

**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta pedagogická**

**Katedra anglického jazyka**

**Diplomová práce**

**HRANÍ ROLÍ VE VYUČOVÁNÍ ANGLIČTINY**

**Bc. Šárka Peclová**

**Plzeň 2021**

**University of West Bohemia**

**Faculty of Education**

**Department of English**

**Diploma Thesis**

**ROLE PLAY IN TEACHING ENGLISH**

**Bc. Šárka Peclová**

**Plzeň 2021**

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

V Plzni dne 20. 4. 2021

.....  
Jméno Příjmení

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank to my supervisor Mgr. Barbora Reynaert, Ph.D.

I would like to express my thanks to Mgr. Bohumil Blecha and Mgr. Jiřina Karasová for their support and help during writing this thesis because I could discuss my thoughts with them. I would also thank you to teachers because without them the research could not be conducted.

## **ABSTRACT**

Peclová, Šárka. University of West Bohemia. April, 2021. Role play in teaching English. Supervisor: Mgr. Barbora Reynaert, Ph.D.

This diploma thesis deals with role play in teaching English. The thesis is focused on influence of role play on speaking skills. The student's point of view on role play is also included in the research question. Theoretical background presents general information concerning speaking skill and importance of its practice, communication strategies, description of role play and its characteristics, advantages and disadvantages. To answer the research question, questionnaire and interview were chosen as research tools. The research was conducted in three schools and questionnaire was completed by 200 students and interview was done with 30 students. The outcomes confirm that role play has positive influence on students in many ways. Because of role play, they are able to talk in English in front of other students without any fear and to develop their speaking skills.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</b> .....	2
Speaking Skills and Development .....	2
Communication Strategies .....	3
Speaking Activities .....	5
Role Play.....	6
Advantages of Role Play .....	6
Limitations of a Role Play.....	7
Materials and Props .....	8
Cue Cards .....	8
Role Cards .....	9
Textbook - Project.....	10
Props and Mime .....	11
Types of Roles in Role Plays .....	11
Characteristics of a Role Play .....	12
Stages of the Activity.....	14
Role Plays in Literature .....	15
<b>III. METHODS OF RESEARCH</b> .....	17
Research Question .....	17
Research Methods.....	17
Subjects of Research .....	18
Research Process.....	19
<b>IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES</b> .....	20
Survey .....	20
Speaking Skills.....	20
Role Play .....	22
Other Information.....	26
Interview .....	30
Speaking Skills.....	31
Role Play .....	32
Other Information.....	34

<b>V. IMPLICATION</b> .....	38
Pedagogical Implication .....	38
Limitations of the Research .....	39
Suggestions for Further Research .....	40
<b>VI. CONCLUSION</b> .....	41
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	42
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	44
Appendix 1.....	44
Appendix 2.....	46
Appendix 3.....	48
Appendix 4.....	49
<b>SUMMARY IN CZECH</b> .....	50

## LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph	Page
Graph 1. The number of students	20
Graph 2. Importance of practicing speaking skills in English lessons	21
Graph 3. Speaking activities improving speaking skills	22
Graph 4. Frequency of role play in English lessons	23
Graph 5. Improvements due to Role play	24
Graph 6. Participation	25
Graph 7. Types of role	26
Graph 8. Props	27
Graph 9. Materials	28
Graph 10. Feedback	28
Graph 11. Feedback time	29

## I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with role play in teaching English and the research question is as follows: Do role plays help to improve speaking skills of lower secondary school pupils and how? The research also reveals students' point of view on this type of activity. This topic is relevant because speaking skills are crucial part of communication. Nowadays, English is around us and it is part of our everyday lives. Students also need this skill for their interests, social life or future studies or job, because almost every employer considers English speaking skills as important matter.

Speaking activities in general are very useful for practicing speaking skills and that is why they are depicted in the theoretical background. The theoretical chapter summarizes the stances of experts on teaching speaking English; for example: Richards, Scrivener; and on role play; for example: Ladousse. The information about communication strategies, role play, its possible positive and negative influence on students, materials used such activities and many other factors important for role play are described in this section. The theoretical background provide basic for the research.

The methods and process of the research are outlined in a separate chapter. This chapter includes the subject of the research and the methods applied. The following chapter interprets and comments on the results of the research. The included ideas and observations of both students and the researcher are included. The summary of outcomes concludes this chapter.

The last chapters uncover the practical use of the research and provide pedagogical implication whereas the suggestions for further research and implication for schools and teachers are included. The thesis allows to look into students' thoughts about role play and its influence on students speaking skills.

## **II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Firstly, speaking skills and their development, communication strategies and speaking activities are included and described. The next part introduced the role play more specifically; describes not only its characteristics and qualities but also its disadvantages and materials which can be used. The experts on language teaching claim that every lesson or activity, not to mention role play, should consist of stages and one part of this chapter depicts each phase of the role play more closely. In the end of the theoretical part literature connected to the role play will be analyzed.

### **Speaking Skills and Development**

Speaking is a great part of everyday life. It is important for students to master and practice this skill because it is useful for their future. Communication is needed for travelling, future job or studies, social relationships or personal life. Speaking is one of the four language skills which students should learn. It belongs to productive skills. It is a skill that enables the students to produce language in a spoken form. Speaking belongs to the important means of communication, for instance, to express thoughts, opinions or feelings orally. (Richards, 2015). According to Scrivener (2011) practicing speaking is very important for the following reasons: many students may know lists of vocabulary or grammar rules but they are not able to use it during conversation. One should also mention that students frequently master passive skills much larger rather than active. It could be caused by lack of experience in using the language, which might make students nervous about trying to say something.

Many factors have an influence on development of speaking skills. Students' attitude to study English, communicative competence or their temperament are components which may have an impact on improving speaking skills. Another possibility can be speaking activities which should help to students with learning and practising speaking. On the other hand, even great speaking activity does not have to have positive effect on students' development. The teacher's attitude, experience, preparation, planning, stances can be the reason why. Teacher can lead the activity or provide feedback in wrong way. Closer description of teachers' part in role play and communication strategies, speaking activities and role play will be discussed and analyzed in the following parts of theoretical background of this thesis.

## **Communication Strategies**

Speaking may be a complicated process for some language learners, especially during role plays. In language classrooms, we can meet learners who are easily embarrassed or have troubles expressing themselves. Such students might stop communicating or give up when they are asked to speak in front of the others. In other words, some students want to avoid participation because of their anxiety of speaking. On the other hand, there may be students that have no problem with speaking, despite their limited language abilities. To manage their oral interaction, they use communication strategies.

According to Goth and Burns (2012), students use communication strategies for two purposes: to avoid having to speak too much and to enable speakers to convey their messages. Strategies used for the first purpose are also called reduction strategies. The main idea of those strategies is a reduction of the scope of communication. That is why they are used by students who are shy and have no self-confidence. It might also be mentioned that reduction strategies limit the opportunities for students to express themselves in the target language. Nevertheless, the strategies used for the latter purpose - to enable speakers to convey their messages - help students to maximize opportunities for speaking in the target language. As a result of that, learners can participate more effectively during communication and develop their language skills at the same time. Those strategies are also called achievement strategies (Goth and Burns, 2012).

Cognitive strategies used during oral communication when learners cannot find a suitable word or term by which they wanted to express their ideas or thoughts. Firstly, students replace a gap in lexical knowledge by describing or giving a list of characteristics of a particular object, person, animal, event, etc. Another possibility would be using an alternative term, for example, a squirrel for a chipmunk (Goth & Burns, 2012).

Metacognitive strategies are a type of mental strategies. Cohen (1998) states that learners may decide to plan what they want to say beforehand so that, when they are actually speaking or participating in an interaction, they will not be totally unprepared (as cited in Goth and Burns, 2012, p. 64). For instance, before the oral interaction (phone call, discussion etc.) students might write down some phrases or expressions, which they need for the conversation. What is more, students can assess themselves because after a speech or a dialogue, they have time to think about their speaking performance. Cohen also mentions that metacognitive strategies are essential for communication and language learning; however, students do not use them very often (Goth & Burns, 2012).

Interaction strategies are connected to social behaviours used for negotiating meaning during the interaction. It means that learners use these strategies for asking their interlocutors for clarifying or repeating of what has been said. Therefore, students should also learn how to ask the speaker to explain a point further, to help with difficult words, to say something again, to give an example and so on.

Thornbury (2007) also mentioned some common communication strategies to teach speaking. The first strategy is called circumlocution. It is very similar to cognitive strategies which are described above. Students use this strategy when they do not know exact word which they want to say. Thornbury (2007) gives an example: *I get a red in my head; it means to be shy*. The second strategy is word coinage, for example; *vegetarianist* for *vegetarian*. The next strategy, is when students often use an alternative or related word; for instance: *work table* instead of *workbench*. This strategy is called approximation. Another strategy is code-switching. It means that students use words or phrases of their mother tongue (L1) to express their ideas. Following strategy is paralinguistics. It means that students use nonverbal communication to help understanding the meaning of their message. The last communication strategy is to ask for help by leaving the sentence incomplete and waiting for the other speaker to complete the sentence.

Thornbury (2007) also writes about other two other strategies used during communication – avoidance and discourse strategy. The discourse strategy could be of two kinds. The first one is when a speaker uses a part of another speaker’s utterance for his/her own purpose. Thornbury gives an example such as:

Speaker 1: When did you last see your brother?

Speaker 2: Last see your brother six years ago ... (p. 30)

The second one is when the speaker repeats what he/she has already said. Thornbury (2007) illustrates this by an example:

Speaker 1: The woman hears a noise ....

Speaker 2: What kind of noise?

Speaker 1: The woman hears a noise, loud one .... (p. 30)

An avoidance strategy is opposite to the discourse strategy. It is because the avoidance strategy is connected to abandoning the message completely. It is a situation when the speaker decides that he/she is not able to express the intended meaning. Instead, the speaker replaces the original message with one that he/she is able to say.

Students should be taught not only the core speaking skills and knowledge of language and discourse, but also how to use these strategies within the conversation. Role plays are one of great examples of this kind of activity because students have opportunities to try them all (Goth & Burns, 2012).

