The effect of role-play on vocabulary learning and retention in Iranian EFL learners

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to investigate the impact of role-play on the vocabulary learning and retention of Iranian intermediate-level EFL learners. A quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group was employed to achieve this objective. The study consisted of 50 male intermediate students who were conveniently selected as participants. The research instruments included an Oxford Placement Test (OPT), a pretest, an immediate posttest, and a delayed posttest. During the treatment period, the experimental and control groups attended 12 classes at the institute. The conditions were identical for both groups, except that role-play was incorporated into the instructional approach for the experimental group while it was omitted for the control group. The findings indicated that role-play positively and significantly influenced the learners' vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention.

KEYWORDS: contextual vocabulary use; EFL learners; role-play; vocabulary; vocabulary retention

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is the building block of a language that affects all language skills. For example, some studies investigate different factors that are directly or indirectly affected by the learners' vocabulary pool, such as politeness strategies (Lotfi et al., 2020), writing skill development (Larsari, 2021), anxiety (Keshavarz and Guneyli, 2021), augmented reality (Yu, 2023), and usage of portmanteaus (Al-Sharah et al., 2021). The learners' vocabulary size might affect all these variables, which some studies ignore. Vocabulary acquisition is complex, as second language (L2) learners often face significant challenges. Many students identify vocabulary acquisition as their main difficulty (Zhang, 2011). Difficulties in learning English vocabulary can arise from various factors, such as limited vocabulary, incorrect word usage, improper phrases, and poor pronunciation (Afdillah, 2015). A prominent issue closely associated with the challenges of vocabulary learning is rote learning, which is widely recognized in applied linguistics as a common characteristic among EFL students despite many years of learning this language (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2021). Despite advancements in teaching methodologies, approaches, and strategies, rote learning persists (Rashidi and Omid, 2011).

While it has been widely acknowledged that long-term vocabulary learning should be the primary focus to enhance vocabulary knowledge, researchers have faced challenges in developing practical and effective vocabulary learning and teaching methods applicable to ESL/EFL contexts (Lee and Yoon,

2019). In other words, lexical development and retention are complex and multifaceted aspects of the language-learning process (Alabsi, 2016). They encompass various challenging tasks, including receptive word recognition, productive word usage, knowledge of associated word families, and comprehension and application of non-literal expressions (Mousavi et al., 2020).

On the other hand, according to Rivers (1981), "*Vocabulary cannot be taught directly to students but can be presented, explained, included in all kinds of activities indirectly*". Rivers (1981) emphasizes the importance of contextual and conceptual approaches to vocabulary acquisition, using instances, illustrations, definitions, comparisons, and contrasts. Instead of explicitly translating word meanings, teachers provide explanations, which require students to engage in extensive practice to acquire the vocabulary. Supporting this perspective, Ilyas and Afzal (2021) asserted that students must find ways to expand their lexicon and vocabulary knowledge to go beyond the lexis and even consider the literary aspects of a text to foster the motivation needed for L2 learning.

It has been argued that vocabulary instruction methods should go beyond teaching individual terms and equip students with strategies to enhance their vocabulary knowledge (Morin and Goebel, 2001). One such method is role-play. Role-play is a versatile learning activity that allows for diversity and creativity. It incorporates various communicative approaches, enhances language proficiency, promotes classroom participation, and boosts motivation (Kusamana, 2011).

However, some instructors may hesitate to incorporate role-play into their lessons despite the documented benefits. They may perceive these activities as ineffective and time-consuming (Subaihi, 2015). Many fail to consider that students often have limited opportunities to use the language they learn outside the classroom. Consequently, when they encounter situations where they need to apply their language skills communicatively, such as when traveling abroad, they may struggle or find it impossible to communicate effectively (Subaihi, 2015). Even students who achieve high grades in school may face difficulties when communicating with other English speakers in certain contexts (Subaihi, 2015).

Aligned with these concerns, the present study aimed to (1) investigate whether role-play enhances students' vocabulary learning and (2) determine whether role-play improves students' vocabulary retention in correct contextual usage.

