



Role-Playing or Retelling Stories: Which One is Preferable in the Post-Reading Stage? - Answers from Direct Stakeholders in English Classes

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Several studies have indicated the benefits of role-playing (RP) and retelling stories (RS) in English language teaching. However, almost none of them has examined the users' preferences for these techniques in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning, especially in the post-reading stage. Consequently, this current study was conducted to investigate the EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using the two techniques as post-reading activities. Besides, the stakeholders' preferences between RP and RS were examined. There were three EFL teachers and 109 students participating in this current study. The study used a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews to collect data. The results revealed that RP was useful for developing EFL students' socialization and brightening the learning atmosphere, and RS helped improve students' linguistic competencies. Nevertheless, the techniques caused much noise, were unsuitable for large and mixed-level classes and encountered students' unwillingness to participate. Besides, two-thirds of EFL teachers preferred RP more than RS. On the other hand, EFL students preferred RS to RP due to their constraints. Based on the study results, pedagogical implications have been made for better implementation of the techniques.

Keywords: direct stakeholders in English classes, post-reading stage, preferences, retelling stories, role-playing, EFL

INTRODUCTION

English is considered the most popular compulsory foreign language subject in Vietnam from primary to high school. With the rapid development of the global economy, English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning have become a trend. Therefore, the demand for students with a higher level of competence in English has been increasing. Since Vietnam implemented "doi moi," especially when becoming a

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member of ASEAN and WTO (World Trade Organization), students have been required to have better English communication skills to meet the needs of their future jobs. Remarkable policies related to the critical role of English have been promulgated to enhance positive results in teaching and learning English. Therefore, learning English has become one of the most important goals of almost all students in Vietnam (Sundkvist & Nguyen, 2020).

Furthermore, the National Foreign Language 2020 Project (official website at: <http://ngoainquocgia.moet.gov.vn>), which has been extended to 2025 (Le Phuong, 2017), aims to reform the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the national education system. In the future, all Vietnamese students are expected to communicate in a foreign language confidently, especially in English. However, in some schools in the Mekong Delta, students do not occasionally practice speaking skills because they have to focus on grammatical lessons for their exams (Pham, 2016). It is undeniable that a lack of communicative competence, mainly speaking skills, is a disadvantage. To help students acquire the knowledge they learn from the reading passages and apply it in their daily communications, EFL teachers have thought of creating an English language use environment in their classrooms.

To meet the national policy requirements on foreign languages and especially the demands of future jobs, students have to achieve specific knowledge in English and be good at four basic language skills, namely reading and listening (receptive skills) and writing and speaking (productive skills). Therefore, EFL teachers must consider strategies to integrate as many language skills into an English lesson as possible. Particularly in reading, which is a receptive skill rather than a productive skill, EFL teachers must work harder to help students comprehend the content of reading passages and use the information obtained from the reading texts in communication or productive skills (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). In other words, students have to figure out what there is in the text, understand what they are reading, and then they can transfer these contents in reading texts into their own words, combined with their own experience, to communicate with others about what they have read and learned. Consequently, after reading, students should be encouraged to practice active communication activities to enhance their skills in learning a foreign language. It is claimed that the students need to be taught general socio-cultural rules in order to be able to negotiate to mean and interact in socially appropriate ways (Fitriyah et al., 2019; Malik et al., 2021; Mohammadi & Izadpanah, 2019).

It is easily seen that EFL teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' learning through their organized activities in English reading lessons. However, with the three stages in the reading lessons, it is believed that students can achieve more information from the text. While the pre- and while-reading stages help students obtain and comprehend new information from the passage, students are expected to communicate about the issues related to the passage in the post-reading stage. Therefore, planning activities in the post-reading stages is vital to develop students' productive skills in learning English. In the post-reading stage, Akkaya and Demirel (2012) suggested that EFL teachers organize activities to help their students summarize, answer

comprehension questions about the lesson contents, combine, and evaluate what they have learned. As a result, two particular activities for the post-reading stage, including retelling stories (RS) and role-playing (RP), are often recommended for implementation in this stage of a reading lesson (Gibson et al., 2003; Krebt, 2017). Even though RS and RP are just two out of many more techniques for the post-reading stage, their values have been approved by a number of previous studies in the Vietnamese context (e.g., Lap et al., 2022; Nguyen & Le, 2020). Besides, these communicative teaching techniques have been confirmed to contribute to developing EFL students' speaking and listening skills by educators from other contexts (Gibson et al., 2003; Ruslan, 2020). Therefore, it is worth-doing to explore more insightful perspectives of different kinds of people, especially those directly participating in experiencing the impact of these two techniques on their work.