According to Thornbury (2007), “The successful use of such strategies in order to communicate in a second language is called strategic competence” (p. 29). He also agrees with Goth and Burns that communication strategies are important for managing the oral interaction. On the other hand, he also mentions that learning and using communication strategies should not be the only thing that speakers use within the conversation. It might lead to a pullback of learner’s language development or to interlanguage. This process is called fossilization. In other words, students might depend on their strategic competence and completely forget about the linguistic competence.

### **Speaking Activities**

Following activities, including role plays, belong to a group of speaking activities. All of them develop students' oral performance in different ways. There is also described the main goals of speaking activities in general. The first speaking activity is a dialogue. According to Ur (1997) it is a „traditional language-learning technique that has gone somewhat out of fashion in recent years. The learners are taught a brief dialogue which they learn by heart“ (p. 131). Then they perform the dialogue privately in pairs or in front of the whole class. Another activity is when students perform a play. The play could be made up by a teacher, or it could be inspired by English literature. This activity is usually used and performed at the end of the school year or during a celebration event. Another activity is a simulation where a hypothetical situation or task is given, students speak and react as fit were them in real life (Ur, 1997). Next activity is role play. In this case, students receive not only a situation, but also a role or a character. A variation of a role-play is a real play. They differ by situation and behaviour of a participant. The real play is based on students' own life and personal experience. Moreover, they are in their own a role, for they are acting

themselves (Scrivener, 2011). Ur (2012) also mentions speaking activities, such as, picture differences, describing pictures or solving a problem.

According to Ur (2012) students should actually talk as much as possible and the language should be used at an appropriate level. Sometimes teachers spent more time by classroom management or talking rather than students' speaking. Students also should prepare their performance. Ur (2012) warned that some good phrases that make an impression can be learnt by heart but not whole performance or conversation. Students should try to speak clearly and think about their body language.

### **Role Play**

Role play belongs to speaking activities, in which students are asked to imagine that they are situated in different places and situations, and they have to act appropriately. (Harmer, 1998). This activity is not only an isolated activity but part of the whole lesson where used in (Ladousse 2004).

#### **Advantages of Role Play**

Ladousse (2004) stated six specific reasons for using this speaking activity. Firstly, through role play, a range of functions, structures and areas of vocabulary could be introduced. Students could practise speaking skills in any situation within the activity. Secondly, students could build up and develop social skills, even from a low level of English; the reason being that they are put in a situation where general/basic forms of language and vocabulary are needed. Unfortunately, according to Ladousse (2004), these are often neglected by our language teaching syllabuses. Subsequently a role play could be a great rehearsal for real life because students can experiment with the language in different kinds of situations. Moreover, students are trained in speaking in a friendly and safe environment of a class. Next reason is that a role may help the shy students to express themselves. Ladousse (2004) states that perhaps the most important reason is that role play brings fun. He also considers role play as the most flexible technique and one of the communicative activities that improve students' language fluency.

Ur (1981) confirms that role play is based on a real-life situation; students may use this knowledge also outside the classroom because the activity involved not only concrete and personal speech but also issues relevant to actual life. Ur states that students prefer this activity over discussion because they think that this is a more attractive and easier way

to practice speaking skills. Other positive aspect is that there are no limitations to what students say because it is not necessary to say something clever or original; everything suitable for the specific situation is correct. Therefore students do not have to be afraid that they have to come up with something complicated. Ur (1981) mentions that the shy students could hide behind the mask of being someone else.

### **Limitations of a Role Play**

The first problem is connected to the nature of role play itself. The author links the issue to shyness of students. As mentioned earlier, students could have a problem with expressing themselves, or they would not know what to say in general. Scrivener (2011) also deals with this „shy problem“. He writes about what students could think about this kind of activity and about statements that teachers may hear their students say. There are some negative students' views on speaking tasks. Firstly, students may think that their classmates speak terrible, and that they do not want to talk to them; they only want to listen to the teacher. Secondly, students could say that they do not want to speak, only to learn grammar, because they will speak later, eventually. Subsequently, some students do not see any point in doing this activity because they have bad English. Next issue is that students consider speaking tasks to be lazy teaching; in other words, they think that the teacher should teach them, not only let them talk. The last students' opinion is very simple – this is just a game.

The second problem is connected to a dimension missing in many speaking exercises, a purpose. Especially within role plays, students are often given only the situation and/or roles, but no final objective to aim for. Ur (1981) describes role play as follow: „Role-play is a step up from „talk about x“; it is now „talk about x in role-situation y; but we need one final step:“talk about x in role situation y in order to achieve z“. (p. 11)

It is clear that there are both significant advantages and disadvantages of role play. For example role play could help shy students but at the same time the activity could fall apart because of them. It always depends on factors such as teacher's instructions, preparation time and organisation, which will be described in the following parts of the thesis.

## Materials and Props

Teacher can use cue cards, role cards, textbook as material for introducing role play and as a support or help for students during the role play. On the other hand, same material could limit students at the same time. Following part includes presentation and description of all mentioned materials used in role play.

### Cue Cards

Kippel (2008) mentions that there are two types of materials to be used during role play – role cards and cue cards. Cue cards, unlike role cards, guide students to what they should say in detail. For instance, in a role play named *Looking for a job*, Kippel (2008) suggests the following cue card:

Freda Hastings, 35, divorced; 2 children aged 8 and 6; trained as a social worker 10 years ago; no employment in the last eight years; no car; would like half-time job; cannot work evenings or weekends; bad health; cheerful personality; likes children; needs a bigger flat (p. 165).

Role cards, on the other hand, give the students information about their character, situation or could give a description of their role. It means that students may express themselves. For example, in role play called *Telephoning*, Kippel (2008) presents following role card:

You are Francis/Frances

You and your boyfriend or girlfriend have just split up and you desperately need someone to talk to. You ring up your friend Robin (p. 185).

Ladousse (2004) also writes about another type of material which might be used as an extra material. It is called „character identity sheet“ which might include not only necessary or basic information such as name or profession of the role, but also a special description of students' role, such as: height, weight, colour of eyes or hair, main personality features, etc. This character identity sheet might be handed out with the role cards, and students should fill the sheet in on their own. Eventually, the teacher might add more questions about students' roles. According to Laddouse (2004), this sheet should encourage students to think about the personality of their role and to use their imagination as much as possible during role play.

Presented three kinds of material which could be hand out during the role-play. Cue cards and character identity sheet look similar but there is a difference. Cue cards are written and/or made up by teachers or authors of books/textbooks. On the other hand, character identity sheet is completed by students. Teachers only give worksheet with some points which we mentioned earlier (weight, age etc.). Students have to fill the sheet out on their own. They could write whatever they want, for example, colour of hair: brown with red stripes. It is about their imagination what they want to write about their role, the teacher gives only the points (or question). We could think about the character identity sheet as questionnaire for students about their role.

### **Role Cards**

Role card is an instructional tool used during role play. Before starting the activity students receive a printed role card with information about their role. Learners have time for preparation, they can read the card or think about the situation, and then they use both the instruction on the role card and their own ideas. (Scrivener, 2011). A simple role card gives a student a „name“ of their role; for example, teacher, famous singer, doctor or mother. Apart from that it usually contains background information about the character, such as: job, sex, personal appearance etc. A student might be given a card like this: 19-year - old daughter. In addition to that a role card could also contain what the person should do rather than a simple description of a person. For instance: Buy a train ticket to Brighton (Scrivener, 2011).

It is also worth mentioning that role cards could lead to a discussion. Students are given different opinions about a topic, a person or a situation. Scrivener (2011) also states that shy students have a chance to disagree with their classmates without any fear of being strange. The role cards are also a useful tool for practising a specific piece of vocabulary or grammar.

On the other hand, Ladousse (2004) claims that teachers criticize role cards, for students are focused only on the information written on them. It means that there are no spontaneous utterances during the activity. According to Ladousse (2004) more complex information on the card and lack of time for preparation for the role are reasons why role play does not work. He also argues that the cards should not contain emotional states because it could prevent a students from learning how to express strong emotions naturally.

According to the information mentioned above, the main difference between role card and cue card is description of the role. In other words cue cards includes more detailed information about the character. On the other hand, role cards only consist of name of character and description of doing.

### **Textbook - Project**

This part concentrates on description of the textbook called *Project*. The particular series of textbooks was chosen due to the fact that it is used by the majority of elementary schools in the Czech republic. At the same time, all schools involved in survey of this thesis use no other textbooks but *Project*.

Every book is divided into six units (1-6) and one introduction part. Each unit is split into four segments (A-D). Section of these segments are similar in all units. For example, part A consists of exercise for practicing vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar, listening and speaking. The part B provides exercise in the same way but with extra writing exercise. In other words, the structure of each segment (A-D) is structured in the same way with slight differences. The most relevant part for role play is the speaking section.

Speaking section often includes activity suitable for practicing speaking skill; for example: dialogue, discussion or even role play. Before the activity itself, students could work with exercises like listening, gap filling or putting the parts of dialogue in the correct order. In *Project*, there are no role cards. The task usually contains just the characters (doctor x patient, shop assistant x customer). Sometimes, there are some ideas or pictures which could help. It means that students are mostly dependent on the teacher's instruction and preparation (worksheet, role card etc.). On the other hand, teacher's book provides some advice on how to work with each role play activity; for example: what the teacher should do before or after the activity itself. Another possibility would be that the teacher creates role play independently of exercise in textbook or teacher's book. It means, that teachers could only follow the topic of the unit and think of the whole activity on their own or with help of literature mentioned in last part of theoretical background.

## **Props and Mime**

As it was mentioned above, students often use paralinguistics strategy. It means that students express their feelings, emotions and message by nonverbal communication. Gestures and mimics could help students to communicate their thoughts and ideas because body language is also part of the common life conversation. Paralinguistics also could be useful in cases of forgetting vocabulary or specific words. Students have the possibility to point at the thing that they wanted to say or they could mime their ideas.