2. Literature review

Role-play in language learning has gained increasing attention due to the growth of the communicative approach. Rahmatillah (2019) emphasized that employing a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, particularly through role-play and speaking activities, allows students to actively engage in conversations, practice English, and improve their communication skills. A study by Shen and Suwanthep (2011) investigated the use of constructive role-plays via e-learning and its impact on the speaking abilities of Chinese EFL learners in college English classes. The findings revealed that Chinese students had limited opportunities to communicate in English with peers and found the experience appealing. This finding positively contributed to improving their speaking skills regarding language quality and production. Huang and Xia (2010) noted that role-play effectively stimulated the enthusiasm and initiative of Chinese students to express their thoughts in English, as English is a foreign language in China, and teachers traditionally play a central role in the classroom. Interestingly, several other Chinese studies supported this finding, including that of Shen and Suwanthep (2011), Yang and Dai (2011), and J. Liu and Lertlit (2020).

In a separate study focusing on Saudi English learners, Alabsi (2016) investigated the effectiveness

of role-play in vocabulary instruction. The findings revealed that role-play was more successful in teaching vocabulary than traditional methods, as students found it enjoyable and engaging. Conversely, the control group, who did not engage in role-play activities, reported feelings of boredom, and their lexical skills did not show significant improvement. This outcome might be attributed to the significance of linking form and meaning during word learning. Pham (2022) suggests that incorporating auditory and visual imagery, emotions, and a combination of these elements is crucial for effectively transferring information from working memory to long-term memory, contributing to successfully retaining the vocabulary.

In another study focusing on Indian higher education English learners, Selvakumar et al. (2022) discovered that implementing role-play in the classroom, particularly for higher education students, led to developing speaking skills and collaborating in pairs and groups. Similarly, Rojas and Villafuerte (2018) reported that role-play is an educational technique that exposes students to authentic situations, enhancing their ability to communicate naturally and meaningfully with peers regarding real-life situations and future professional environments. Another study by Mandasari (2017) explored the successful application of role-play in English for business lessons among Indonesian students. Mandasari (2017) emphasized that role-play promotes engagement and enjoyable learning experiences in general English classes and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. It encourages reluctant students to simultaneously utilize various components of speaking skills, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Samsibar and Naro (2018) examined the role-play technique's impact on Indonesian students' motivation in English conversation. They found that the intervention of utilizing role-play significantly enhanced students' motivation to engage in English discussions. This finding is consistent with other research that has demonstrated the positive effects of implementing role-play in English lessons on students' confidence and motivation during the English learning process (Kumaran, 2017). It is important to encourage students to express their thoughts and emotions in the target language (Wafaa, 2014). However, they should also engage in higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, explanation, and evaluation when using a foreign language (Marin and de la Pava, 2017) since in foreign language learning contexts, English is not a communication medium outside the classroom (Okyar and Demir, 2019).

Furthermore, role-play provides ample opportunities for students to practice speaking in real-life contexts. Idham et al. (2022) reported that role-play techniques help learners develop their fluency, pronunciation, intonation, and conversational skills by engaging in interactive and authentic language exchanges. However, role-play is not limited to developing speaking skills. For example, Boakye (2021) employed role-play to enhance the academic reading proficiency of first-year sociology students in South Africa. The results demonstrated that many students improved their reading fluency and experienced cognitive and affective benefits.

Similarly, Yen et al. (2013) observed that L2 learners enhanced their writing skills through role-play activities, which usually resulted from a lack of academic vocabulary knowledge, according to Asaad and Shabdin (2021). Role-play often involves reading and understanding role cards, scenarios, or instructions. Students must comprehend written information, extract relevant details, and apply them in their role-play performance. This activity strengthens their reading comprehension skills (Hartono, 2023).

Moreover, during role-play activities, students must actively listen to their peers' dialogues and respond accordingly. This action enhances their listening comprehension skills, including understanding

spoken language, following instructions, and interpreting verbal cues (Yakubov, 2022). In addition, role-play allows students to actively use and apply newly learned vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Through role-play, learners can practice using vocabulary appropriately, reinforcing their understanding and retention of the words and expressions (Alabsi, 2016). Yakubov (2022) postulates that role-play promotes effective communication and interaction as students engage in dialogue, negotiation, and problem-solving within the given roles. Learners develop interpersonal skills, including turn-taking, expressing opinions, clarifying ideas, and adapting language to social situations.