However, not much research on the EFL teachers' and students' preferences for these techniques on students' English learning has been well-explored. Rachmawaty and Hermagustiana (2015) conducted an experimental study. This study was on speaking fluency performed by six low-level students using the retelling technique. The study aimed to determine the effect of retelling on the students' speaking fluency and the strategies used by those students while retelling a story. The result revealed that their speaking fluency increased in some areas, as shown by their vocabulary and comprehension. Based on the research findings, they conclude that RS was considered a technique that can be applied to improve students' speaking fluency. In Malaysia, Mokhtar et al. (2011) studied the use of storytelling and games in EFL classrooms. The study's objective was to evaluate the influence of storytelling on foreign language speakers' communication skills. The key findings of the study were that the students made progress in vocabulary, comprehension, and story recall with each storytelling. Their ability to transfer information and use non-verbal language also developed. In his research, Duong (2014) conducted quantitative research using closed-end questions and tests to collect data from Vietnamese students. The findings of this study were some benefits of using role-play, which improved students speaking skills and provided students with speaking opportunities. Students could speak English confidently, naturally, and fluently with native English speakers or those who used English as a means of communication under any circumstances. In the Indonesian context, Ruslan (2020) determined students' perceptions of learning activities followed by students who experienced the role-play method during the classroom learning process. Data were collected using interviews with students who had carried out role-play activities. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The results showed that the use of RP could: (1) increase students' confidence to communicate with others, (2) increase student's ability to build language competence, (3) increase students' motivation, (4) help students eager to learn (5) motivate students to be active in the learning process. Thus, students' attitudes towards RP were positive.

As observed, several benefits of RS and RP have been found. However, no study has compared the students' and teachers' perceptions of using RP and RS in the post-reading stage and their preferences. According to Ferguson and Bargh (2004), one's perception and preference will lead to their effort making in doing things. As so, EFL

teachers' and students' perceptions of the techniques and their preferences need to be clarified. Therefore, this current study addressed three research questions:

1. How do EFL high school teachers perceive the advantages and challenges of role-playing and retelling stories as post-reading activities?
2. How do EFL high school students perceive the benefits and difficulties of participating in role-playing and retelling stories as post-reading activities?
3. Which post-reading activity is preferable, role-playing or retelling stories?

Literature Review

Post-Reading Stage

According to Nuttall (1996), general comprehension must be intended when intensive work during/while the reading stage is completed. At the post-reading stage, students are expected to show their viewpoints and their agreement or disagreement with the author or the characters in the text by participating in given activities. In EFL classes, teachers often ask students to show their text understanding through other skills, such as writing, listening, or speaking (Al-Jarf, 2022). However, Nuttall (1996) believed this stage is best done orally since discussion and exchanging views are essential, culminating in written work. As a result, this current study investigated the effects of two communicative techniques, RP and RS.

Role-Playing

Kenneth (2008) defined RP as the type of teaching and learning activity in which students are expected to behave in a particular context. Krebt (2017) specified RP as playing a character in fantasy or imagination to be someone else in a specific situation for a while, improvising dialogue and creating a real-world scenario. In role-plays, students learn the language and behave as if they are in real work (Akmal & Ihsan, 2018). Akmal and Ihsan (2018) also pointed out that role-play is a fundamental technique in language teaching, especially in English-speaking classes, providing learners with opportunities to practice communicating in different social contexts. Moreover, role-play urges students to speak directly in the target language to develop communicative competence.

Ruslan (2020) pointed out the benefits of the RP technique, including increasing students' confidence in communicating with others, building students' language competence, enhancing students' motivation, fostering students' eagerness to learn, and developing students' activeness in the classrooms. Therefore, it is necessary for EFL teachers to create a vibrant learning atmosphere in an English class. Moreover, RP motivates students to speak spontaneously in the target language, ultimately developing communicative competence (Akmal & Ihsan, 2018). Besides, RP helps improve students' communication skills. Cornett (1999) approved that students improve fluency in language and oral interaction skills with their body language during face-to-face communication. Iman and Angraini (2022) also highlighted that RP could help students get higher marks on proficiency tests. Besides, students become more confident and speak English naturally in society.

However, some researchers have discovered some drawbacks of RP (e.g., Al-Arishi, 1994; Patel, 2017). This technique would be unsuccessful if assigned roles did not meet learners' needs and experiences (Al-Arishi, 1994). Additionally, Al-Arishi (1994) pointed out that the audience plays a negative role since honest communication does not occur. Moreover, the lack of reality in roles assigned to learners during role-plays lowers the effectiveness of the technique (Patel, 2017).

Retelling Stories

RS is a technique in that students write, tell, or present the stories differently from their original form to improve their comprehension (Otwinska et al., 2020). Besides, students are required to read texts carefully in order to retell stories. Therefore, it is an effective tool for teachers to gain insight into how their students understand the texts. According to Gibson et al. (2003), oral language provides information and shares the meanings of a particular text. Consequently, students must practice retelling to perform well, so it is an opportunity to enhance their speaking skills.

Moreover, RS helps learners internalize information and concepts, such as vocabulary and story structure (Cavner & Bryant, 2022). Besides, RS is an active learning process that encourages students to reconstruct the content of the text (Gibson et al., 2003). When students retell stories comprehensively, they reflect on the text and distinguish between the actual words on the page and the meaning behind them (Gambrell et al., 1991). It potentially helps students to have logical thinking and know how to arrange ideas appropriately. Moreover, a retelling group provides a supportive, collaborative setting to practice verbal discourse and recall of text (Gibson et al., 2003). Besides, Nguyen and Boers (2019) stated that RS helps increase students' retention of the text contents, and it has a positive influence on language learning as it improves students' skills in rearranging information from the text they have read. According to Hidayah (2016), RS helps students improve their vocabulary, grammatical structure, and pronunciation. Unlike RP activities, students must present what they learn and understand the reading texts individually in the RS activity.