Another part of role play are props. Props could encourage students to take part in role play and improve the legibility of their body language. Even small props can make a big difference. Props such as business cards can also be created or brought from home by students. Anderson (2006) states that music is considered a very effective prop for a role play in a restaurant or at a party. If props are hard to get or to make, students should demonstrate and mime all the more (Anderson, 2006). The students might use them when they do not know the word. In that case they just show the prop. Props could also be a great part of a performance, not only for the speaker but also for the audience.

## **Types of Roles in Role Plays**

Thanks to role-play, students can try acting several different types of roles. Laddouse (2004) divided these roles into four groups. The first group are roles which are connected to a real need in the students' lives. In this case, students try roles such as cashier, customer, doctor, patient, waiter or guest. It is easy for students to imagine such situation because of their own experience. They may have already experienced these situations when they were abroad on vacation.

In the second group there are roles in which students play real life situations too. However, they may have no direct experience with this kind of situation so far; for example: passenger asking for information or a guest asking for a hotel reservation. The students will probably be exposed to all of these situations eventually.

In the third type of roles, students have substantial indirect experience with the roles, but it is not very probable that they will practise them in real life in the future directly. The most common role is a journalist on television doing an interview. This type of role could be interesting for students because they could try out situations they might never experience. Another reason could be that the topic or related environment is attractive for them to act.

The last type of role is a fantasy role. The character could be imaginary, fictional and even absurd. Laddouse (2004) states that some students think that it does not make any sense to play a fantasy role, because it has no connection to real life. On the other hand, some students are interested in playing fantastic or unreal character. The enthusiasm for fantasy role could depend on how developed their imagination is.

### **Characteristics of a Role Play**

There are some factors which could help make the activity more effective. There are also elements of role play which should be considered before setting the activity up. As was mentioned above, teachers' skills, experience, approach and personality are equally important factors to make the activity efficient.

Selecting the right role play is an important thing. Teachers should choose or create role plays which are adequate for their students' level of English. Role play can be played on every level, from beginner to advanced, however, not every conversation topic or grammatical phenomenon can be used for every level of English. On the other hand, the activity may be arranged a little bit above the level of students involved to make it challenging for them. We have to remember that every class is different and that we should think carefully before choosing the role play for our class (Anderson, 2006).

The target language influences arranging of the role play. In other words, teachers create role play according to what they want to practice with their students. A role play can be focused on vocabulary or grammar. Of course, all possibilities could be involved in one role play. During the role play, students could concentrate on social skills as well; for example: empathy, helping each other, thinking about a problem; cooperation; improvisation, flexibility of using a foreign language or imagination. In that case role play works as preparation for a possible real life situation (Klippel, 2008). In addition to that, Scrivener (2011) states that students would also learn functional language – apologizing, disagreeing or refusing.

The Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (FEP BE) introduces cross-curriculum subjects such as: Personal and Social Education, Democratic Citizenship, Education towards Thinking in European and Global Contexts, Multicultural Education, Environmental Education and Media Education. Students might meet some of those subjects because of role play. With an appropriate topic such as environment, health or different cultures students can learn in the matter of cross-curriculum subjects. Everything depends on how the teacher introduces the particular role play. (FEP BE, 2007)

Nowadays, FEP BE emphasizes key competences of students which are following: personal and social competences, communication competence, problem-solving competence, learning competence, civil competence and working competence. A competence can be developed through role play, eventually. Nevertheless, students might improve communication, personal and social competence due to cooperation with their classmates during their preparation of the activity. (FEP BE, 2007)

The organisation of the activity depends on the features of a concrete role play. Students can work in pairs, in groups or even as the whole class. Pairs or groups for the role play can be created by students, the teacher or randomly. Role play can be done while students are standing, sitting, static or moving. The students can also use mimics, gestures and other types of nonverbal communication mentioned above. The type of the performance usually depends on students but it could be also affected by the teacher and the topic of a role play. (Ur, 1981)

Distribution of role cards is an equally important thing. It depends on who has the responsibility for choosing a role – teacher or students. In other words, the teacher could decide who is who or students could choose the role on their own. Another possibility would be a random distribution. In the situation where students negotiate their roles, the right environment for the activity could arise since they have a chance to choose a suitable role for them. However, the insecure students might end up with a key role, and the role play could fall apart (Laddouse, 2004).

Preparation time is a necessary element of the activity for students. It is an important part because students have to understand what they are supposed to do. Student's understanding of what to do also depends on the clarity of teachers' instruction. Moreover, students need time to prepare and think their roles through. At this stage, they could practice one type of communication strategies – metacognitive strategies. However, some students, might have nothing to say, despite sufficient time for preparation.

The reason could be that they are shy or that they do not know what to say in general. In this case teacher, classmates or more specific role cards could help. Time for organisation, distribution of the role cards and negotiation of the roles among classmates, should not be included in time for preparation. (Ur, 1997)

### **Stages of the Activity**

Lead-in is an important stage for getting the students interested in the activity and the topic. According to Anderson (2006), students should be familiar with the context. If they are not, they need to take time to practice vocabulary or phrases that might be needed. Scrivener (2011) mentions another significant part of this stage – students' understanding. Teacher's clear instruction is crucial in this part because students have to understand what is required from them. They have to know and understand the situation and the role they are supposed to play.

When time for preparation is over and students are ready, it is time for the role play itself. Teacher and non-active learners should not interrupt the presenting students in any way. It is also similar to correcting students during any activity. The students could lose the flow of the conversation and they might not be able to continue. They might become insecure and very careful because of the fear of similar interruptions. After finishing the performance, it is the right time for the teacher and classmates to give feedback to students involved in role play. Students need to feel that they have achieved something. That is why the assessment should include not only the use of language, but also the appropriacy of what was said. (Scrivener, 2011)

Most of the authors who deal with role plays, agree on the nature of follow-up activities – discussion and writing tasks. Ladousse (2004) suggests debriefing, which is an analytical discussion. Another possibility is the usage of technology such as recording the performance on a device and then discussing it together. Nevertheless, the teacher should agree on recording with students beforehand, because some of them could find it embarrassing. One should mention that the role play can be placed as the follow-up activity too. It means that this activity can serve as follow-up after another activity.

## Role Plays in Literature

This section shortly introduces literature which could be divided into following three groups: role play oriented books in which some parts are focused on role play and collections of role plays. The first group consists of works such as *Role play* written by Ladousse, G. P. He addresses the book to teachers and gives them pieces of advice. He does not only explain what role plays represent, but gives examples of role plays and guidance how to use and prepare them for a language lesson. What is more, the individual activities consist of description – level, time, aim, language, organization, preparation, warm-up, procedure and follow up activity. Ladousse introduces three types of role play. The first, called preparing the ground, is designated for beginners. The second, off the cuff, is connected to improvised role play which is useful for developing student's creativity. The last section, now tell me, includes role plays particularly easy and safe to use with insecure students.

The second group includes books which are focused on speaking, for instance, a textbook called *Communication strategies* written by David Paul. There are several topics with speaking exercises, including role plays. Every role play has its own role, role cards and short example of a possible dialogue. This activity is also described in almost every book for teachers, such as *Key issues in language teaching* written by J. C. Richard or *How to teach English: an introduction to the practice of English language teaching*. by J. Harmer. Role play can be found in chapters describing speaking or teaching speaking.

The last group - collections of role plays - are books which usually consist of an introduction, worksheets and role cards. Jason Anderson wrote *Role plays for today: Photocopiable activities to get students speaking* where we could find role play connected to the following four topics: services, shopping, social life and lifestyle. Anderson (2006) also includes a section called creative role plays where situations such as murder in paradise, political debate, fortune teller or the elixir of life can be found. In the beginning of the book, he gives brief information on role plays; how to make role plays work or how to select the right role play. Every worksheet includes information for the teachers where they could find instructions, instructions, lead-in and follow-up suggestions or target language.

Anderson (2006) also adds one or two exercises to practice the language which students need for the topic. Another book is a set for students at intermediate or advanced level. The title of the collection is *ESL Role Plays: 50 Engaging Role Plays for ESL and EFL Classes* written by English teacher Larry Pitts. The name of the book gives us an amount of role-plays presented in this book - fifty. One should also mention a box of role plays. This collection was published in 2020. It consists of 75 cards grouped according to a level and situation. 36 situations can be found there.

To sum up, this part of thesis provided theoretical background for the research of this thesis. The thesis begins with general information about speaking activities and skills and importance of practicing. The main aim of this part was to introduce topic of the thesis: role play. Advantages and disadvantages of introducing the activity were presented and explained as well as materials used during role play. After that, the impact on students was discussed. The characteristics of the role play were depicted with further comments. Many factors have influence (positive or negative) on the development of speaking skills.

### **III. METHODS OF RESEARCH**

This chapter depicts the practical part of the thesis. Firstly, a research question is introduced. Secondly, the organization of the research is explained and analyzed. The results of research and comments are included in the next chapter.

#### **Research Question**

According to Ary (2019) it is important to select the specific issue (also called problem or question), that has not been explored yet, from the extensive topic. Role play in teaching English is the topic of this thesis. After reading and researching other works concentrating on this problem, the question was stated as follows:

Do role plays help to improve speaking skills of pupils of lower secondary school and how?

The second thing to consider was the point of view – teachers' or students'. Owing to the fact that most works about this or similar issues were written from teachers' point of view, this thesis is focuses on the students' point of view. The next point is that the research also covers and reveals students' opinion on speaking activity called role play.

#### **Research Methods**

To answer the research question mentioned above, a combination of two methods was chosen. The first method uses questionnaire; it belongs to quantitative research methods. The reason being that according to Doulik (2016) this method is used for getting large number of responses. The survey was designed in online platform Microsoft 365 using the application for forms. Due to Covid-19 situation, all schools involved in research used this online platform for distance teaching. It means that the students were familiar with an online environment of Microsoft 365. The survey is divided into three main parts – speaking skills in general, role play itself and other information connected to role play, such as materials, cooperation or atmosphere in the class. The questionnaire consists of 12 close questions. To better understand the questions and possible answers, the survey was given to students in Czech language (Appendix 1). For this thesis, it was also translated to English (Appendix 2).