Finally, role-play encourages students to think critically, analyze situations, make decisions, and solve problems within the context of the roles they are portraying, which, in the end, can result in mental toughness (Mohammadi and Pouya, 2021). It fosters creativity as learners imagine and creates dialogues, scenarios, and characters (Chan, 2012). By engaging in role-play activities, students can develop and integrate these language skills in a meaningful and interactive manner, making vocabulary learning more engaging, practical, and effective.

Based on the objectives stated earlier in the study, the research questions for the study can be formulated as follows:
1) Does incorporating role-play in the instructional approach significantly impact the vocabulary learning of Iranian intermediate-level EFL learners?
2) To what extent does role-play influence long-term vocabulary retention among Iranian intermediate-level EFL learners?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The study employed an experimental design as its framework, with the experimental group receiving the treatment while the control group did not. Both groups, however, underwent the same pretest and posttest assessments. The dependent variable in this study was the students' increasing vocabulary knowledge, while the independent variable was the implementation of role-play.

This study's pretest and posttest assessments were designed to measure participants' vocabulary knowledge before and after treatment. The purpose of the pretest was to establish a baseline of the participants' vocabulary skills before any intervention. It helped to determine the initial level of vocabulary knowledge among the participants.

Using the same pretest and posttest for the experimental and control groups, the researchers aimed to compare the impact of the role-play intervention on vocabulary learning. This design allowed for a direct comparison between the two groups, enabling the researchers to assess the effectiveness of role-play in improving vocabulary knowledge.

3.2. Participants

In this study, 80 individuals from the Hezare-Danesh Language Institute in Jam, Iran, were initially considered for participation. From this pool, 50 male intermediate students were selected as the final participants based on their Oxford Placement Test (OPT) performance. The OPT was used as a criterion to determine the students' proficiency level and eligibility for the study.

The sampling approach employed in this study was convenience sampling, as the participants were conveniently selected from the intact classes available at the language institute. This approach is commonly used in research when access to participants is relatively easy and convenient.

All participants in this study were native Persian speakers and learned English in their schools. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22, indicating that they were young adults at the intermediate level of English proficiency.

3.3. Instruments and materials

The study utilized several instruments to measure the participants' vocabulary knowledge and assess their learning progress. These instruments included the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), a pretest, an immediate posttest, and a delayed posttest.

The OPT is a standardized test consisting of 70 multiple-choice items, including 20 listening items, 20 reading items, and 30 items related to language use. It has been widely used in various Iranian studies and has demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90. Wistner et al. (2013) confirmed the test's validity.

The pretest, designed by the teacher, comprised 40 multiple-choice vocabulary items from the book *American English File 2* by Latham-Koening et al. (2008). The test had a time limit of 40 min and demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85. Its content validity was confirmed by a group of experienced teachers with MA and Ph.D. degrees and 5–10 years of teaching experience. The purpose of the pretest was to assess the participants' initial vocabulary knowledge before the treatment.

The immediate posttest was parallel to the pretest, consisting of 40 multiple-choice vocabulary items with the same format and number of items. It aimed to measure the participants' vocabulary learning immediately after the treatment. The test demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92. The same team of experienced teachers also confirmed its content validity.

These instruments, including the OPT, pretest, and immediate posttest, assessed the participants' vocabulary knowledge, tracked their learning progress, and compared their performance before and after the treatment period.

The study included a delayed posttest conducted parallel to the pretest and immediate posttest. It consisted of the same number of items and the same format as the pretest and immediate posttest—the delayed posttest aimed to assess the effectiveness of role-play on vocabulary retention over time.

The delayed posttest exhibited high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85, indicating good internal consistency. Additionally, the content validity of the delayed posttest was confirmed by the same team of experts involved in validating the pretest and immediate posttest.

By administering the delayed posttest, the study aimed to examine whether the vocabulary learning, and retention achieved through role-play in the experimental group persisted over a longer duration than the control group. This test helped evaluate the long-term impact of role-play on vocabulary retention among the participants.

The material used in this study was the book *American English File 2* by Latham-Koening et al. (2008), published by Oxford University Press. This book was employed to teach the study's experimental and control groups. *American English File 2* is designed to teach adult learners English and covers various skills, including vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening, speaking, and writing. The book consists of 10 lessons that focus on these main language skills.