METHOD

Research Design

This current study was designed as a descriptive study followed by a convergent parallel mixed methods design, using a questionnaire (for students), focus group interviews (for students), and individual semi-structured interviews (for teachers) to collect data. Separately collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data helped provide the research team with detailed views of participants qualitatively and quantitatively (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

First, in terms of EFL student participants, 109 grade ten students participated in this current study. The students studied in the same high school in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Besides, they were learning in three different classes. The number of students

in Class 10.1 (N=39) was the highest, whereas Classes 10.2 and 10.3 had 70 students, 35 each.

Three EFL teachers (namely A, B, and C), who taught the student participants, agreed to participate in the current study. Specifically, Teacher A taught Class 10.1, Teacher B was responsible for Class 10.2, and Class 10.3 was taught by Teacher C. All three teachers were in their 30s, females, obtained bachelor's degrees in teaching EFL, and had more than ten years of teaching experience. Also, these teachers confirmed that they had been trained in using the target techniques, including RS and RP.

The research participants agreed to participate in this current study voluntarily. Besides, the participants' information was only reviewed by the research team in order to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. Additionally, there was no penalty if the participants would like to withdraw from the study.

Instruments

Questionnaire

First, the students' surveys were designed on the 5- point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, to (5) strongly agree and were divided into three main parts consisting of 50 statements items and 5 "Others" items.

The first part was about participants' background information. It included name (optional), class (optional), gender, age, years of learning English, and learning results of the previous school year. The second part was about the benefits and challenges of RP, with 25 items in total. The third part was about the benefits and challenges of RS, with 25 items total. At the end of each part, the "Others" item was added to gain more responses from the participants about the benefits and challenges of RP and RS. The questionnaire also included a question with "Or" to investigate the students' preferable activity between RS and RP.

As noticed, all questionnaire items were presented well-designed and translated into the Vietnamese version to avoid ambiguity and misunderstandings for the students. Before administering the questionnaires to the principal participants, the researchers piloted the questionnaires with 50 EFL high school students sharing the same learning context. The pilot questionnaire was conducted via Google Forms. After the pilot had completed, SPSS version 20.0 was run to check the reliability of the collected data from the pilot questionnaire. Its reliability was high to use for the official questionnaire administration ($\alpha = .96$). The pilot study participants were excluded from the official research.

Interviews

There were three focus groups for the interviews, and each group included six students out of 109 participants for the questionnaires. For the focus group interviews, the students were grouped randomly. Particularly, Group 1 included Anna, Beta, Cella, Dane, Era, and Fanta; Group 2 consisted of Grant, Hugo, Jay, Katy, Lynn, and Max; and members of Group 3 were Nancy, Oxy, Pat, Q-Skill, Star, and Tina. The researcher interviewers asked three main questions, including (1) what the benefits and challenges

when learning with RP are, (2) what the benefits and challenges when learning with RS are, and (3) which activity is preferred, RP or RS. Furthermore, the researchers asked further questions when the students' answers were unclear.

In addition to the interviews for students, the individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with three EFL high school teachers, named A, B, and C, who took responsibility for teaching the student participants. In the interviews, the interviewers mainly used the research questions to ask the teachers. Moreover, the researchers elicited more insightful answers by using further questions when needed.

Significantly, during the interviews, both interviewers and interviewees used Vietnamese as their mother tongue to help run the discussions smoothly, quickly, and comprehensively. The interviews were recorded and note-taken with the participants' permission. Then, the research team translated the scripts into English. If there was any confusion related to the interviewees' respondents, the researchers contacted them via direct phone calls and asked them to clarify their ideas.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data from students' respondents to the questionnaires, SPSS 20 was employed. First, a Scale test was used to check the reliability of the results of the questionnaires. The test results indicated that the reliability of the questionnaire was reliable enough for further analysis ($\alpha=.93$). Then, the researchers used Pair-Samples T-tests to compare the students' perceptions about the benefits and drawbacks of two techniques, RP and RS. For all analyses, differences were considered the most highly significant if $p < .05$ and vice versa.

For qualitative data analysis, the interviewing data were analyzed according to the themes, following these steps:

1. All researchers read through the transcriptions to be familiar with the data on the teachers' and students' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of the two techniques. All research team members in this stage were to ensure the inter-rater reliability of the data analysis.
2. Data related to the benefits of RP were highlighted yellow, RS were highlighted green, whereas the drawbacks of RP were coded in blue, and RS were coded in pink.
3. All excerpts of the same code were grouped.
4. The researchers categorized the codes into sub-themes, including the benefits of the techniques in students' attitudes towards English learning, the benefits of the techniques in students' improvement in language aspects, and the drawbacks of the techniques that the students and the teachers encountered during the implementation of the techniques.