The second research method is an interview. According to Švaříček (2007), the interview is considered a basic qualitative method. During the conversation students have opportunity to talk about their opinion on role play with more details. It is an important part of the research because some information could be hard to include into the survey. To get additional information is the reason why the interview was chosen, beside the questionnaire. Due to Covid – 19 situation, the interview was also done online. The conversation was held using the same online platform as the survey – Microsoft 365 – through application Teams. Some students were interviewed in a phone call. The choice of way of talk was up to students. The interview consists of 12 questions. For better communication, the dialogue was held in Czech language (Appendix 3). For this thesis, it was also translated to English (Appendix 4). The process of the research will be discussed later in this chapter.

To summarize, the choice of the right method for research of this thesis was influenced by situation Covid-19 because the whole process took place online environment. When considering the methods, the main aim was to collect a large amount of responses and to get detailed information from the students at the same time. That is why the combination of qualitative (interview) and quantitative (questionnaire) research methods were chosen.

### **Subjects of Research**

As mentioned earlier, the question is connected to students' point of view. It means that the subject of the research were students of lower secondary schools, particularly, students of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> classes. The reason being to see and also to compare the opinions on role plays and its influence on students' speaking skills. Three schools participated in the research; two of them are located in Pilsen – 14. ZŠ Plzeň and 10. ZŠ Plzeň, whereas the third school is located near to Pilsen - ZŠ Josefa Hlávky Přeštice.

The survey was given to teachers in February and then they had three weeks to have their students to fill out the questionnaires. After that the data was collected from the online tool. Overall, 200 responses were received; 114 from 6<sup>th</sup> class and 86 from 8<sup>th</sup> class. All individual interviews with students took place in the first half of March. From each of class was 15 conversations from different schools.

## **Research Process**

First and foremost, the teachers were addressed by an email. The topic and the short description of the research process were included in the message. The researcher received positive answers from teachers of the three schools mentioned above. After that (in February) the questionnaire was sent to them. The researcher and teachers agreed on a deadline - the end of February. It meant that they had enough time to convey the survey to students. The teacher was chosen to do so for two reasons. Firstly, it was an easy way how to deliver the survey to students via an online platform – Microsoft 365 (application Teams). Secondly, the teachers could explain the topic better thanks to experience and practice with their own students. The number of collected questionnaires is mentioned above.

The second phase was the interview with the students who answered the survey. The students were asked by their teachers if they wanted to be interviewed by the author of the questionnaire. 30 volunteers were chosen randomly for this part of the research; 15 from 6<sup>th</sup> class and 15 from 8<sup>th</sup> class. With each student date and time of the conversation were established. All interviews were conducted in March. The parents of students were informed about the research in advance. At the same time, the recording of the interview was discussed with them. All parents agreed. Sometimes they were present during the online conversation; the choice was up to parents and students. As described above, the interview consisted of 12 open questions and took approximately 15-20 minutes. In the beginning, students were informed about the topic and process of the interview. The first question was concentrated on class (6 or 8) which they are part of. Following questions were divided into the three parts; which were identical with parts in the questionnaire – speaking skills in general, role play itself and other information connected to role play. After that, the researcher concluded the interview and thanked the student for their participation. Last question for students was as follows: What did the interview give you?. The question was asked to make student think about the issue again and to state what the students discovered during the conversation.

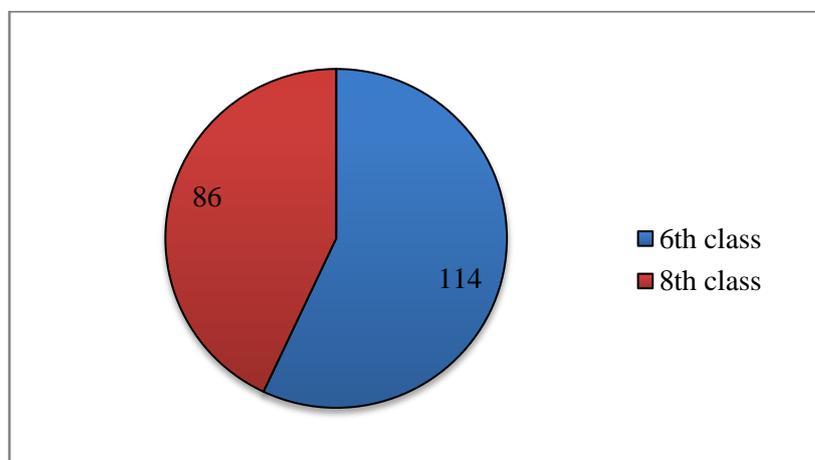
To summarize this chapter, firstly, the research question was introduced and explained. Secondly, the choice of research methods was analyzed. Thirdly, the subjects were described and finally, the whole process of the research was revealed. The results of the research and comments are included in the following chapter.

## IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

This chapter, which includes results of research and is divided into two main parts. In the first part, the results of the survey are described and presented in graphs. The graphs illustrate opinions of all students and afterwards the results of each class (6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> class) are interpreted and compared in the text. This part consists of the same three sections as the questionnaire – speaking skills in general, role play itself and other information connected to role play. The second part of this chapter reveals interview results and students' notable ideas and comments. This part is separated into the same sections as the first one.

### Survey

As mentioned above, this section presents results of the questionnaire completed by students. As the graph below illustrates, the survey was done by 200 students. Students of 6<sup>th</sup> class form the majority of respondents, specifically, 114 (57 %). The rest 43 % (86) are students of 8<sup>th</sup> class. The students are all from the three schools, which were introduced in the previous chapter.

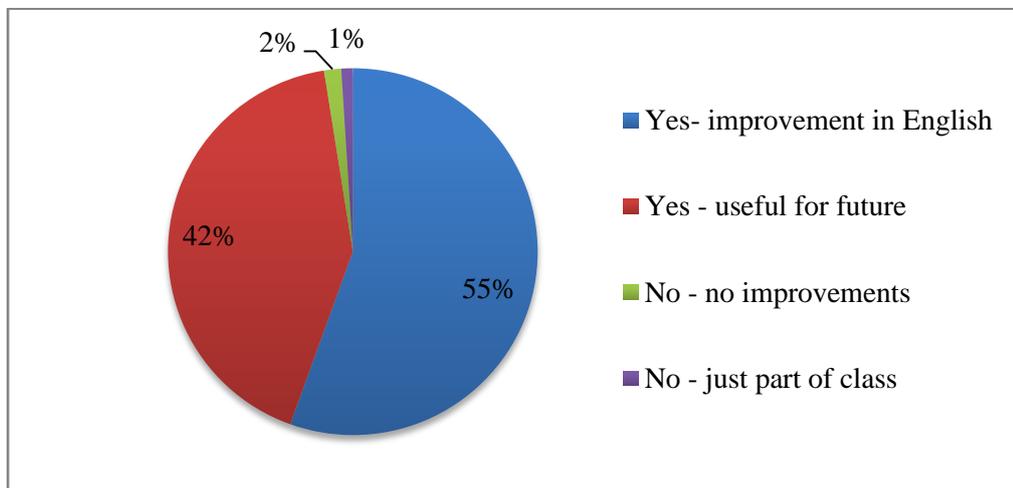


**Graph 1: The number of students**

### Speaking Skills

This section of survey is focused on speaking skills in general. These questions investigate how students perceive practicing speaking skills during English lessons and what speaking activities improve their speaking skills. In the graphs, opinions of all students are

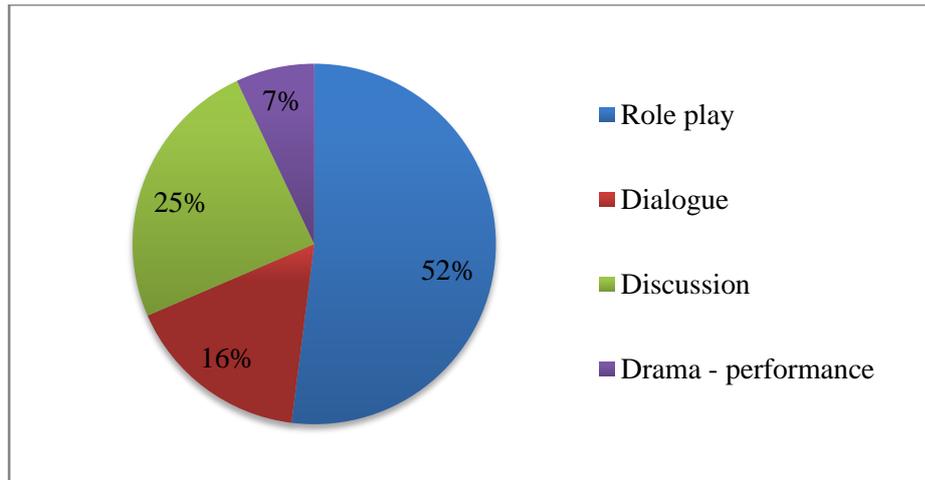
recorded, since in almost all cases results showed only slight differences between the answers of both grades – 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. On the other hand, a small contrast between the grades is sometimes described.



**Graph 2: Importance of practicing speaking skills in English lessons**

Majority of respondents (97 %) claimed that practicing speaking skills is important in English lessons. 111 students (6<sup>th</sup> – 62 and 8<sup>th</sup> – 49 students) wrote that the training improves their speaking skills and 84 (6<sup>th</sup> – 49 and 8<sup>th</sup> – 35) students think that it is useful for their future. There were not any significant differences in answers across the classes. 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade have nearly the same numbers. Only 3 respondents could not see any improvements and all of them were from 6<sup>th</sup> class. On the other hand, 2 students from 8<sup>th</sup> class considered practicing speaking as a regular part of the lesson.

According to the results, students considered speaking practise a crucial part of English lessons. Perhaps, it is influenced by aspects of the current world situation (before Covid-19 situation) because young desired to travel on their own, not with travel agencies, and to get to know foreign countries and meet new people. Another possibility would be more opportunities for jobs because these days knowledge of English is more and more frequently taken for granted. As it was already commented in the theoretical part (speaking skills) students very often have more passive knowledge of the language than active. The results could also point out that students want to turn passive knowledge into active. It means they have no problem with vocabulary or grammar but they are not able to communication orally and the practice could help them to improve their performance.

