P)=Significance

Students mainly found useful pair work to practice speaking, although some pairs speak slowly or do not pronounce correctly. Table 5 presents the most significant perceptions of students towards pair work.

Table 5

*Pair work*

Indicators	Pre-Survey		Post-Survey		Sig. (P)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Pair work is useful to practice speaking	2.90	1.37	4.30	0.67	0.004
It is advisable although some pairs speak slowly	3.20	1.31	3.90	0.87	0.010
It is advisable although some pairs do not pronounce correctly	2.90	1.28	3.70	1.15	0.053
It is good if I work with the pair, I choose	2.20	0.78	3.40	1.35	0.024

N=Sample M= mean Sd= Standard Deviation Sig.(P)=Significance

*Research Question # 3 What challenges do students face during the process?*

Students provided information about their experiences working in pairs, speaking English, learning English, and their perception of the role-play technique. The

most common opinions are divided into categories. Table 6 presents the number of times students indicated the categories for each question during the pre-and post-survey.

Table 6

*Categories from the surveys*

Questions	Category	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
1. What other advantage/difficulty do you have when working in pairs?	Confusing pronunciation	3	2
	Mutual support and help	6	4
	Pair work discoordination	3	2
	Low bandwidth	1	0
	Learning together	1	3
2. What other challenge/difficulty/limitation do you have when you speak in English?	Fluency	2	3
	Anxious of correct pronunciation	6	7
	Other responsibilities	3	1
	Concerning for lack of vocabulary	1	0
	Listening Difficulties	2	1
3. How is your experience learning English? (Pre-Survey)	Place of studying English	7	
	Reading difficulties	4	
	Listening Difficulties	4	
	Speaking Difficulties	6	
	Writing difficulties	4	
4. How is your experience learning English through roleplay in Speaking? (Post-Survey)	Positive Experiences		4
	Difficulties at pronunciation		5
	Motivation		2
	Increasing Vocabulary		2
	Improving Listening		1
	Listening difficulties		1

Initially, Question 1 determined two advantages and three difficulties in pair work expressed by students during the pre-and post-survey. In the pre-survey, most of them (6) expected the partner's help with the mistakes during the practice; one of the participants expressed, "If I make mistakes, my partner could help me." Another student mentioned that he expected to learn from each other. Some learners were worried about the concentration in the pair work (3), pronunciation (3), and internet connection (1). They indicated, "Sometimes we don't understand each other" and "My partner could not pay attention to the instructions."

In the post-survey, they confirmed to the partner as a support for the activities (4); one participant said, "If we need, we look for the answers together." Two students remarked on the importance of their partners in the activity. They mentioned, "My partner could make me confusing in the pronunciation" and "The other may be shy when talking."

Secondly, Question 2 identified challenges, difficulties, and limitations expressed by students in the pre-and post-survey. In the pre-survey, students considered it as a challenge to have the ability to speak fluently (2) and lack vocabulary (1). They said, "I would like to speak faster and fluently" and "I don't know what to say." They revealed pronunciation (6) as the main difficulty, and one participant mentioned, "I feel nervous at speaking because I am afraid of mispronouncing."

In the post-survey, students kept as a challenge, pronouncing the words correctly (7) and speaking fluently (3); they reported, "I cannot learn to pronounce the words correctly" and "I have difficulties speaking in English." One student recognized an improvement in listening skills and commented, "Before, it was hard to listen to, but now, I have achieved to understand it." The limitations expressed were similar in both

surveys, students indicated that their responsibilities at the high school impeded the time to practice more.

Finally, Question 3 explored the previous experiences of students learning English in the pre-survey, and the answers were organized into five categories. Most of the students (7) reported that they started studying English at school. They found it hard to develop listening (4), speaking (6), reading (4), and writing (4) skills, some of the students mentioned, “I find it difficult to read,” “I understand a little bit when other people are talking in English, but it is hard” and “When I speak in English, I get stuck and feel nervous.”

After the implementation, the post-survey included asking learners about their perceptions of using roleplays to practice speaking skills while learning English. The answers were classified into six categories. Four students mentioned positive experiences at speaking in English; one participant expressed, “Now, I like English; it has been easy.” Other student said, “It was easier to learn the words.” They felt more confident (2) about increasing fluency and expanding their vocabulary knowledge; learners said, “I feel that I speak more fluently” and “I feel happy at speaking English and I know more words.” Students confirmed that pronunciation (5) and listening (1) are difficult for them.

To conclude, roleplays were easier for students. They included the specific vocabulary of an activity. Pair work supported the practice and development of skills, especially listening and speaking.

### **Discussion**

The study determined in the first research question that roleplays increase vocabulary and improve oral skills in Pre-A1 learners. Similar positive results have been reported in other research studies (Alabsi, 2016; Fadilah, 2016; Yavaşlar &

Demirci, 2018). Their explorations also identified roleplay techniques that promote motivation and interaction between students; thus, speaking skills become possible to develop.

Students must practice speaking through activities that prepare them for the real world (Rao, 2019; Romero, 2020). Alabsi (2016) highlighted that roleplay strategy contributes to the simulation of real-life situations and prepares students to interact with society. For this practice, students acted roles of professionals involving realistic situations in a community. As a result, students developed skills, included new vocabulary words, and created short conversations.