For the teachers' and students' preferences, the researchers reviewed the participants' responses to the last question in the interviews for both students and teachers and the

open-ended question in the questionnaire for students, “Which one do you prefer, RP or RS?”. Then, the same answers were coded in the same color, red for RP and grey for RS for the interviewing data, and the answers were counted for the quantitative data. Next, the researchers analyzed the participants’ explanations according to two sub-themes, reasons related to students’ language proficiency and those relevant to other factors.

Procedures

The current research followed the following steps. First, the literature on teaching methods was reviewed to help the researchers learn more about the two techniques, RP and RS. Later, the researchers piloted the instruments, including the questionnaire and the interview questions. For the pilot questionnaire, the researchers asked ten high school teachers who had used the techniques in their classes to deliver the questionnaire to their students. After collecting data from the pilot participants, the researchers employed a Scale test provided by SPSS 20 to ensure the questionnaire’s reliability. Then, the interview questions were piloted. The researchers invited three EFL students and three teachers to answer the interview questions. The research team adjusted the word choice through the participants’ answers and commented to enhance the comprehensibility and intelligibility of the questions. Both pilot participants for the questionnaire and interviews would not participate in the study.

In terms of participant recruitment, the researchers sent a permission letter to the vice-principal of the researched high school to explain the aims and scope of the study and its significance in improving English teaching and learning quality. After obtaining the acceptance of the vice-principal, the research team delivered the questionnaire to the official student participants through Google Forms. Then, the researchers downloaded the survey results on Google Forms and imported them into SPSS 20. First, a Scale test was used to check the reliability of the questionnaire results. After the reliability was checked, Pair-Sample T-tests were employed to compare the benefits and drawbacks of techniques according to the student participants’ perceptions. The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with the teacher participants and three group interviews with the students after analyzing the survey data and noticing the differences between the two techniques regarding the participants’ perceptions. In addition to exploring the participants’ perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of techniques, the researchers also required the students to explain more about the distinctions occurring in the quantitative data analysis results. Finally, the data from the interviews were analyzed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

EFL Teachers’ Perceptions of Advantages and Challenges of Retelling Story and Role-Playing

According to the teachers, both techniques enhanced *EFL students’ self-confidence*. In terms of RP technique, Teachers A and B said,

“Applying to role-play would make it diverse in activities in the post-reading stage. I could also motivate my students’ learning which helped them become more active, more confident in speaking.” (A)

“I recognized that the learning atmosphere in the class had changed, which helped my students to become more active, and they worked with their friends, they became more confident. It also helped students become better at speaking in their role-play.” (B)

Especially, Teachers A and B remarked on the contributions of the retelling story technique as,

“I could help the students to be more confident in their learning.” (A)

“They have become more confident in themselves and their English as well.” (B)

According to the above excerpts, using the techniques could encourage EFL students to believe more in their speaking skills. Participating in those techniques, including RS and RP, is an excellent opportunity for EFL students to boost their speaking skills since several preceding studies have confirmed the contributions of those techniques to enhancing language learners’ speaking skills (e.g., Akmal & Ihsan, 2018; Cornett, 1999; Ruslan, 2020).

In the interviews, the teacher participants also emphasized that RS and RP could develop EFL students’ language aspects, such as speaking skills, pronunciation, and grammatical knowledge. Specifically, Teachers A and B remarked on the contributions of the techniques to improve their students’ English-speaking skills as,

“The students improved their speaking skills because they could apply the given knowledge to their speeches.” (A)

“My students improved their English-speaking skills after learning with RS technique.” (B)

Additionally, Teacher C highlighted the usefulness of the RP technique in developing EFL students’ pronunciation and grammatical knowledge as,

“I thought when the students practice with RP, and I could help my students improve their grammar and pronunciation as well.” (C)

Several previous studies have found the effectiveness of the techniques in EFL students’ language aspects, such as speaking skills and pronunciation (Duong, 2014; Praneetponkrang & Phaiboonnugulkij, 2014; Rachmawaty & Hermagustiana, 2015). Interestingly, according to Teacher C’s excerpts, it was expected to see the value of the RP technique in improving EFL students’ grammar. While several studies highlighted that incorrect grammatical production is a drawback of RP activities (e.g., Mehdiyev, 2020; Shangeetha et al., 2010); in Vietnam, examinations still have much focused-on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing evaluation (Le Ha, 2009; Phuong & Nhu, 2015). Therefore, EFL teachers might strictly require their students to pay attention to grammatical structures when performing.

Then, both techniques were perceived as valuable activities for bettering EFL students' understanding of the lessons. Regarding the RP technique, Teachers A and C shared,

“It helped my students understand lessons better.” (A)

“I thought when the students practiced with RP, and I could help my students to understand the lesson better.” (C)

Teachers A and C, who also highly evaluated the values of the retelling technique in improving EFL students' understanding of the main ideas of their lessons, said,

“With the use of RS, I could help the students to understand the main ideas of the texts better.” (A)

“I could help the students to understand the main ideas better and gave prompts which made the students easier in making their speeches more effective.” (C)

Both techniques require EFL students to comprehend the texts to produce their learning products (Koskinen et al., 1988; Kumaran, 2017). After reading and analyzing the texts, EFL students transform their reading comprehension into skits or stories. The products, therefore, reflect how they understand the main ideas of the lessons.

