





Liset Sulay Rodriguez Baca, Julia Lizet Torres Rivera, Hernando Díaz Andía, Mitchell Alberto Alarcón-Díaz. (2020). Role play: quasi-experiment for the development of social skills. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)*, 12(1): 496-502.  
DOI: 10.9756/INT-JECSE/V12I1.201030

**Received: 26.02.2020 Accepted: 13.05.2020**

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## Role play: quasi-experiment for the development of social skills

### Abstract

*The objective of this study was to determine the influence of roleplaying on the social skills of 79 students of the Intercultural Education specialty. The quantitative-quasi-experimental methodology was applied. The instrument was the GOLDSTEIN et al. (1980), adapted by Tomas in 1993. The inferential results showed a significant difference at the end of the intervention, evidencing the influence of the role-playing technique on different social skills and the importance of using the active methodology in the higher education space*

**Keywords:** Role play; teaching method; practical classes; higher education.

### Introduction

University teaching worldwide has had to evolve in line with the changes taking place in the educational system and the labour market, which are placing new demands on universities in terms of the training of university professionals immersed in the growing globalisation of human activities and the mass use of information technology (ICT).

Role-playing is understood as an activity in which the players, in a process of simulation,

represent actors from reality, constituting a group of individuals who operate out of empathy with society; that is, they place themselves in the situation of the other person. This empathic process allows to understand to a certain extent the circumstances, conflicts, needs, expectations, interests and motivations of the other around a reality of which all are part: real actors and actors in representation (Dosso, 2009; Radhy, 2019).

In the role-playing, the indispensable

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aspects for the development of the student's personality and for his or her academic preparation are enhanced. This understanding constitutes the basis for the emergence of reflective thinking, which allows the subject to regulate his or her activity and submit to the rules and situations of society. It also enables the development of the imagination and the formation of the voluntary sphere to take up more and more objective and verbal actions, taking into account the objectives of the adult at first and then his or her own by making use of his or her external verbal language and then internalizing the actions to reach the internal level (González, Solovieva and Quintanar, 2009).

The above would be a recurrent didactic strategy among the pedagogical activities that are applied in the field of education at all its levels and disciplines of knowledge; in this case, it should be considered attributes that grant sustainability in time, contributions and contributions emerging from experiences carried out such as instrumental objectives, the opportunity of its application, the methodological design, the creativity of the device, the operational dynamics, the thematic diversity, confer inexhaustible potentiality, versatility of application and multiplicity of options.

Likewise, in the role-playing activities, the participation of the teacher's instructional language is fundamental because at the beginning they are based on verbal communication and then they express themselves through behavior modification (González and Solovieva, 2016; Barreto & Alturas, 2018).

According to Gaete (2011), simulation exercises such as role-playing promote critical thinking and develop analytical skills by creating an atmosphere of trust in the student; benefits that clearly endorse the use of teaching and learning strategies and didactics, where the student acquires a greater role and interaction with their knowledge, skills and classmates.

**Table 1.**  
*Benefits of role-playing*

<b>Staff evaluation</b>	- Representing reality - Putting communication skills into practice - Evaluate/develop attitudes, interests and/or values
<b>Staff training</b>	- Do not jump to conclusions

- Overcoming stereotypes and first impressions
- Checking consequences of actions

Source: Gaete-Quezada (2011, p. 294)

As an evaluation, roleplaying is conceived as an activity that could evaluate professional competencies; therefore, it is necessary to guarantee an evaluation process that fits the application of the criteria through qualitative and/or quantitative rubrics (Gaete, 2011).

According to Shabani, Ghafari and Boroumandfar (2020), educational interventions are necessary, and given that role-playing improves the educational experience, promotes critical thinking, develops analytical skills, encourages social interaction, develops leadership, promotes decision-making, strengthens teamwork and develops the ability to express oneself; therefore, it is necessary to analyze the impact on social skills at the higher level.

According to the theories related to the topic, Polo et al. (2018), according to Gaete (2011), assert that role-playing is a strategy applied in the education sector with the aim of strengthening coexistence habits since it intends that university students assume roles in simulated situations as training for the work field.

In role-playing, participants assume to be characters in simulated scenarios. The characters have the freedom to develop, act and make decisions under the direction of the teacher. Alessandroni (2017) indicates that this technique has as a theoretical basis what Lev Vygotsky says, who states that the game is born as a need to make contact with other individuals. The origins of the game go back to social aspects. According to this theory, during the game, the thoughts of the individual are connected with his natural and socio-historical development. Likewise, Vygotsky, when addressing the issue of the zone of proximate development, considers that the social context provides the necessary conditions to generate learning more easily; the psychologist maintains that language and social experience arise in a parallel way. Reviewing the literature, it can be mentioned that the use of role-playing should be taken into account:

- The characters or roles and the setting must be as close to reality as possible. It is suggested to consider a real experience that involves the problem to be solved.

- Avoid the use of communication scripts since the aim is for the university student to show creativity, spontaneity, responsibility for decision making and application of the theoretical knowledge acquired in his/her academic training.