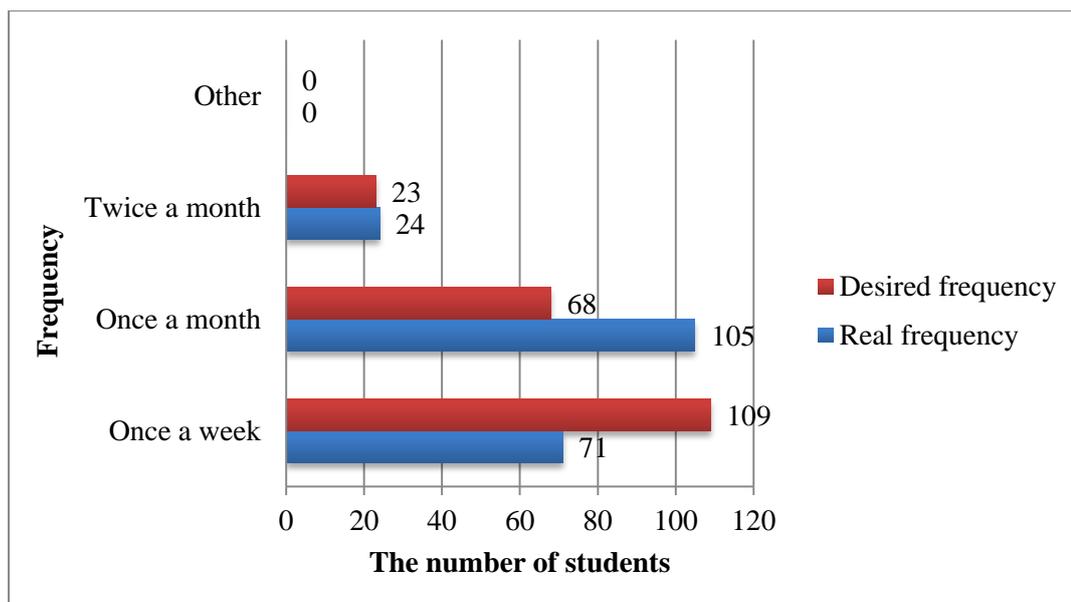


**Graph 3: Speaking activities improving speaking skills**

The survey showed that the most effective speaking activity according to students is role play. Approximately half of respondents (104) answered that role play helps them to improve their speaking skills. Possibly, the reason is that the role play could include an interesting combination for students – learning, performance (movement element), and fun at the same time. Of course, some shy students would disagree with the previous statement because it could be challenging for them to improve their oral communication or social skills. This issue was more discussed with students during the interview and the results will be analyzed later. 25 % of students answered that the most effective activity was discussion, 16 % mentioned dialogue and only 7 % participants of the survey considered drama to be most effective; possibly due to the fact that the drama is typically performed only at the end of the school year or during a celebration event. The contrast between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade was very small.

### **Role Play**

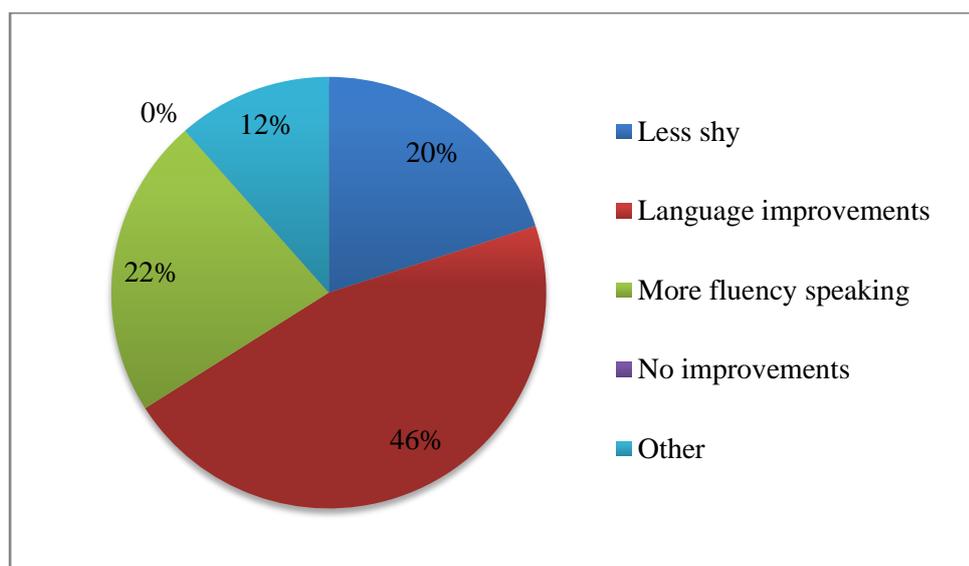
This part of the questionnaire concentrates on role play. As the previous Graph 3 revealed, more than 50 % of students chose role play to be the most effective activity to help them to improve their speaking skills. The frequency of role play in English classes, improvements due to role play and cooperation between students during this activity will be analyzed in this section.



**Graph 4: Frequency of role play in English classes**

The respondents were asked to answer two questions connected to frequency of role play in English classes – real and desired frequency. *The real frequency* shows how often role play is conducted classes and *the desired frequency* shows how often students want to be part of the activity. The results could be affected by the teachers of the participants, who use the activity once or twice in each (topic) in the textbooks. As presented in the theoretical background, all schools involved in this research use the textbook called *Project*. Most teachers have to complete one unit in a month or two. It means that the frequency mainly depends on the teachers (experience, lesson plans, preferred activities etc.). 105 students (53 %) experience the activity once a month, 71 students (35 %) once a week, 24 students (12 %) twice a month. In this case, answers of both grades differ. The order of particular frequencies is the same but with other percentages. Results of 6<sup>th</sup> grade are as follows: 46 students (40 % of 114 students) experience the activity once a week, 57 students (50 %) once a month and 11 (10 %) twice a month. In the 8<sup>th</sup> class the contrast is more significant because 25 students (29 % of 86 students) participate in role play once a week, 48 students (56 %) once a month and 13 students (15 %) twice a month. The detailed analysis shows that students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade experience the activity more often than the students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

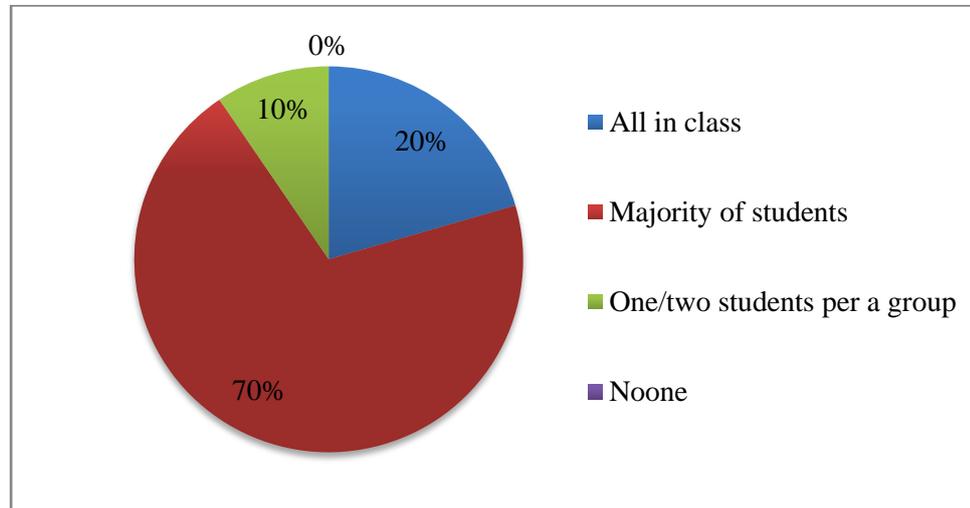
As visible, the Graph 4 also compares *the real frequency* and *the desired frequency* as well. One more time, the option – other - was overlooked and outcome of choice - twice a month – was nearly the same. On the other hand, students „switch“ last two possible answers – once a week and once a month. The numbers and percentage are conversely. The difference between the real and desired frequency across the grades was insignificant. To put it more simply, students want to do role play more often, specifically, once a week. This outcome could illustrate that students like the activity.



**Graph 5: Improvements due to role play**

The Graph 5 reveals the most significant results of the whole research. This outcomes present what improvements students can see thanks to role play. The issue was discussed with students more thoroughly during the interview; the responses from the interview will be analyzed later. According to the graph, noone of the respondents thought that the activity brings no improvements. Every activity should provide development in some way. Majority of students (46 %) note a progress in English in general thanks to role play. 45 students (22 %) are able to speak English more fluently because of that. 23 students (12 %) choce an option titled *other*. 40 respondents (20 %) mentioned that they are less shy to talk in English in front of other classmates because of the activity. This is a great type of progress because despite of students' knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar, some students could have problem to talkto or in front of someone else in English or in general. The practicing speaking skills by role play could help such students to get rid of the fear of oral communication. On the other hand, the last option – less shy – has a bigger percentage of respondents in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, specifically, 28 students (24 % of 114

students). In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade there were only 12 (14 % of 86 students), who chose this option. These results could be also affected by length and quality of their relationships in class.