Even though the two techniques shared many similarities in terms of their benefits in EFL teaching and learning, they also displayed some differences. It was perceived as a helpful technique for enhancing EFL students' socialization and mutual understanding regarding the RP technique. Teachers A and C stated,

“Through working in groups/pairs, the students became more sociable, mutual understanding.” (A)

“The students also became more confident and did group/ pair work effectively. They helped the students to understand more about their partners.” (C)

Basically, RP is mainly conducted through pair or group work. According to Santiara and Abdullah (2022), students' cooperation helps the classroom become more relaxed and friendlier. In order to produce a successful skit, EFL students have to share their points of view; as a result, through a group of different shared perspectives, they understand more about their friends' characteristics, perceptions, or beliefs. Consequently, student communities are expected to be strengthened by in-depth mutual understanding among the members.

Besides, Teacher A remarked on the potential of RP to improve the classroom atmosphere,

“It also changed the learning atmosphere in the class.” (A)

Kumaran (2017) stated that people would find it fun and enjoyable to act out a role. Therefore, RP offers an enjoyable learning environment.

Moreover, according to the teacher participants' perceptions, RS was somehow perceived as a technique focusing more on language accuracy than RP. Consequently, it was beneficial for evaluating EFL students' performances. Teachers B and C said,

"I could also evaluate the students from their performances." (B)

"Using this technique eased my work on giving feedback on my students' performances." (C)

Speaking performance as a productive skill was more accessible for the teachers to clarify their students' text understanding than when their students did the reading tasks, allowing them to finish the tasks with luck (Erten, 2015; Johnston & Winograd, 1985).

In order to get more insight into the technique's implementations, not only did it discuss the benefits of the techniques, but this current research also investigated the challenges the EFL teachers had encountered when implementing the techniques in their classes. In the interviews, the teachers clarified similar drawbacks of the techniques in their English classes. First, the techniques are enjoyable; they, however, cause much noise. As a result, it negatively affects the neighboring classes. All three teachers remarked,

"When the students were discussing, they made so much noise which influenced neighboring classes." (A)

"I had to face the challenge that my students usually made noise which influenced other classes. [...] My students made so much noise when participating in activities which influenced the neighboring classes." (B)

"Although the students sometimes practiced the activity well, they made so much noise which made teachers in neighboring classes feel upset." (C)

It is agreeable that those techniques are fascinating. However, they are too noisy, that might disrupt other classes (Castro & Villafuerte, 2019; Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018).

Also, the teacher participants found applying the techniques in mixed-level classes challenging. Specifically, Teachers A and B, who employed RP unsuccessfully as weak students significantly depended on their prominent partners, stated,

"The students depended on the group's leader. And the students did not know how to apply vocabulary and structures to their speeches effectively." (A)

"Lack of English proficiency prevented my students from participating in the RP activities." (B)

Teachers A and C specified students' mixed abilities as a challenge of this technique. Specifically, it was difficult for weak students to perform well. They said,

"I worried about my students' ability because when applying to retell a story, only the best students could do well; the average and the weak students could perform the contents of the lesson in Vietnamese, not in English." (A)

“Some best students could do exercises well. The average students were still afraid of presenting their ideas although they had done it with their friends before.” (C)

There are many challenges when teaching English in mixed-level classes. For example, selecting and adapting tasks are extremely difficult (Abbott, 2019). In the researched context, large classes with varying levels have been considered one of the most common challenges for EFL teachers to implement their teaching techniques effectively (Hung, 2021).

Student-related factors, including students’ fear of making mistakes, self-confidence, lack of lexicon knowledge, and learning attitudes, were significant factors hindering EFL students’ engagement in these techniques. Specifically, Teachers A and C mentioned students’ fear of making mistakes as,

“The students were afraid of making mistakes. They were still shy and were afraid of being laughed at by their peers. [...] When my students’ performances were not effective, they were afraid of making more mistakes in their speeches. Therefore, they could not express all their ideas about the text.” (A)

“My students did not want to make mistakes in their speeches when performing in front of others.” (C)

Fear of making mistakes is one of the common barriers in English learning and teaching. Several previous studies have been on this issue (e.g., Al Nakhalah, 2016; Hamouda, 2013; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Teachers B and C shared the same concerns about students’ lack of confidence when using the techniques. They said,

“Most of them were afraid of presenting in front of their friends because of their lack of self-confidence in their pronunciation and speaking skills.” (B)

“The students lacked confidence. They were afraid of participating and presenting in front of the class.” (C)

It was similar to the study by Akbari and Sahibzada (2020), which indicated that a lack of self-confidence strongly affected their responses to English lessons. EFL students, those without self-confidence, tend to sit still in their seats and refuse to participate in speaking activities.

Additionally, it seems too difficult for EFL students to participate in the activities like RP and RS without a good range of lexicon knowledge. Teacher B, who highlighted the role of lexicon knowledge in students’ participation, said,

“My students could not apply vocabulary into their speeches, so their performances were not effective.” (B)

Khan et al. (2018) highlighted the role of lexicon knowledge in EFL students' participation in speaking activities. Lacking lexicon knowledge might prevent the students from engaging in the activities.