- In the description of the scenario, do not consider elements that positively or negatively bias the interpreters of the characters, nor should you suggest attitudes, values, etc. The character is free to act.

- Students should know the rubric with which they will be evaluated, which contains the evaluation criteria.

The role-play presents the following benefits:

- It identifies problems in interpersonal relationships.

- It proposes alternative solutions to conflicting or tense situations.

- It increases the student's empathy, through the adoption of characters; this implies assuming different attitudes to those that he or she regularly carries out in everyday life.

- Promotes effective and efficient communication skills.

Thus, the game becomes a context of expression of attitudes, values, and relationship with others; this scenario promotes the development of ethical behaviors, values and empathy.

It allows the integration of the university student with his environment since there are components that admit interaction between the subjects and generate significant experiences, this helps to promote social skills. Betancourth, Zambrano, Ceballos, Benavides and Villota (2017) stated that social skills are a set of behaviors that people use to face diverse daily situations; such as developing adequate interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, social skills allow human beings to solve a situation in an effective or acceptable way for the social environment. Likewise, it can be mentioned that they allow to express feelings, appreciations, opinions in a healthy way, respecting the rights of others, strengthening friendship links.

Five major categories of social skills are considered:

- Interaction with strangers in consumer situations,

- Interaction with people you attract,

- Interaction with friends and colleagues,

- Interaction with family members, and

- Making and refusing requests to friends who respond to different contexts of social

interaction

The curriculum of various professional careers is generally based on competencies, which involve the cognitive, procedural and attitudinal aspects. In addition, other factors, such as social skills, also influence the training of the new professional.

According to Montes (2011), social skills can be trained using role-playing as they promote communication, teamwork as well as help establish healthy interrelationships in the environment where the individual performs. In this way, the use of active methodologies is an alternative to the traditional model and, in this sense, role-playing promotes university students to develop social skills by allowing them to assume functions that they must perform with responsibility (Sebold, Boell, Fermo, Girondi and Santos, 2018).

According to Polo et. al. (2018), role-playing allows university students to explore and analyze how they perform in simulated situations, thus identifying opportunities for improvement in order to strengthen their social skills. As an emerging strategy, Ricker, Peterfeso, Zubko, Yoo and Blanchard (2018) point out that this technique activates and generates the transfer of learning in the insertion of the university student in the labor market.

Man is a purely social being and the skills to interact socially are acquired as the individual develops in his environment with others. Castillo, Ríos, Cristófol and Carrasco (2013) point out that these skills are configured at an early age and are the basis of social competence since the child begins his or her process of interaction with the environment and with others. Therefore, at school age, these skills must be enhanced and improved from the classroom.

In conclusion, Gutiérrez and Expósito (2015) refer that when the student improves his or her social skills in the classroom he or she receives many personal benefits, while at the same time developing his or her interpersonal competence. Among the most relevant social skills are the following: listening, initiating and maintaining a conversation, asking a question, being thankful, asking for help, participating in an activity that has already begun, and following instructions: all of these are primary skills for development in higher education.

## Methodology

This study used the quantitative approach since, through measurement, an attempt was

made to approximate knowledge of reality (Hernández and Mendoza, 2018). The type of research was applied which, according to Sánchez and Reyes (2015), is used in certain knowledge of a particular problem. The design was quasi-experimental considering a pre- and post-test for two groups: one experimental and one control.

The population was made up of students of the specialty of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities; for the sample, a non-probabilistic sampling was used since the researchers assumed selection criteria considering, finally, 79 students of the specialty of Intercultural Education, whose ages fluctuated between 21 and 24 years.

These students were about to enter an internship in communities, and required a program that would develop social skills conducive to their insertion into the community. Thus, students belonging to the third year of studies in class A - control group (38 students) and to class B - experimental group (41 students) were considered.

The intervention was developed over three months with a frequency of twice a week in most cases. Theoretical and practical sessions were

used (in the first week) and, from then on, group dynamics played a predominant role. Specific contexts or situations were presented; it was available who would participate assuming different roles and who would participate as spectators; time was considered prudent to adapt to the new proposed situation and it was emphasized that one should not limit oneself to play a role; but to feel part of the assumed role; for this purpose thinking, acting and deciding, as the real character would do, was fundamental.

The experience culminated in a plenary session where aspects such as the challenge assumed, the problem addressed, the participants' performance, the relationship between what was observed and what exists in reality, among others, were evaluated.

For the evaluation of social skills, the instrument initially structured by Goldstein et al. (1980) and adapted by Tomas in 1993 was used. It considers 6 dimensions: basic social skills, advanced social skills, skills related to feelings, alternative skills to aggression, skills for coping with stress, and planning skills. This 50-item instrument with a polythic scale was previously analyzed for reliability and content validity, in both cases the results were adequate.

