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**EVALUATING THE ROLE OF ROLE-PLAY AND SIMULATION IN
DEVELOPING ESP SPEAKING COMPETENCE**

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Abstract: In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly for students in technical and professional fields, the development of oral communication skills remains a significant pedagogical challenge. Traditional ESP instruction often relies heavily on grammar-based and translation-focused methods, which fail to provide learners with the necessary interactional competence required for real-life professional settings. This study explores the effectiveness of role-play and simulation activities in enhancing the speaking competence of university students studying in architecture-related programs.

Drawing on communicative language teaching principles and task-based learning theory, the study implemented a series of interactive role-play and simulation scenarios that reflected authentic architectural contexts—such as client consultations, project presentations, and technical discussions. A quasi-experimental design was applied, with pre- and post-assessments used to evaluate improvements in fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range, and communicative confidence.

The findings indicate that the integration of role-play and simulation significantly contributed to students' speaking performance, increasing their motivation, willingness to speak, and ability to handle ESP-specific tasks with greater confidence. These results suggest that incorporating such interactive strategies can effectively bridge the gap between academic English and workplace communication demands.

Keywords: ESP (English for Specific Purposes), speaking competence, role-play, simulation, communicative approach, architecture students, task-based learning

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become an essential component in tertiary education, especially for students in professional and technical disciplines such as architecture, engineering, and design. While the teaching of ESP has made strides in addressing learners' specific needs, one persistent shortcoming remains: the insufficient development of oral communicative competence. Despite students having a working knowledge of domain-specific vocabulary and grammar, many struggle to effectively use spoken English in real-life professional interactions.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP instruction should be purpose-driven and context-based, enabling learners to use language as a tool for achieving specific communicative goals in their respective fields. However, in many ESP classrooms, particularly in non-English speaking countries, teaching practices remain traditional,



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focusing on passive reception rather than active production of speech. As a result, students' ability to participate in simulations of real-world professional scenarios—such as giving presentations, engaging in client meetings, or explaining technical processes—is often underdeveloped.

Role-play and simulation have been widely recognized in communicative language teaching (CLT) as effective strategies to promote fluency, confidence, and interaction. When applied within an ESP framework, these methods can provide students with low-risk, high-engagement environments to practice professional discourse. This study investigates the role of these techniques in developing the speaking competence of architecture students, offering evidence-based insights for modernizing ESP pedagogy.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of role-play and simulation activities in improving the speaking competence of architecture students within an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) framework. Specifically, the research seeks to determine how such interactive methods influence learners' fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and confidence in handling professional oral communication tasks. The study also aims to identify whether these techniques can enhance student engagement and reduce language anxiety in speaking-focused ESP lessons.

Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental design involving two groups of second-year architecture students from a technical university. A total of 68 students participated, with one group receiving traditional ESP instruction and the other engaged in role-play and simulation-based speaking tasks over the course of eight weeks.

The instructional materials included scenario-based dialogues, project presentation simulations, client-architect negotiation role-plays, and peer feedback sessions. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to measure students' speaking performance across four key criteria: fluency, vocabulary range, pronunciation accuracy, and communicative confidence.

In addition to quantitative assessment rubrics, qualitative data were collected through student reflection journals and teacher observations. These data were thematically analyzed to identify patterns in learner attitudes, engagement levels, and perceived benefits of the intervention.

Findings / Results

The results of the study indicated a notable improvement in the speaking competence of students who participated in role-play and simulation-based ESP lessons. Compared to the control group, which followed traditional instructional methods, the experimental group showed statistically significant gains in all four assessment areas.

1. Fluency: Students demonstrated increased speech rate and fewer pauses during presentations and dialogues.

2. Vocabulary Range: Learners used a broader set of architecture-related terminology in appropriate contexts.



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3. Pronunciation Accuracy: There was a visible improvement in stress, intonation, and clarity of technical terms.

4. Communicative Confidence: Learners reported feeling more comfortable speaking in front of peers and simulating real-life situations.

Qualitative data also revealed that students found the interactive format enjoyable and motivating. Many highlighted the relevance of the role-play scenarios to their future careers, noting that such activities helped bridge the gap between classroom learning and professional practice. Furthermore, the simulation tasks encouraged collaboration, peer correction, and authentic language use—factors that contributed to sustained engagement.

These findings suggest that the incorporation of role-play and simulation in ESP instruction is not only pedagogically effective but also practically valuable for preparing architecture students for real-world communication tasks.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study affirm the pedagogical value of integrating role-play and simulation techniques in ESP instruction, particularly for students in architecture and other technical disciplines. These interactive methods proved to be effective not only in enhancing core speaking skills—such as fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation—but also in fostering communicative confidence and learner autonomy.

From a methodological perspective, role-play and simulation created a meaningful learning environment that mirrored authentic workplace communication scenarios. As a result, students were better prepared to apply language functions relevant to their future professional contexts, such as describing project designs, negotiating with clients, or participating in technical discussions.

The study implies that ESP educators should consider revising their instructional approaches to include more experiential, learner-centered speaking tasks. Additionally, curriculum developers and textbook writers may incorporate scenario-based tasks into ESP materials to support the development of oral communication competence.

Future research may explore the long-term effects of role-play and simulation in other ESP domains, such as engineering, medicine, or business, and examine how digital simulation tools can further enhance speaking instruction.

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