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**Poseban otisak (separat)**

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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING METHODS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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*Abstract*

The aim of this study is to analyses and evaluates different methods in learning English as a foreign language. Effective teaching combines a number of methods (individual work, pair work, group work, role playing/simulation) so that the experience of the student is varied and the different learning styles of students can be catered for. The article seeks to answer the question which is the most effective method that enables students to make use of the English knowledge appropriately in actual communication. In order to do that, the students were given a questionnaire to explore their opinion about the effectiveness of learning methods.

The research was carried out among the full time students who have been attending the courses of English as a foreign language at the University of Pula. The author concludes that the students find role play/simulation method as a most creative and successful method of studying language.

**Key words**: *English as a foreign language, individual work, pair work, group work, role play/simulation*

## Introduction

The way that class of foreign language is organized, can have a great influence on students motivation to learn that same language. For example, if the tasks preformed during the class are uninteresting or difficult, students will be less motivated to complete them. Uncreative and badly conceive task can have negative affection on student interest and intention for realization of his task. On the other hand, if students perceive tasks as interesting, that can influence on their motivation and willing to complete them.

In order to organize the class that will be perceived by students as interesting and creative, teachers use different learning methods. Some of the most common are: individual work, pair work, group work and role playing/simulation. This paper describes each method and examines its benefits.

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## Individual work

Individual work is necessary to hone the skills of the student and ensure that they address weaknesses, learn rules and definitions for later use and prepare for exams.

For many students, individual work is getting through an exercise without making too many mistakes. Some talented individuals will absorb the ideas and others will flounder. The task of the teachers is to support individual work effectively both in the classroom and when the student is completing homework.

## Pair work

Pair work is one of the most successful ways of getting students to use the new language they have been taught. It is a very important method in every foreign language lesson because it gives students a chance to practice language. Some students love talking to professors, doing role plays and performing, and other, less confident, students benefit enormously from the less intimidating aspect of pair and group work.

Van Ments (1990) define a pair work as an activity that gives pupils a chance to talk to each other. It is popular with students and having a range of games and conversations for students to try will help lessons be productive and lively. Research shows that students remember only 20% of what they hear, 70% of what they themselves say and 90% of what they do and say, e.g. pair work/role play (Joyce, Weil, Showers, 1992).

## Group Work

Group work promotes discussion and interaction. Students can learn from one another and develop the skill of expressing their opinions among each other. According to Scarcella and Crookall (1990) working in a group means cooperating in finding solution for specific problem.

Managing group work effectively is probably one of the most important aspects of teaching foreign language. The tasks have to be designed in a way that ensures that all students are involved and that one talented or forceful individual does not do all the work. It is also important to avoid failing groups and to encourage reticent individuals to get involved.

To establish good group work it is necessary to use it often so that students are used to doing it. Jones (1988) states that it is good practice to establish base groups which are then used regularly. These are established groups of three or maybe four students which have been selected soon after the beginning of term. These

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groups should mix in every way - by ability, gender and ethnicity. These way students know immediately what is expected of them.
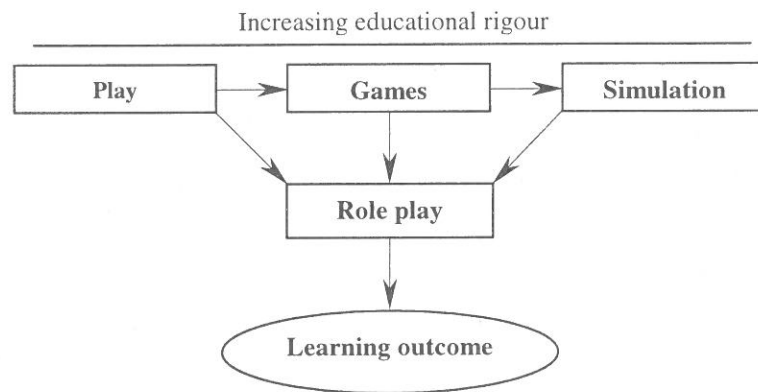
On other occasions students can be grouped according to their ability to complete extension work and support slower learners (Jones, 1988).

When working in groups, it is important to ensure that each member has a definite role. For example, each group will need a note taker and a chair to ensure that all members contribute. Tasks have to be designed so that they cannot be done by individuals.