Finally, the teacher participants remarked on the influence of students' learning attitudes on the technique effectiveness. Teachers A and B said,

“The first factor is the learning attitude of the students. They were well aware of the topics, but they did not want to share their ideas.” (A)

“Some students are so lazy, and they refuse to participate in the activities.” (B)

Among various factors affecting students' English learning, their learning attitudes towards a particular teaching and learning technique is the key (Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013; Le & Le, 2022). The query of whether EFL students want to engage in the activities or not strongly affects the outcomes of the activities. Without motivation to participate in the activities, observing the positive results after teachers employ them is nearly impossible.

In summary, according to the EFL teachers, both techniques were expected to enhance EFL students' confidence, English-speaking skills, and comprehension of the text contents. Besides, RP was recommended to develop EFL students' socialization and mutual understanding and brighten the classroom atmosphere, whereas RS showed its potential in contributing to their development of language. On the other hand, there were three principal challenges that they encountered in their implementation of the techniques, including making too much noise, dealing with large and mixed-level classes, and student-related factors, consisting of students' attitudes, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, lack of lexicon knowledge.

EFL Students' Perceptions of Benefits and Difficulties of Retelling Story and Role-Playing

For quantitative data, a Pair-Sample T-test was run to check whether the students' perceptions of the benefits of RP and RS as post-reading activities were significantly different. Table 1 illustrates the test results.

Table 1
Comparison between students' perceptions of the benefits of RP and RS

Benefits		Mean	SD	t	p
Help understand the text details	RP	4.46	.69	-.74	.46
	RS	4.50	.73		
Help gain main ideas in the texts	RP	4.29	.71	-.23	.82
	RS	4.31	.74		
Help improve reading skills	RP	4.41	.74	-.37	.71
	RS	4.44	.69		
Help improve grammatical knowledge	RP	4.17	.90	-.69	.49
	RS	4.23	.77		
Help brainstorm ideas before speaking	RP	4.06	.84	-.28	.78
	RS	4.08	.96		
Help speak more fluently and naturally	RP	3.94	1.03	-	.05
	RS	4.12	.90		
Help increase self-confidence in speaking	RP	4.45	.74	2.61	.01
	RS	4.22	.98		
Help stimulate to speak in class	RP	4.33	.78	2.03	.05
	RS	4.15	.84		
Help become more active in class	RP	3.68	1.17	-	.00
	RS	4.21	.73		
Help understand the values of peer-feedback	RP	4.20	.89	.53	.60
	RS	4.16	.82		
Help identify the mistakes in peers' speeches	RP	4.21	.85	.87	.39
	RS	4.14	.96		
Help classify the mistakes in peers' speeches	RP	4.22	.79	1.34	.18
	RS	4.10	.86		
Help enhance motivation for English reading	RP	4.20	.78	-.97	.34
	RS	4.28	.78		
Help improve lexicon knowledge	RP	4.24	.73	-.34	.73
	RS	4.27	.84		
Help prepare an outline with grammatical sentences	RP	4.08	.86	.45	.65
	RS	4.05	.93		
Help increase willingness to use English rather than mother tongue	RP	4.01	1.01	1.48	.14
	RS	3.86	1.13		
Help reflect ideas, feelings and thoughts with confidence	RP	4.14	.87	-	.23
	RS	4.22	.77		
Help check understanding of the texts	RP	4.39	.73	1.01	.31
	RS	4.30	.83		
Help produce coherent and cohesive conversations	RP	4.24	.76	-.23	.82
	RS	4.26	.87		
Overall	RP	4.20	.56	-.37	.72
	RS	4.21	.60		

In general, the students were perceived to benefit from learning with these techniques at the same level (MRP=4.20; MRS=4.21; p=.72). However, there were some differences between the students' perceptions of the specific strengths of the two techniques.

Specifically, RP helped increase the students' self-confidence in English-speaking (MRP=4.45; MRS=4.22; $p=.01$) and stimulate them to speak English in class (MRP=4.33; MRS=4.15; $p=.05$) more than RS could do. Otherwise, RS helped the students speak more fluently and naturally (MRP=3.94; MRS=4.12; $p=.05$) and become more active in class (MRP=3.68; MRS=4.21; $p=.00$) than applying RP to practice in the post-reading stage.

In the interviews, the students also explained the reasons for these differences. First, using RP could build up their self-confidence. Anna and Jay said,

“Honestly, I used to be confused about whether I could act out or not. However, I realized I could do it well after participating in the RP activities. I was confident in my acting abilities now.” (Anna)

“Doing role-plays helped improve my self-confidence because when I have practice for times, I became more used to it. Therefore, I am more confident than before.” (Jay)

It was similar to what Maarof (2018) indicated that role-play could foster students' self-confidence. Fear of standing and speaking in front of other people prevents EFL students from participating in the activities. However, after overcoming the aforementioned fear, EFL students gain a chance to discover more about themselves and their potential. Therefore, EFL teachers need to encourage their students to take a trial without any fear of failure in order to implement a particular instructional strategy.