As established by Leong and Ahmadi (2017), students are able to speak the target language when they organize their ideas, use vocabulary and provide information. The participants had improvements in the language, and ideas were understood. The Ministry of Education incorporated CLT activities in the projects for learning at home (Ministerio de Educación, 2020). Students had the advantage of constructing a relationship between the content and practice. Ghofur, et al. (2017) advocated students can understand and integrate knowledge. Desai (2015) highlighted the CLT principle, students have difficulties acquiring a language in loneliness instead of learning better in social interaction. Roleplays facilitated the students to increase their vocabulary and practice interaction in this implementation.

Regarding the second research question, roleplays influenced the student's perceptions to learn English. The authors Coutinho et al. (2020) indicated students present negative attitudes when speaking English in front of others. In practice, students felt anxious or nervous when they have to participate. They were afraid of making mistakes or finding words to say.

Alabsi (2016) regarded that roleplays permit students to develop communicative competence because they feel motivated when exposed to the language. The teacher observed interaction between students, and they paid attention to their partners. Fadilah (2016) regarded that the fantasy involved in roleplays motivates students and benefit the learning of the language. Students expressed that they improve speaking to have a natural conversation.

Yavaşlar and Demirci (2018) stated that for active learning strategies, the role of the teacher is to be a guide, and students assume the responsibility of the learning process. The teacher included familiar topics and facilitated the practice of the language through roleplays in classes. The participants increased the practice of oral and writing skills using a vocabulary of personal interest.

Pair work improves speaking practice because the learners used the language in a friendly environment (Cordeiro, 2017). Students recognized their partners to help clarify the activity, support the correct pronunciation, and share information to include them in the activities.

Finally, the third research question showed that students identified challenges as part of the learning process. In the surveys, the participants highlighted that learning to pronounce words and phrases correctly was essential. On the contrary, the study from Thornbury (2005, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) affirmed students pay attention to other abilities and omit pronunciation.

Students showed motivation to learn speaking in English. The students considered it essential for their partners to demonstrate responsibility and compromise during the practice. Speaking is relevant for people to accomplish objectives and succeed in their activities (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).



According to Leaver et al. (2005, as cited in Ihsan, 2016), motivation enhances the attitudes of effort, values and interest. Students felt comfortable about recognizing the mistakes as part of the practice, and they showed respect to their partners.

### **Conclusions**

The National Curriculum from the Ministry of Education in Ecuador promotes English language acquisition; however, students lack opportunities to practice the language skills because, the exposition of the mother tongue and feelings of shame. The study has explored the improvement of speaking skill, focused on increasing vocabulary using roleplays as the main technique.

The action research's positive results have found that roleplay is a strategy to improve language in students with low English proficiency levels. The significant difference between pre-and posttests demonstrated that roleplays benefit the understanding of ideas. Also, students increase vocabulary and improve interaction.

Roleplays encouraged students to practice the language. Students felt more confident to have a regular conversation while they understood what another person is saying. Additionally, the participants were motivated to continue learning English and comprehend the importance of starting practicing.

In this research, the challenges discovered are pronunciation, ideas to share, coordination in the pair work, and have a conversation. Furthermore, the study detected participants could appreciate the pair work as learning support as long as both keep the compromise to be successful.

The research confirms that students make progress in their language when they are involved in real-life situations like roleplays. They wanted to improve their skills and practice conversation. In addition, students showed a predisposition to work in pairs and learn from each other.

**Limitations**

Limitations encountered in this study are related to remote learning conditions due to the pandemic. Some students could not join specific online sessions via Zoom because they did not have the internet at home because their parents have not paid. As a solution, the teacher worked with students via WhatsApp until the internet was available, and they scheduled a recovery class. Another limitation was some students had internet with low bandwidth, and they sometimes disconnected from the session and came back later; as a consequence, pair work or other activities were affected. The teacher had to apply contingency plans in order to reinforce the learning process.

Remote learning affected certain aspects of the development of the classes. Regular classes limited the time for expanding the activities. As regular classes were carried via WhatsApp, the student's adaption to work in the Zoom platform and educational apps was challenging at the beginning of the innovation, like keeping the camera on during the classes or manage the different options in the apps.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations for future researchers to expand the study and make improvements are the following: implementing roleplays to increase vocabulary for advanced proficiency level students. Also, roleplay strategy could be oriented to acquire technical vocabulary for students who desire to learn the language professionally. The new study could determine and compare results.

Another future research could study the use of roleplays to improve the development of listening or reading skills. For speaking, verify if roleplays could work with students to obtain a better fluency in dialogues. Peer feedback could be added to the study and take advantage of the mutual support to expand the learning process.

Finally, there are some students in a class from public schools and high schools who only work via WhatsApp, and individual students have facilities to access to the internet and use online platforms, considering this could be remarkable for future studies, dividing between control and experimental groups in order to monitor the progress through these different educational opportunities.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Demographic Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Background Demographic Pre-Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Student's Perspectives Post-Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Pre-test

Available upon request.

**Appendix 7**

**Pre-Test Rubric**

**Teacher Name:** Ms. Lissette Roman

**Student Name:**

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Post-Test

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

Post-Test Rubric

Available upon request.



Appendix 8

Teacher's Journal

Increasing Vocabulary in Speaking through Roleplay

Available upon request.

Appendix 9

Table 3

Available upon request.

Appendix 10

Table 4

Available upon request.

Appendix 11

Table 5

Available upon request.