## Role Play

Role play has been in existence, long before we even gave it a name. Shakespeare affirmed that "one man in his time plays many part". Wordsworth too talked of the child as 'The Little Actor' who "fits his tongue to dialogues of business, love or strife" In our daily social encounters, we put on varied roles to fit the contexts. In the language class, role play is an imaginative enactment, where learners assume a part (either their own or somebody else's) when they take on a role, either prepared or impromptu. It is a product of play, games and simulation. According to Bambrough (1994) in education role play may be seen as an interaction between these three components – either in combination or by themselves – and the student who performs the activity, resulting in learning outcomes (Figure 1). It is suggested in this model that there is progressively increasing intellectual rigour involved as you move from play to games to simulations. Again, in this model, all aspects of role play are derived from play. Since the initiation and design of role play is driven by the teacher, play takes on an educational function. Some types of role play use techniques derived from drama, which may be adapted for use in teaching science. Role play, therefore, is a product of the use of drama, games and simulations.

Figure 1. *Role play as a medium of interactive/experential learning.*

Increasing educational rigour

| Play | Games | Simulation |

Role play

Learning outcome

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There is little consensus on the terms used in the role playing and simulation literature. Just a few of the terms which are used, often interchangeably, are simulation, game, role-play, simulation-game, role-play/simulation, and role-playing game (Crookall and Oxford, 1990a). There does seem to be some agreement, however, that simulation is a broader concept than role playing. Ladousse (2004), for example, views simulations as complex, lengthy and relatively inflexible, but role playing as quite simple, brief and flexible. Simulations simulate real life situations, while in role playing the participant is representing and experiencing some character type known in everyday life (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992). Simulations always include an element of role play (Ladousse, 1987).

In this research we focused on effectiveness of learning methods in teaching English as a foreign language. The present study has two aims:

a)  The first aim is to investigate the students opinion about the usefulness of learning methods used in the class of English as a foreign language.

b)  The second aim is to explore if there is a difference between the answers of students studying different studies: technical and economical.

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## Method

A total of 140 English learners took part in this exploratory study. The research included 73 freshmen students majoring in tourism, marketing, and finance at the Department of Economics and Tourism and 67 students studying at Politechnics in Pula. All the subjects learned English as a foreign language as a compulsory university course. They were full time students attending lectures in English four hours per week.

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## Procedure

The instrument used in this research is a questionnaire developed by Kostić-Bobanović (2009). The students were given questionnaire to explore (from 1-not effective at all to 5-very effective) their opinion about usefulness of four learning methods: individual work, pair work, group work and role play/simulation. They were also asked to explain why they found the chosen method the most effective. Participation was voluntary and took place during regular class time. Instrument was completed with no personal identification (except sex and code) to insure anonymity and increase the probability of honest responses. The measure was a self-report scale that was translated from English to Croatian and back translated to insure accuracy.

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## Data analysis

The results from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

## Results and discussion

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the communicative wave has swept across the language teaching world. There has been growing emphasis on communication, in which tasks focus on meaning more than form. Learning for communicative competence– the ability to use language appropriately has gained prominence instead of linguistic competence of knowing grammatical rules. Language proficiency includes not only knowledge of phonology, syntax, vocabulary and semantics but the ability to make use of this knowledge appropriately in actual communication (Canale and Swain, 2000). In the intimate relationship between communicative competence and oral activities, language is the invariable by-product, covertly acquired and implicitly facilitated. Both proficient and less proficient learners are engaged in negotiating meaning through verification, explanation and clarification to achieve the common group goal. They strive to comprehend and be comprehended by applying the relevant language functions in natural, real-life language befitting the speech community. During the English lessons students learn to apply communication skills and methods for overcoming barriers to communication. The results of research are shown in the Graph 1.

Graph 1. *The importance of different learning methods in teaching foreign language*

**learning methods**
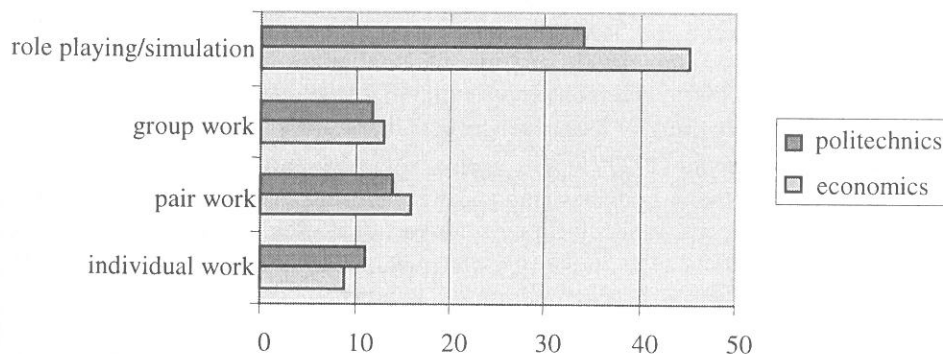


According to the results presented in the Graph 1 there are no statistically significant difference between the answers of the students who are attending technical studies and those who are studying economics.