It is important to note that the existing curriculum determined the choice of the book, and the researchers did not have control over the selection of the specific material. Thus, the researchers utilized

a book that was already part of the established curriculum for the English language learning program.

3.4. Data collection procedure

Before conducting the present study, the researchers obtained informed consent and permission from the head and authorities of the Hezare-Danesh Language Institute, informing them about the study's purpose. After receiving consent and permission, the participants were invited to participate in the study. To enhance their motivation for participation, they were promised a 30% discount on their tuition fees.

Four intact intermediate-level classes were conveniently selected for the study. Using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), 50 students with homogenous proficiency levels were selected as participants. Homogeneity was determined by selecting students whose OPT scores fell within the range of ±1 standard deviation (SD) from the mean score. These selected students were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, with 25 students in each group.

Both groups were pretested before the treatment period. The treatment period consisted of 12 class sessions held at the institute, with the same conditions for both groups, except that the experimental group incorporated role-play activities in their instruction, while the control group did not. In the experimental group, role-play was used to teach new vocabulary, with students engaging in conversations and assuming different roles and contexts. The control group received traditional vocabulary instruction, such as rote memorization and vocabulary notebooks. Classes were held twice a week for 90 min, with the role-play activities conducted in the last 15 min of the experimental group's sessions.

At the end of the treatment period, a posttest was administered to compare the results between the two groups. Additionally, after a one-month interval (as suggested in the literature), a delayed posttest was conducted to assess the effectiveness of using role-play on the recall and retention of the newly learned words. It is important to note that the scores of students excluded during the homogenization stage were not included in the data analysis.

Overall, the study followed a systematic procedure, with informed consent obtained, homogenous groups selected, pretests and posttests conducted, and a delayed posttest administered to evaluate the impact of role-play on vocabulary learning and retention.

3.5. Data analysis procedure

An independent samples *t*-test was employed to address the first research question regarding the difference in vocabulary knowledge. The *t*-test is a statistical analysis used to compare the means of two independent groups and determine whether the observed difference is statistically significant.

Descriptive statistics, such as measures of central tendency (e.g., mean, median) and variability (e.g., standard deviation), were likely calculated for the vocabulary knowledge scores of both the experimental and control groups. These statistics provide an overview of the data, summarizing the distribution and characteristics of the participants' vocabulary knowledge.

The independent samples *t*-test was then conducted to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in vocabulary knowledge between the experimental group (which received role-play instruction) and the control group (which did not engage in role-play). The *t*-test allows researchers to assess whether the observed difference in means is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Furthermore, descriptive statistics were likely calculated to summarize the vocabulary retention data for the delayed posttest scores. It provided an overview of the participants' vocabulary retention in the experimental and control groups.

To assess the effectiveness of role-play on vocabulary retention, an independent samples *t*-test was likely applied to compare the delayed posttest scores between the experimental and control groups. It allowed the researchers to determine if the difference in vocabulary retention between the two groups was statistically significant.

4. Result

The researcher conducted the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normality of the data. **Table 1** presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest scores of the participants.

Table 1. Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

	Pretest	Immediate posttest	Delayed posttest
N	50	50	50
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	1.09	0.73	0.85
Asymp Sig (2-tailed)	0.183	0.64	0.46

According to **Table 1**, the significance levels (asymptotic significance) obtained for all three tests are greater than 0.05. This finding indicates that the data distributions for the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest scores are considered normal. As a result, parametric tests can be applied for data analysis in this study.

Additionally, before proceeding with the analysis to answer the research questions, the author compared the pretest results between the experimental and control groups to ensure the homogeneity of the groups in terms of vocabulary knowledge. According to **Table 2**, the experimental group had a mean pretest score of 22.76, with a standard deviation of 1.23. Conversely, the control group had a slightly higher mean pretest score of 23.36, with a standard deviation of 1.46. The degrees of freedom for the *t*-test were 48.

Table 2. Independent sample t-test for English vocabulary knowledge pretests of experimental and control groups.

Pretest	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*Df*	*t*	*f*	Sig.
Experimental group	50	22.76	1.23	48	1.56	1.12	0.12
Control group	50	23.36	1.46	48			

The *t*-value obtained from the independent samples *t*-test was 1.56, and the associated *p*-value (significance level) was 0.12. Since the *p*-value is greater than 0.05, the difference in vocabulary knowledge pretest scores between the experimental and control groups was not statistically significant.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the experimental and control groups had similar levels of vocabulary knowledge before the experiment, as there was no statistically significant difference between their mean pretest scores. This finding supports the homogeneity of the groups in terms of vocabulary knowledge at the beginning of the study.