**Graph 6: Participation**

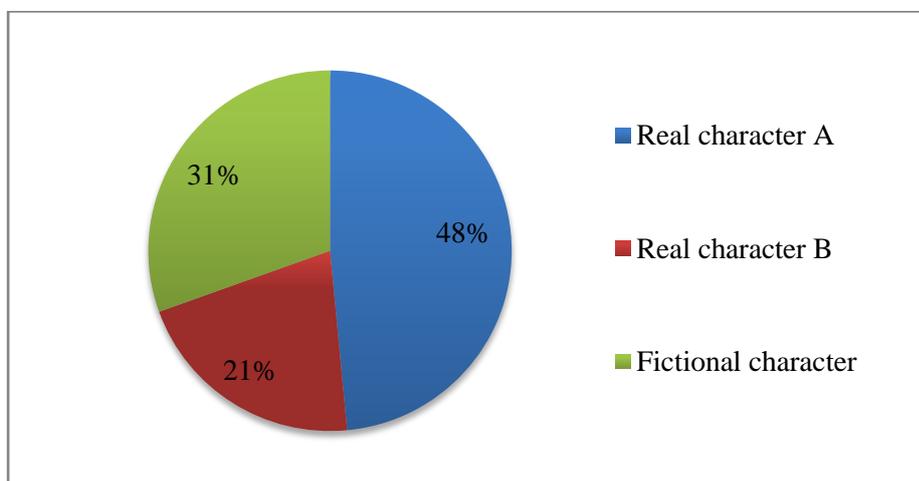
The graph 6 above presents results connected to cooperation among students during the role play. 140 students (70 %) claimed that majority of students is involved in the activity, 41 students (20 %) wrote that everyone is ractive, 19 respondents (10 %) answered that only one or two studnets per group work on role play and noone thought that everyone in class ignores the activity completely. The contrast across the grades was not significant. To illustrate, 6<sup>th</sup> grade students responded as follows: 28 students (25 % of 114 students) – all in class are teractive, 77 students (67 %) – majority of students work and only 9 students (8 %) thought that only one or two learners per group cooperate. To compare, here are results of students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 13 students (15 % of 86 students) – all learners in class cooperate, 63 students (73 %) – majority of class participate in the activity and 10 learners (12 %) replied that only one or two learners per group are involved; nobody answered that everyone ignores the activity.

Of course, the outcomes could be influenced by teachers, namely their experience, respect, instruction and so on. On the other hand, the relationship among students, relationship between students and the teacher or atmosphere in the class could influence the participation of students. Another possibility could be a combination of both teachers' and students' aspects. To put it more simply, a teacher's attitude could have

an impact on students' cooperation and vice versa. For example, teachers should know how to create pairs or group to make activity as effective as possible and students should respect their classmates and the rules stated in class.

### Other Information

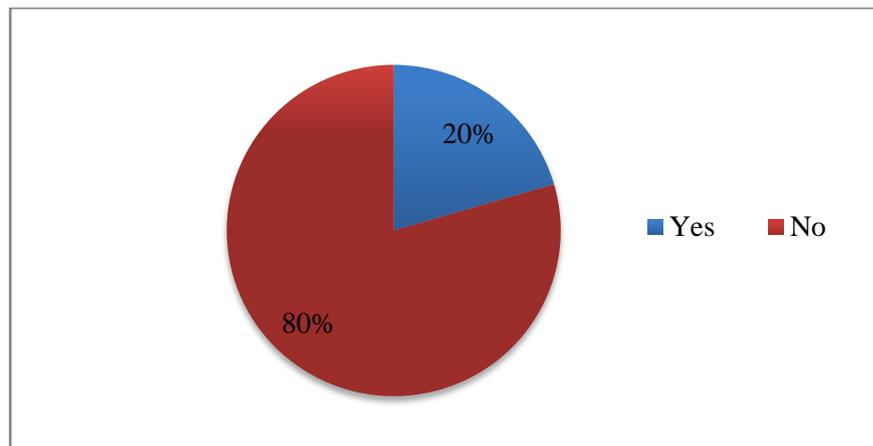
This part of the survey is connected to the role play too. The most popular type of role and materials used in class are presented. One question investigates if students are interested in props. Discussion whether use or not use the props will be commented in the interview section. The last two questions (graphs) are focused on feedback which is a crucial part of improving every kind of skill.



**Graph 7: Types of role**

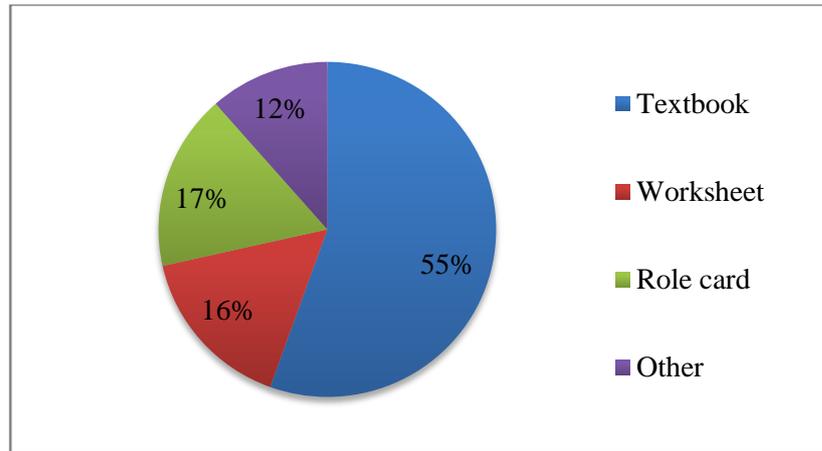
First and foremost, the Graph 7 will be explained. Real character A represents a role, which students can experience everyday; for instance: waiter and guest, shop assistant, or customer. Real character B means a role which students might never experience, for example: TV interview with a famous person. The last possibility was a fictional character which is connected to a role that is not real and could be made up by students or a teacher. Fantasy could be interesting for students because they could imagine whatever they want. The Graph 7 above shows that the most popular students' character is a real role in everyday situations (48 %). The reason could be that students think that the role is the most useful for their future. The situations are close to their everyday lives or common on holiday abroad; for example: making a reservation, ordering food or shopping. The real character A is followed by fictional character (31 %) and real character B (21 %). There are differences between points of view of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. They agreed on

the order but there are differences in percentage. The results of 6<sup>th</sup> class are: 53 students (47 % of 114 students) chose real character A, 30 learners chose fictional character (26 %) and 31 learners (27 %) wanted to play real character B. To compare, results of 8<sup>th</sup> class will follow: 44 students (51 % of 86 students) – real character A, 12 students (14 %) – fictional character and 30 students (35 %) – real character B.



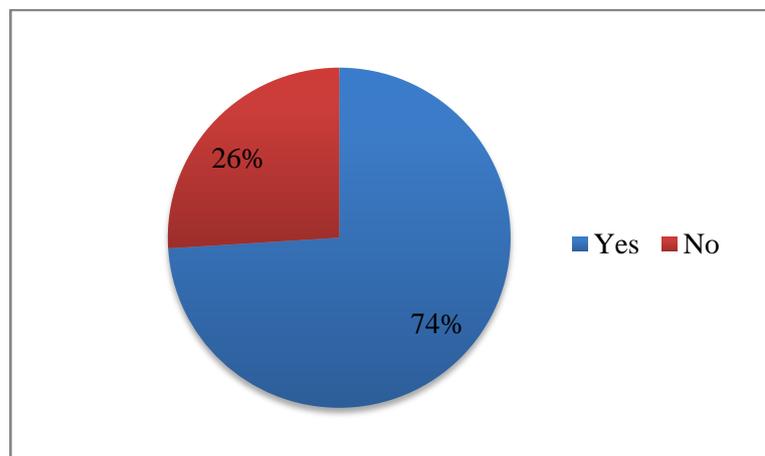
**Graph 8: Props**

An integral part of role play are props. The researcher was told by teachers of the students involved in the questionnaire that props are available almost during every role play. Some teachers also allow students to use their own props made at home; for instance: business cards. As visible, the Graph 8 shows that most of students are not interested in props at all. 159 learners answered (80 %) that they do not need props in contrast with only 41 learners (20 %) who do. Respondents of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade have the same opinion about props but with small differences in percentage. 88 students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade (77 % of 114) said that they do not use props during this activity and 71 students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade (83 % of 86) shared their opinion. The reasons for that were discovered during the interviews with individual students. Students' comments will be analyzed and specified later.



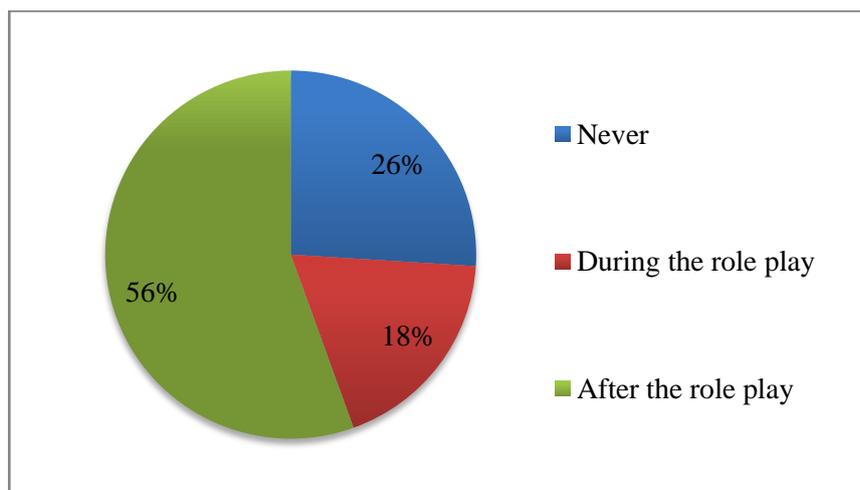
**Graph 9: Materials**

Another important part is material which students work with during the role play. The materials can also be considered as support or instruction for children. The Graph 9 revealed that textbooks are the most frequently used material. 111 students (55 %) answered that they use textbooks. As was commented earlier, all schools, involved in this research, teach according to the textbook called Project. Presentation of role play in this textbook was analyzed in the last part of the theoretical background. There was a very slight difference between role card (34 students) and worksheet (32 students). Those were followed by other materials (24 students). The results of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades were not radically different. To illustrate, 52 students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade (61 % of 86) and 59 students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade (52 % of 114) wrote that they use textbook the most. The most distinct numbers were connected to *role card*, because in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 21 % of students chose this answer whereas in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade only 12 %.