## Results and discussion

**Table 1.**

*Social skills in control and experimental students according to pre-test and post-test*

Group		Control 38	Experimental 41	Test U of Mann-Whitney
Pretest				
Low	12.8		13.6	Z =-1,271
Medium	87.2		86.4	P= , 182
High	0		0	
Posttest				
Low	0		0	Z =-2,784
Medium	86.2		27.8	P=, 005
High	13.8		72.2	

In table 1, it can be seen that, with respect to the pretest, the control group presents 87.2% in the medium level and 12.8% in the low level; compared to the experimental group that presents equally 86.4% in the medium level and 13.6% in the low level; in the same way, with respect to the post test, the control group presents 86.4% in the medium level and 13.6% in the high level; compared to the experimental group that presents equally 72.2% in the high level and 27.8% in the medium level.

The results show that the social skills in the students of the control and experimental group according to the pretest present a similar condition (U-Mann-Whitney:  $p=0.182$ ); on the other hand, the post test shows a significant difference with the scores obtained from the control group (U-Mann-Whitney:  $p=0.005$ ), concluding that the intervention has a significant effect on the social skills.

**Table 2.***Dimensions of social skills in students from the control and experimental groups according to the post test*

		Group Control 38	Experimental 41	
		Posttest		
<b>Dimensions</b>				
Basic social skills	Low	27.3	0	Z =-3,160 P=, 003
	Medium	72.7	13.4	
	High	0	86.6	
Advanced social skills	Low	26.1	0	Z =-2,573 P=, 017
	Medium	41.4	39.7	
	High	32.5	60.3	
Social skills related to feelings	Low	25.1	0	Z =-2,172 P=, 031
	Medium	62.3	42.8	
	High	12.6	57.2	
Alternative social skills to aggression	Low	13.2	0	Z =-2,584 P=, 037
	Medium	86.8	26.4	
	High	0	73.6	
Social skills for coping with stress	Low	15,4	0	Z =-3,169 P=, 003
	Medium	84.6	41.5	
	high	0	58.5	
Social planning skills	Low	22.4	0	Z =-2,149 P=, 012
	Medium	66.2	43.3	
	High	11.4	56.7	

In table 2, we can see the result of the statistical analysis of each of the dimensions of social skills and, with respect to the post-test, in each of them, the inferential results of the intervention show significant differences through the U-Mann-Whitney statistic.

At a general level, it is necessary to point out that, from childhood, it is necessary to promote activities that foster skills that connect the student with his or her self and his or her environment; this with the purpose of establishing effective relationships based on the development of the personality. In that sense, from role playing, basic and advanced social skills can be developed (listening to the other, asking questions, introducing oneself to others, being able to start a conversation with another person, being assertive, knowing how to apologize, among other aspects).

They can also develop skills related to feelings and promote actions in the face of aggression (understanding our feelings, expressing them, understanding others, asking for permission, sharing something, negotiating in the face of a problem that arises, responding to jokes, etc.).

Finally, pedagogical initiatives can be

provided that develop skills to face stress and to be able to plan (to be able to make a claim, to be able to respond to a complaint or criticism, to face a shameful fact, to face failure, to make decisions on time, to propose objectives and to become mentally prepared in a certain task).

Achieving student learning requires the application of a whole set of teaching strategies at all levels of education and, especially, in the university environment where the master class has a preponderant position. This study confirms the premise proposed by Sánchez, Robles and Gonzales (2015), which holds that it has been demonstrated over time that various competencies, including social skills, can be improved through the application of role-playing.

It is of utmost importance to provide students with tools that promote their professional development through the generation of skills from basic to planning skills that allow them to face controlled problematic situations. This contributes to a better relationship between teachers and students. Role-playing, apart from being a pleasant activity (Neha and Rule, 2018), has been part of a broad academic debate for decades (Howard, 2018; Gordon and Thomas, 2018) and is conceived as an active learning

technique that promotes collaborative work by encouraging communication; this is based on the study, analysis, development and proposal of solutions to problem situations related to the future working environment of university professionals.

Role-playing is a pedagogical technique of representing characters who interact in a certain scenario or situation to be solved and the teacher is the conductor of this context; definitely, the student is the generator of his or her learning. This technique is recommended to articulate the theoretical with the practical.

One of the most important aspects in this research is that the different skills were approached in a motivating space for the university student since the integration of knowledge was encouraged in the face of different proposed scenarios, promoting the development of social skills, stimulating teamwork and assuming the decision making at the right time.

## Conclusion

In the present study, the influence of role-playing as a strategy in the development of social skills of a group of university students was tested under a quantitative and quasi-experimental methodology.

The intervention developed under a theoretical-practical modality improved basic and advanced social skills, those related to feelings, alternatives to aggression, those dealing with stress and those linked to planning; inferential statistical values, through the U-Mann-Whitney statistic, showed significant differences between the control and experimental groups at the end of the experimentation process.

Likewise, it was possible to observe that the application of role-playing favors social interaction by stimulating individual and collective aspects such as decision-making, teamwork and the possibility of being able to express oneself; thus demonstrating the relevance of the application of innovative active strategies for the consolidation of skill development in higher education students.

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