To answer the first research question (Does incorporating role-play in the instructional approach significantly impact the vocabulary learning of Iranian intermediate-level EFL learners?), the authors compared both groups' mean immediate posttest scores. **Table 3** presents the independent sample *t*-test results to compare the immediate posttest scores of the experimental and control groups' English vocabulary knowledge.

Table 3. Independent sample *t*-test for English vocabulary knowledge immediate posttests of experimental and control groups.

Immediate posttest	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	f	Sig.
Experimental group	50	27.72	2.45	48	6.25	8.89	0.000
Control group	50	24.24	1.30	48			

According to the table, the experimental group had a mean immediate posttest score of 27.72, with a standard deviation of 2.45. On the other hand, the control group had a lower mean immediate posttest score of 24.24, with a standard deviation of 1.30. The degrees of freedom for the *t*-test were 48.

The *t*-value obtained from the independent samples *t*-test was 6.25, and the associated *p*-value (significance level) was 0.000. Since the *p*-value is less than 0.05, the difference in vocabulary knowledge and immediate posttest scores between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the participants who practiced role-play (experimental group) demonstrated significantly higher vocabulary learning levels than those who were taught through conventional methods (control group). Role-play as a teaching approach positively and significantly impacted the participants' vocabulary acquisition, as evidenced by the higher immediate posttest scores in the experimental group.

To answer the second research question (To what extent does role-play influence the long-term vocabulary retention among Iranian intermediate-level EFL learners?), mean delayed posttest scores of both groups were compared. **Table 4** presents the independent samples' *t*-test results to compare the experimental and control groups' English vocabulary knowledge delayed posttest scores.

Table 4. Independent sample *t*-test for English vocabulary knowledge delayed posttests of experimental and control groups.

Delayed posttest	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	f	Sig.
Experimental group	50	27.52	2.32	48	8.52	4.41	0.000
Control group	50	21.16	2.21	48			

According to **Table 4**, the experimental group had a higher mean delayed posttest score of 27.52, with a standard deviation of 2.32. In contrast, the control group had a lower mean delayed posttest score of 21.16, with a standard deviation of 2.21. The degrees of freedom for the *t*-test were 48.

The *t*-value obtained from the independent samples *t*-test was 8.52, and the associated *p*-value (significance level) was 0.000. Since the *p*-value is less than 0.05, the difference in vocabulary knowledge delayed posttest scores between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that teaching vocabulary through role-play (experimental group) significantly impacted vocabulary retention compared to traditional vocabulary teaching methods (control group). The experimental group participants showed higher vocabulary retention levels, as evidenced by their higher mean delayed posttest scores. This finding supports the effectiveness of role-play in enhancing long-term vocabulary retention among Iranian intermediate-level EFL learners.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine role-play's impact on vocabulary learning and retention in Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The findings revealed a significant difference in learner performance between the experimental and control groups, indicating that role-play positively affected vocabulary learning. This finding aligns with previous studies by Alabsi (2016), Mandasari (2017), and Selvakumar et al. (2022), which also demonstrated the positive impact of role-play on vocabulary learning in EFL contexts. One possible explanation for this finding is that role-play enhances learners' noticing and attention to vocabulary during the learning process. Additionally, learners' active participation in role-play activities

may contribute to creating mental connections between vocabulary items, as Sinhaneti and Kalayar Kyaw (2012) suggested.

It is also important to consider the role of vocabulary learning strategies as a potential moderator in the influence of role-play. Although this study did not specifically focus on vocabulary learning strategies, research by Sinhaneti and Kalayar Kyaw (2012) suggests that many EFL learners, including those in Iran, continue to rely on traditional strategies like mechanical drills and rote memorization. For example, according to the study conducted by Samian and Tavakoli (2012), Iranian EFL learners tended to rely more heavily on mechanical drills and repetitive rote memorization strategies than other memory strategies. Therefore, the positive results observed in this study and similar studies within similar contexts may not necessarily lead to immediate changes in learners' behavior. However, changes in learners' motivations, such as studying abroad or pursuing practical language use, may eventually influence their vocabulary learning strategies (Ha, 2022).