Second, even though they were not good at English, they could use English without fearing grammatical mistakes because they could use body language to act out their characters. Lynn and Q-Skill stated,

“I am not good at English. However, when doing role-plays, I could use my body language to perform and help my friends understand what I want to say.” (Lynn)

“I was not afraid of making grammatical mistakes during my performances because I could use my body to act out the messages I want to deliver.” (Q-Skill)

In communication, Azeez and Azeez (2007) highlighted the importance of body language, including gestures, facial expressions, and gaze behaviors. In a communicative learning activity like RP, nonverbal language is more essential than verbal in some situations. Therefore, EFL students who can use their body language effectively are highly perceived to have successful characters in their skits.

Moreover, RS seemed to be easier for the students to perform. Therefore, they felt more comfortable and became more active than RP. Max and Tina shared,

“Honestly, RP is tough for me. Therefore, I was always afraid that my teachers organized that activity. However, RS is a bit simpler.” (Max)

“I am more interested in RS than RP because I cannot perform well in the plays. It is too difficult for my friends and me.” (Tina)

As noted in the study by Khoshshima and Shokri (2017), motivation occurs only when the task's difficulty does not surpass one's capacities. Therefore, students tend to give up on challenging tasks and prefer simpler ones. In this current case, it was agreed that RP seemed to be more challenging than RS. It might satisfy those with high English proficiency, but those with lower competence in English would find it a bit outweighing.

Besides, RS did not distract them from speaking by acting or moving. As a result, they mainly focused on the scripts or their stories to speak fluently and naturally. Cella and Hugo remarked,

“I could prepare for my speeches better in RS since I did not need to remember the movements.” (Cella)

“It was complicated when I had to remember my talking turns and actions in doing role-plays while RS did not require me to move.” (Hugo)

Several studies indicated that incorrect grammatical production is a drawback of RP activities (e.g., Mehdiyev, 2020; Shangeetha et al., 2010). As a consequence, it was understandable to find out that EFL students paid more attention to grammatical structures when RS than doing RP.

Another Pair-Sample T-test was used to examine whether there was any significant difference between the students' perceptions of the challenges of RP and RS as post-reading activities. Table 2 displays the test results.

Table 2

Comparison between students' perceptions of the difficulties of RP and RS

Difficulties		Mean	SD	t	p
Face challenge in giving feedback	RP	4.12	.97	-.98	.33
	RS	4.22	.83		
Face challenge in working with an inactive partner	RP	4.25	.93	-.36	.72
	RS	4.28	.88		
Face challenge in determining partner's mistakes	RP	3.97	1.01	-2.50	.01
	RS	4.23	.86		
Face challenge in receiving harsh feedback	RP	4.28	.84	-.65	.52
	RS	4.35	.80		
Lack vocabulary to well perform	RP	4.44	.74	.60	.55
	RS	4.39	.77		
Feel shy	RP	4.23	.89	-1.13	.26
	RS	4.32	.87		
Overall	RP	4.22	.60	-1.55	.12
	RS	4.30	.58		

The test results showed that the students found it challenging when learning with both RP and RS techniques in the post-reading stage at the same level ($p=.12$). However, it was easier for the students to determine their friends' mistakes when doing role-plays than RS (MRP=3.97; MRS=4.23; $p=.01$).

According to the students, doing role-play distracted them from accuracy focus. As a result, they made more mistakes in pronunciation and grammar. Star and Dane shared,

“We did not need to focus much on grammar or pronunciation in RP because the most important thing in this activity was the content. Therefore, we might make mistakes.” (Star)

“In RS, I paid more attention to grammar and pronunciation than when I did role-plays. Moreover, the performances seemed to be not affected much because of these mistakes in RP, I guess.” (Dane)

In RP activities, the students could pay more attention to the content of their skits and ignore other language aspects, such as pronunciation or grammar. Consequently, making mistakes was unavoidable but acceptable. On the other hand, RS allowed the students to focus more on their scripts without movements. Therefore, they might make fewer mistakes. In short, RS was expected to suit students with low English language proficiency, while RP was perceived to be effective for those who focus on communication functions.

EFL Teachers’ and Students’ Preferable Post-Reading Activity: Role-Playing or Retelling Stories

Regarding the teachers’ preferred post-reading activity between RP and RS, while Teachers B and C preferred RP over RS, Teacher A favored RS.

According to Teacher A, although the RS activity was rather strenuous than RP for the students to practice, it helped them learn logically and increase critical thinking. Besides focusing much more on the accuracy, the criteria for evaluating EFL students’ products seemed more apparent for teachers’ evaluation. Teacher A said,

“In my opinion, I like to retell a story; although the retelling story is difficult for students to practice, the atmosphere in the class is not as active as the one in role-play. I like to retell the story because it helps me evaluate students’ abilities more easily so that I can clarify students to teach them.” (A)

On the other hand, Teachers B and C liked RP because they could help the students to improve their communication and speaking skills. They stated,

“I like to role-play more than retelling a story because, with this activity, I could help the students practice communicative and speaking skills. This activity was easy to practice, and students also liked role-playing.” (B)

“I recognized that role play was better because it helped the students to have interaction with each other; the students could correct mistakes and learn to experience each other.” (C)