**Graph 10: Feedback**

The feedback is an important part of development of every skill. The students have opportunity to learn from their mistakes and increase speaking skills. As it is visible from the Graph 10, 148 students (74 %) claimed that they get feedback which is positive information. On the other hand, the questionnaire does not say what kind of assessment students get. Teacher should give a constructive feedback. In other words, the teacher should not just say the following phrases: It was good, It was bad or I liked it, I do not like it; without any further comments. The reason being that students do not know what they did wrong or right and how they could improve it. The quality of feedback was included in the interview with students and the results will be analyzed and specified later. 52 students (26 %) get no feedback at all and they do not have a chance to talk about mistakes. This fact could be influenced by insufficient time during the lesson or teachers' bad attitude. One should also mention that role play also provides opportunities for peer assessment and this kind of evaluation was not included in the questionnaire. It means 52 students do not get no teachers' assesment. Possibly, students have to pay attention to performance of their classmates and then they have space to express their felings, correct mistakes or to give a piece of advice. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades shared the same experience with feedback; there were no differences. To illustrate, results of 6<sup>th</sup> grade are as follows:96 students (84 %) – yes and 18 students (16 %) – no. The answers of 8<sup>th</sup> grade have completely same percentage: 72 students (84 %) – yes and 14 students (16 %) – no.



**Graph 11: Feedback time**

The last question of the survey was focused on the time when the feedback is given to students. The Graph 11 shows that, the majority of students (56 %) get comments after the activity (or their performance), 37 students (18 %) during the activity and 52 students (26 %) never got any comments; this corresponds with the previous question. To compare the answers of the grades, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade agreed on their point of view about this problem. The Graph 11 confirms that students involved in the research, are not assessed by other students. It means that they do not listen any comments on their speaking skills. As it was described in the theoretical background, to give feedback during the process of the activity is not a good idea. The students could start to be afraid of making a mistake and of being interrupted, again. They could be unsure and lose the flow of the conversation. Besides in situation like this, some students do not pay attention to any piece of advice. The positive information is that the majority of students get the feedback after the activity.

To sum up briefly, the results of the questionnaire showed that students have a positive attitude to role play; they even they want to do this activity more often and they claimed that role play helps them to improve their speaking skills the most. According to the results, props are not necessary for the activity in order to develop speaking skills. The students of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade have the same opinion on all set questions. There were no big differences in numbers or percentage. Some of the questions provide only general information but they were discussed during the individual interview in detail and the results will be presented and analyzed in the following chapter.

## **Interview**

This part depicts results and commentaries of interviews and is divided into the same three sections as the previous one – speaking skills, role play and other information. Due to Covid 19 situation, the interviews were conducted online using Microsoft 365 platform. In the beginning, topic and process of the conversation were introduced to the students. Students were also told that their answers cannot be wrong. It means that every answer or idea was welcome. The results of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade will be analyzed separately and then they will be compared.

## Speaking Skills

The first part of interview was connected to speaking skills and how they could be improved. The communication strategies are one of the possibility of development. The theoretical part described three main strategies: cognitive, metacognitive and interaction. The questions investigate if students know them and if they practice them during role play. The questions were asked indirectly. It means that the researcher introduce a situation and students should answered how they would react. In the case that students had not heard about communication strategies, the researcher explained those strategies to them.

Most of students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade claimed that if they forgot a specific word during the conversation they would try to described it in other words. This solution of situation is typical for cognitive strategy. Three students also said that they would use gestures, mime or, if possible, they would just point at the thing they wanted to say. Another statement included help of a friend. Two respondents would use a mobile phone. One of them talked about the most common online translators, such as, google, lingea etc. The second outlined application which translates everything what one says out loud. The students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade mentioned the same answers: description - 12 respondents, gestures – 2 respondents and only one person - help of friends. No one mentioned an idea using a mobile phone for translation. It is quite clear that the majority of students would use cognitive strategy to solve the problem. The older students know the strategy due to situations in role play and the teachers' explanation. On the other hand, the students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade use this method thanks to common sense; without any help from the teacher. All students agreed on one thing – they would like to practice this strategy more during role play.

The second question was related to metacognitive strategy. 13 students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade use this strategy because they always prepare themselves before the conversation in English. The preparation is individual because some respondents just think about what they want to say. Others person would repeat only vocabulary and phrases which could be useful for the specific situation. Only two students would improvise without any training. On the other hand, all students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade reflect on their conversation and consider what they would do better next time. 14 students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade do not need any preparation and only one person would practice the conversation ahead. Not a single person reflects their communication in English. As it is evident from the results, students of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade completely disagreed on use of metacognitive strategy. The older students said that they do

not need any time to think because they had opportunity to try different kinds of situations during role play several times. Thanks to role play, they know what they can expect from the conversation in a concrete situation and they know how to respond.

The students were also asked what would they do if they did not understand during the conversation with an English speaking person. The same two students as in the first question would be use technology (online translators in mobile) again. The rest of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students would ask the person to repeat the word or sentence however only four students know how to ask. They learnt it in process of study speaking in English classes, not because of role play. In comparison, the students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade have the opposite experience because they would please the person to explain, repeat, talk slowly and they know phrases how to ask at the same time. The phrases were taught during classic English lesson but they practise them in role play.

According to students' responses, 8<sup>th</sup> grade students are more capable of using communication strategies or they do not need them. They also confirmed that development of speaking is happening thanks to role play. As is evident, the older students are more experienced with role play and the improvement of speaking skills is more visible. Students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade commented that they want to learn these strategies and practice them. They think that such strategies could help them to communicate more fluently without any pauses. One student mentioned that she would not be afraid to speak with foreigners because she would know how to ask for repetition or explanation.

## **Role Play**

This part of the interview was focused on role play itself. Experience with role play as real life character, specification how role play helps to improve speaking skills, and disadvantages of the activity will be discussed. The topics which students want to include will be revealed. The last part of this section is atmosphere in the class during the activity. It is focused on how students observe the mood in the class and also how they personally feel when they are involved in this activity.

All students have the same or similar experience in real life situations; for example: they try to make reservation, to order food in restaurant, to buy souvenir on holiday. Some of the younger students responded that they need assistance from parents or older siblings. The positive information is that they challenge themselves and try it. The students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade claimed that thanks to role play they are able to express their thoughts, to speak more

fluently and to talk to someone else in English. One girl, who said that she is very shy, sensitive and introvert, managed to speak fluently without any problems in front of the whole class, just because of role play and patience of her teacher. Another student responded that he improved his pronunciation. Majority of 8<sup>th</sup> grade learners replied that they are able to react faster during the communication. Other students added that they learnt new useful phrases and vocabulary, not only according to topic but also for general conversation. One student said that he used to make a sentence in Czech and then translate it to English and now he is able to think in English. Three students argued that role play helped them to express their thoughts more quickly. On the other hand, there were two students who could not see any development of speaking skills, even though they like the activity itself.

All students considered the time as the most significant disadvantage of role play. They have enough time for preparation and for thinking about the situation but not for performance. The reason being that teachers mostly set this activity at the end of the lesson and not all students have a chance to practise their role. Five students stated that they often feel disappointed because there is no time left for them. There were four students who said that they like the activity a lot but they do not want to perform because they are very nervous about that. On the other hand, one of them also added that it is a challenge for her. Besides the time students did not mention any other limitations of this activity.

Half of younger students answered that this activity created closer relationships in the class. They got to know each other better and stopped being nervous or uncomfortable about speaking in front of the whole class because they started to support and help each other. Majority of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students really enjoy role play and said that it is a funny way to learn how to communicate. Five students claimed that almost everyone participates in this speaking activity. An interesting fact is that one student described his classmates as two following parts: old curriculum and new curriculum. He meant that if role play was concentrated on grammar or vocabulary they had already known well, some students did not participate and looked bored. On the other hand, if it was connected to the new stuff, all students learnt with interest in their faces. Two 8<sup>th</sup> grade students compared role play and learners in English and German lessons. The both came to a conclusion that the atmosphere depends on the learners in the group. The rest of students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade agreed on

four same following five things: they cooperate with each other, support each other, have fun, like the activity and listen to each other.

Students were also asked about topics which they want to include and try during the role play. Responses of 6th grade students include topics such as, shopping (complaint about goods, grumpy customer), at the doctor, sports environment (especially football), hotel room service and so on. All mentioned topics can be found in the textbook Project so they will probably go through these topics eventually. 8<sup>th</sup> grade students had completely different points of view on this question. It could be influenced by the fact that they already played the most common topics (at the restaurant, interview with a famous person, at the hotel) and that they want to do something new. Students shared the idea that teachers should not only teach according textbooks but they should include some extra topics such as interview with UFO, detective case, crash in the laboratory, doctor in the surgery room, movie scenes, audition, university environment and more.

From students' comments, it is clear that they really like role play. The most crucial answer for the research question of this thesis was revealed. The role play helps students to develop their speaking skills in many ways. Firstly, students are able to talk more fluently and to express their thoughts faster. Secondly, shy, insecure students start to get rid of fear of oral communication in English. The practice of specific situations and conversations is the reason why students are getting better. Thirdly, students are more self confident in speaking in English. The minimum of students cannot see any speaking improvements. Besides, role play may have a positive affect on relationship in the class.

### **Other Information**

The last section of the interview is connected to other information such as role cards, props and feedback. The most current issue - role play in online classes - will also be analyzed. The last question should make students think about the conversation with the researcher and role play itself. Their thoughts and observations will be described in this part as well.

Students were asked what they think about role cards. The students of 6<sup>th</sup> grade claimed that a role card is very helpful for them. Thanks to it, they know what they are supposed to say or include in the conversation. Half of the students have the possibility to use them; the other half does not, even though they would like to have such

possibility. There has been one student who stated that in real life there are no role cards so it is nonsense to use them. He also added that role cards definitely limitate him. All students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade shared the idea of limitation with him. However they admitted that in the 6<sup>th</sup> class they appreciated the role cards as support. According to students, role cards are useful tool for support until they are ready to talk on their own.