Regarding the second research question on the effect of role-play on long-term vocabulary retention, the study's findings confirmed that role-play contributes to improved long-term retention. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Özedmir (2015) on young learners' vocabulary retention. The benefits of role-play in enhancing retention may be attributed to the cognitive challenges and problem-solving skills involved (Halpern and Hakel, 2003) and the active learning nature of role-play activities. Active learning encourages learners to make meaningful connections between their prior experiences, current content, and new vocabulary, leading to better retention (Lajooee and Barimani, 2013; Mayer, 2004). Learners' positive attitudes toward role-play may also contribute to better retention outcomes.

Overall, the findings support the effectiveness of role-play as a strategy for improving vocabulary learning and retention in the context of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Role-play's active and engaging nature, combined with learners' cognitive processes and positive attitudes, can contribute to more effective vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention.

6. Conclusion

In the current study, the effectiveness of role-play was compared to the traditional grammar translation method (GTM) and vocabulary list memorization for both short-term and long-term vocabulary retention. The results indicated that learners who engaged in role-play outperformed those who used traditional methods on immediate and delayed posttests.

Incorporating role-play into the classroom enhanced language production and provided a more engaging and enjoyable learning experience (Dorathy and Mahalakshmi, 2011). Role-play can be an ongoing part of the class, allowing continuous language practice and expanding the classroom world to include real-world scenarios (Dorathy and Mahalakshmi, 2011). This approach can also benefit quieter students by allowing them to express themselves more openly. When actively involved in assuming roles, learners become more motivated and enthusiastic about the language learning process (Bender, 2005). Engaging learning materials that incorporate role-play can enhance student participation, collaboration, and enjoyment of the learning experience.

Furthermore, role-play can create a safe environment for students to practice their English, particularly for those who plan to travel to English-speaking countries (F. Liu and Ding, 2009). By simulating real-life situations, students can develop practical language skills and benefit from realistic practice. By designing role-play scenarios that simulate real-life situations, learners are exposed to

language and communication patterns they are likely to encounter outside the classroom, making their learning experiences more relevant and practical (Har, 2013).

In addition, role-play activities facilitate the integration of various language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Learning materials incorporating role-play can provide learners opportunities to practice and develop these skills simultaneously, promoting holistic language learning and communication competence (Yen et al., 2015). Role-play encourages learners to produce language in meaningful and authentic ways. Learning materials designed for role-play can include prompts, dialogue examples, and language resources that prompt learners to communicate using target vocabulary, grammar structures, and functional language in natural contexts (Har, 2013). This notion promotes the production of authentic language expressions and improves learners' communicative abilities.

Chan (2012) says that role-play promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Learning materials that incorporate role-play can include scenarios that require learners to analyze situations, make decisions, negotiate, and solve problems within the context of their roles. This action helps develop learners' cognitive abilities and enhances their ability to think critically and creatively in the target language.

Finally, role-play can expose learners to different cultures, perspectives, and social dynamics. Learning materials incorporating role-play can include scenarios requiring learners to adopt roles and perspectives different from their own, fostering cultural awareness, empathy, and intercultural communication skills (Murtazina et al., 2022).

However, it is important to note that previous research has emphasized combining multiple vocabulary learning strategies for optimal learning outcomes (Wong, 2017). While role-play has shown significant benefits, it should be integrated with other effective strategies to maximize vocabulary acquisition and retention.

In conclusion, the present study highlights the effectiveness of role-play as a method for enhancing vocabulary learning and retention, surpassing traditional methods such as GTM and vocabulary list memorization. Role-play offers diverse language production opportunities, adds enjoyment to the classroom, and can facilitate real-world language practice. Nonetheless, incorporating various vocabulary learning strategies is crucial for achieving comprehensive and effective language learning outcomes.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, BB and AS; methodology, RK; Software, RK; validation, RK, AS and LK; formal analysis, BB and RK; investigation, RK and TAD; resources, BB and LK; data curation, RK, AS, and TAD; writing—original draft preparation, LK; writing—review & editing, RK; visualization, TAD; supervision, RK; project administration, BB and RK. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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