Two-thirds of EFL teacher participants preferred RP more than RS, and the main reason was the difficulty level of the two techniques. On the other hand, the EFL students were likely to be satisfied with RS since 65 student participants selected this technique in the questionnaires; 44 others chose the RP technique. In the interviews, the students,

especially those with adequate English proficiency, were likely to retell stories instead of doing role-plays. Era and Max stated,

“I like RS more than doing role-plays because my English is not good at all. I am afraid that my friends will not understand my words...” (Era)

“I do not want to do role-plays. My English is not good, so that it will affect the performance of other members. They will get bad results due to my weaknesses. I do not want to do that.” (Max)

The students with higher English proficiency, distinction, and high distinction, would like to do both. However, most of them proposed that they had chosen RS as their preferable activity. Grant and Oxy explained,

“Even though my English is not bad, I think I am more confident when RS than doing role-plays.” (Grant)

“It is much more difficult when working in a group because there are many ideas, and sometimes we cannot agree. It makes me feel very tired. That is why I want to retell stories rather than do role-plays.” (Oxy)

According to the above excerpts, self-confidence and teamwork skills are the main factors leading to the students' decisions. Self-confidence was also comprehensively displayed in the previous discussions. Therefore, the researchers mainly focused on the team working skills in this discussion. In Vietnam, skill development, including team working skills, for students to help them possess a better potential for competition upon graduation has not received sufficient attention (Trung & Swierczek, 2009). Therefore, the EFL students seemed unable to work in their groups effectively, failed to support the weak ones, and failed to assign efficient roles for each member based on their capacities.

Both techniques have their strengths and weaknesses, and that makes the difference between what teachers and students like about them. However, many studies have shown that the English proficiency of most Vietnamese students is not high (e.g., Doan & Hamid, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021). As a result, the difficulty level of RS, arguably easier, gets more likes than RP receives.

CONCLUSION

The study was conducted as a mixed-method approach to investigate high school teachers' and students' perceptions of the benefits and difficulties of implementing RP and RS as post-reading activities. Moreover, the study aimed to check which was preferable, RP or RS. The results showed that the teachers believed in the potential of the two techniques to enhance students' confidence, English-speaking skills, and abilities to comprehend the given texts. The two techniques also showed their uniqueness. While RP was considered by the teachers a helpful technique for developing EFL students' socialization and brightening the learning atmosphere, RS helped improve students' linguistic competencies. Nevertheless, according to the teachers, both techniques displayed shortcomings, such as noise, unsuitability with large and mixed-level classes, and students' reluctance to participate in the activities.

Regarding the student participants, both RP and RS contributed to developing their language skills and self-confidence. For the last research question, EFL teachers preferred RP activities to RS because doing role-plays could enhance students' communicative competencies. Otherwise, EFL students were more likely to engage in RS activities than doing role-plays since they were not much confident in their English proficiency and avoided negatively affecting their friends' performance.

From the findings of the study, there are some implications for pedagogy and administration. EFL teachers are advised to consider before applying RP and RS as post-reading activities in their teaching because not only do they bring benefits, but they also have some shortcomings. Firstly, EFL teachers are recommended to do diagnostic tests at the beginning of the course to measure their students' language proficiency. RS would be more suitable for those with low-level English proficiency, whereas RP could be applied to high-proficiency classes. Also, to implement RP activities successfully, EFL teachers should train their students to work in groups, assign roles to each member, and support weak ones but not slow the strong ones down.

Consequently, EFL teachers also need sufficient support from school administrators and policymakers. They need training on developing their students' skills, especially the necessary skills for their future. Moreover, EFL high school students are advised to prepare for new lessons before class. They should be active in participating in RP or RS activities. Whenever they have difficulties, they should ask teachers for help immediately. Finally, the administrators and policymakers need to provide adequate and appropriate training workshops to EFL high school teachers in relation to applying RP and RS as post-reading activities in high schools.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This current study investigated EFL teachers' and high school students' perceptions of RP and RS as post-reading activities. The research has reached its purpose. However, there were certain limitations. Firstly, this study was conducted with only tenth graders at a public high school in the Mekong Delta. Therefore, the result could not be generalized to all EFL high school students in Vietnam. Secondly, time constraints prevented the researchers from contacting many teachers from different public high schools in the Mekong Delta to participate in this study. There were only semi-structured interviews to get the EFL teachers' insights about RP and RS activities because only three EFL teachers at this public high school taught these grade 10 classes. Finally, the study results are based on self-reported information from the teachers and the students who participated in the research. There were no observations or teaching log analyses to triangulate the self-reported data.

Further research in this field is advised to conduct with more EFL high school students in grades 10, 11, and 12 in both public high schools and high schools for the gifted to give a complete picture of EFL high school students' perceptions of advantages and challenges of RP and RS as post-reading activities. Then, further research in this field should be carried out with as many EFL high school teachers in the Mekong Delta as possible. Therefore, it would generalize the participants' perceptions about RP and RS

activities. This descriptive study only measured EFL high school teachers' and students' perceptions about applying RP and RS as post-reading activities. Therefore, further studies are recommended to employ experiments to measure the results and the quality of EFL teaching and learning. Finally, this research investigated the advantages and challenges of RP and RS, so further research should explore the strategies that EFL high school teachers and students can use to overcome the difficulties when they apply these two activities in their teaching and learning.

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