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Students from the both groups find role playing/simulation as the most beneficial method of learning, while the individual work is perceived as the least beneficial method. Role playing/simulation was shown as extremely valuable method for learning foreign language. It encourages thinking and creativity, lets students develop and practice new language and behavioral skills in a relatively no threatening setting, and can create the motivation and involvement necessary for learning to occur.

Our results are similar to the results of the research done by Jones (1982). In his study the author states that role playing/simulation as an effective learning method clearly promotes interpersonal relations and social transactions among participants. To fulfill their role responsibilities, students must relate to others in the simulation, utilizing effective social skills. It provides the opportunity for students to develop and revise their understanding and perspectives by exploring thoughts and feelings of characters in given situations. Scarcella and Crookall (1990), in their research also define simulation as one of the most successful way of facilitating second/foreign language acquisition. Students have the opportunity to try out new behaviors in a safe environment, which helps them develop long term motivation to master an additional language. In addition to encouraging genuine communication, active involvement, and a positive attitude, the simulated real life problems help students develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. Skehan (1988b) states that the role play or similar creative, imaginative activities will stimulate students to use their imagination and challenge them to think and speak as well. The role playing/simulation method meets author four criteria for task-based instruction: meaning is primary; there is a goal which needs to be worked towards; the activity is outcome-evaluated; there is a real-world relationship. Traditionally, learner roles have been specifically defined in the role playing/simulation method, either through verbal instructions or role cards. The activities in class, therefore, do not focus on language itself, but on the goals and activities that may be defined by the teacher. Such simulations can be applied to teaching language in many areas, such as technical English (Hutchinson and Sawyer-Laucanno, 1990), business and industry (Brammer and Sawyer-Laucanno, 1990), and international relations (Crookall, 1990). Indeed, Pennington (1990) even includes role playing/simulation as part of a professional development program for language teachers themselves.

However, Kaplan (1997) argues against role plays/simulations that focus solely on prescriptive themes emphasizing specific fields of vocabulary, as they do not capture the spontaneous, real-life flow of conversation. Slavin (2001) suggests the useful model for learner roles in the role playing/simulation method, which is Scarcella and Oxford's (1992) "tapestry approach." Learners, according to this approach, should be active and have considerable control over their own learning. The students should help select themes and tasks and provide teachers with details of their learning process. The teacher may take a role, becoming an active participant in promoting independent thinking and co-operative learning. He defines the general structure of the role play, but generally does not actively participate once the structure is set. According to Burns and Gentry (1988), the teacher must take on some additional

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responsibilities in role playing/simulation. In particular, he must keep learners motivated by stimulating their curiosity and keeping the material relevant, creating a tension to learn. Again, this is consistent with Scarcella and Oxford's (1992) principles. Rather than a traditional, teacher-centered classroom structure, the teacher keeps a relatively low profile and students are free to interact with each other spontaneously. This reduces student anxiety and facilitates learning.

## Conclusion

The results of our study show that both groups of students define role play-/simulation as the most effective method of learning English as a foreign language. There are no statistically significant difference between the answers of the students who are attending technical studies and those who are studying economics.

Our students believe that role play/simulation will help them to develop empathy as they examine other's ideas, feelings and points of view. Using this method will help them to develop their oral expression and interpretation skills as they use language to describe perceptions, emotions, and reactions. According to their opinion, another benefit of role play/simulation is in practicing decision-making and problem-solving so that they will gain experience in independent thinking and co-operative learning, speaking and listening abilities. Role play/simulation is learning method, known to generate a lot of fun, excitement, joy and laughter in the language class. It is reasonable to expect that students will be more active during the class by using all methods that they described as interesting and beneficial.

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## UČINKOVITOST METODA POUČAVANJA STRANIH JEZIKA

*Sažetak*

Cilj ovog istraživanja je analizirati različite metode učenja engleskoga kao stranog jezika te pronaći najučinkovitiju metodu poučavanja koja studentima omogućuje primjenu stečenog znanja u stvarnoj komunikaciji. Za uspješno poučavanje potrebno je kombinirati različite metode (individualni rad, rad u paru, grupni rad, simulacije). Izradili smo upitnik sa svrhom da se ustanovi mišljenje studenata o korisnosti pojedinih metoda.

Istraživanje je provedeno među redovnim studentima Sveučilišta u Puli. Na temelju dobivenih rezultata autorica zaključuje da studenti smatraju "role play"-/metoda simulacije najkreativnijom i najučinkovitijom metodom poučavanja stranih jezika.

**Ključne riječi:** *engleski kao strani jezik, individualni rad, rad u paru, grupni rad, "role play"/metoda simulacije*

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