Questionnaire results detected that students mostly do not use props. The individual conversations uncovered reasons why. 6<sup>th</sup> grade students mentioned that the props are not necessary in this activity but sometimes they use them for more realistic performance. One student works with props only when she does not know vocabulary. It means that she used them as help or support. Four students declared that they are able to empathize with the role better thanks to props. Students of 8<sup>th</sup> grade explained that they used them but not for better communication but for audience and joy. It could be said that props are an additional element of role play mainly for fun not for developing speaking skills.

Six interviews revealed that teachers have tendency to interrupt the conversation and correct mistakes immediately. They also commented that some of their classmates cannot get used to it and they started to fear that they could say everything wrong and lost the flow of the conversation. Other learners look at the teacher during the whole conversation because they expect to be interrupted. According to questionnaire results, teachers mostly assess after students' performance so they have enough time for discussion about what was wrong and right. Unfortunately, according to five students their teachers just say phrases such as: it was ok, it was bad, make it better next time, I like it, I do not like it. The students added that they do not know what they did wrong. The positive information was that most of the time, teachers use formative assessment. It means that they point out mistakes and give a piece of advice on how to improve it. Another good outcome is that sometimes students evaluate each other and the teacher just completes the assessment. In general, the majority of students responded that feedback from the teacher helps them to improve their speaking skills because they have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

Students confirmed the researcher's expectations that almost no teacher include role play in distance learning. There could be several reasons for that. The most obvious is time. Teachers could be behind the school plan and have no space for activity which takes a lot of time. Another possibility could be teachers' skills with technology. On the other hand, seven students had a different experience because their teachers do this activity online.

Students also described the process and told that the role play takes the whole lesson. Students have already done the activity before (present in class) so it is easier for teachers to give the right instructions. Microsoft 365 provides opportunity to separate the students and divide them into groups. Students admitted that not every time the whole class cooperated but after first teacher's assessment they started to work.

After the interview, students had enough time to think about what was discussed in. Some students thanked for explanations of communication strategies and mentioned they would try them in future. Half of the students said that they have no other comments. Two 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were glad that they had the opportunity to be involved in the research. Majority of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students said that they miss the activity in English lessons and they realized how much the activity helps them.

This chapter answered the research question about effects of role play on development of speaking skills. According to the results collected from 200 students, role play has a positive influence on students in so many ways. First and the most important answer is: role play actually helps students to improve their speaking skills. Students have a chance to try vocabulary, phrases and flow of real communication in specific situations. They know what they should expect from the conversation and they start to feel more self confident. Another reason is that some students train communication strategies and know how to react if some problem arises (forgotten words, understanding). The second positive influence of role play is on relationships in class and social skills in general. Students mostly stop being afraid of communication or speaking (general or in English) in front of the whole class. As it was mentioned in the methodology part, the research also reveals a point of view on role play. Role play was chosen as the most useful speaking activity for developing speaking skills by half of the respondents (104 students). It is evident from the questionnaire and interviews that, students are interested in this activity and they want to do it more often. This fact could disprove the Scrivener's notes mentioned in the theoretical background that students think about the activity as a game with no purpose and a symptom of laziness of teachers. These days students have a small chance to participate in role play because of Covid 19 situation and distance learning. Some interesting ideas were also mentioned concerning the topics for role play. The outcomes revealed the biggest disadvantage of the activity – time. There is no time left for some students' performances. The most popular role is connected to everyday life situations. The minority of students does not use props at all and does so only in order to entertain the audience. The constructive feedback could also

affect development of speaking skills. Mostly students are assessed after the performance and teachers often use formative assesment. On the other hand, teachers stilll have a tendency to evaluate during the activity and it has a bad impact on students because they start to panic about what they did wrong and sometimes they are not able to continue. One of the materials used in role play is a role card. Students with of lower speaking skills want this card as a support but after some time they do not need them at all; in some cases, the cards start to limitate them. In the results, the point of view of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were compared. As it is visible, all students agreed on general questions which were included in the questionnaire. There were small differences in numbers but, not in order of answers. On the other hand, the individual interviews and detailed answers showed a significant contrast of thinking between grades. All responses lead up to one important answer: role play helps to improve speaking skills of pupils of lower secondary school by practicing speaking in general and in different kinds of real situations, since it develops communication strategies, vocabulary and phrases, feedback and many other aspects mentioned earlier.

## **V. IMPLICATION**

The practical use of this thesis is discussed in this chapter. This thesis and its results could serve as inspiration or guide for teachers because the outcomes uncover students' point of view on the role play and its impact on their speaking skills. Teachers can discover at how students feel in certain situations during this activity and how they think about it. Following implications can also be applicable to a second foreign language. The suggestions for further research and the limitations of the research will be introduced here as well.

### **Pedagogical Implication**

Teachers should think about giving feedback more often and should consider when and how to assess their students. Students claimed that after feedback such as, I like it, I do not like it; they do not know what they did right or wrong and in this case they have a small chance of improving themselves. The biggest issue is no assessment. The problem of not providing evaluation at all could be connected with timing or lesson plan. It is known that role play requires plenty of time so teachers should focus on timing of the lesson as a whole. Students also said that they are often dissatisfied because there was not any time left for their performance.

Plenty of materials were presented earlier; for example: textbook, role cards or worksheets. All of these could be considered as help and support for students. On the other hand, teachers should bear in mind that after some time, students could start to feel tied up by them. This fact was visible from the interview where younger students were glad that they have support in role cards but the older students felt limited by them. It means that the teacher should decide if the support is necessary in the particular case.

The next point is connected to communication strategies, which should be practiced during role play. Students should know what to do if they forgot a specific word or do not understand. They should practise how to ask somebody to repeat something, to talk slowly and so on. Students agreed that it is a good idea to include these strategies in role play because they have the opportunity to try it in real life situations.

Teachers also can be inspired by interesting topics suggested by students. Teachers who do this activity regularly probably try all situations from the textbook and students might get bored of repeating them. The solution is simple – to try something different.

Teachers can ask their students or conduct brainstorming about what they would like to try. Every class has different needs or interests. Topics mentioned in this research are from real life (football player), fiction (crash in laboratory) or something the learners would like to try (doctor in the surgery room, investigation).

For students who came from elementary school to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, could be very hard to join a new group of students. According to the research results younger students make close relationship in class because of this activity. They start to be more talkative in front of the class. Surprisingly, the teacher can use this activity for getting to know each other.

The last and the most current issue is distance learning. Few teachers do this activity online. The most frequent reasons are unfamiliarity with technology, insufficiency of time and teachers' attitude towards distance learning. Teachers should at least try conducting this activity online or learn how to work with an online platform used during this situation. As it was mentioned earlier, all schools involved in this research use Microsoft 365, particularly the application Teams. There are many instructional video on the internet which help the teacher to master the online platforms. The most useful and crucial skill for role play is dividing students in groups, which is currently one of the simpler online actions.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The first limitation is connected to number of respondents. This research included only 200 students (6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades). The second limitation is the location of schools involved in the research because they are located only in the Pilsen region. For these two reasons, the research cannot be generalized too much.

Another limitation was Covid 19 situation, because the original research methods (observation and questionnaire) had to be changed. The situation also had influence on making impersonal interviews with students. In other words, the conversation could not be face to face. The reason being that students mostly did not have equipment (camera) for it. Except for the mentioned limitations, there were no other problems with managing the research.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

The first suggestion, to make this research more generalized, includes larger number of respondents (students). The second suggestion is to include more schools from different regions in the research. These two suggestions were also mentioned above as limitations of this research.

The topic of this thesis is Role play in teaching English and the research is focused on students of lower secondary school and their own opinion on role play; specifically, influence of role play on their speaking skills. The next research could expand and include students of elementary school. Another exploration could focus on teachers' point of view. It means that the research could investigate teachers' attitude, approaches or stances about this activity.

Next possibility would be observation in classes and examination of the process of the activity closely (students' or teachers' point of view). The observation could reveal the process of role play in classroom; for example: the whole lesson structure, timing, teachers' approaches but also atmosphere in the class and students' participation more closely. The most current problem is connected to role play in an online environment during distance learning.

This chapter presented the most serious problems and observations pointed out by students in the questionnaire and the interview with the researcher. Time and feedback were chosen as the most crucial elements for developing students' speaking skills. The number of students and location of involved schools were presented as limitation and suggestion at the same time.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis deals with Role play in teaching English. In the first place, the theory of role play was studied and then depicted. Advantages and disadvantages, used material, characteristics, speaking activities, literature were presented. In the second place, the research was conducted in three schools in the Pilsen region and 200 students were involved. Thanks to the research, the question was answered, eventually.

The main goal of this project was to find out whether role play helps students to improve their speaking skills and how. The results of the research revealed that role play helps students to develop not only their speaking skills but also social skills. The research also revealed that students are interested in this activity. On the other hand, the research also points at weaknesses of the activity; for example: the quality of feedback, which could slow down the process of improving the speaking skills. Teachers should think about their approaches and attitude to this activity. This is connected to the practical use of the research and suggestions for future researches. The limitations of the research were also mentioned and further information was presented in corresponding parts of this thesis.

To conclude this thesis, every activity has strengths and weaknesses but every time depends on different aspects, approaches or stances of teacher or students. According to students role play is an important activity for developing their speaking skills. The results showed that students have opportunities to practise vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation at the same time. The activity helps them to prepare for future communication in English. Students might like the activity because of the combination of fun and learning. The teachers should take advantage of this and try to motivate them through the activity students are interested in. On the other hand, with a bad attitude of teacher or students, damage could be caused; for example: slow down the process of development because of bad feedback. We should remember that every class is different and with different needs. We should support them and be there for them, not only come to the class, teach and go.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. (2006). *Role plays for today. Photocopiable activities to get students speaking*. Peaslake: Delta Publishing.
- Ary, D. (2019). *Introduction to research in education*. Boston: Cengage.
- Doulík, P. (2016). *Vybrané základy metodologie pedagogického výzkumu*. Ústí nad Labem: Univerzita J.E. Purkyně v Ústí nad Labem.
- Goh, C. C. M., & Burns, A. (2012). *Teaching speaking: A holistic approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. (1998). *How to teach English: an introduction to the practice of English language teaching*. Harlow: Longman.
- Hutchinson, T. (2013). *Project. 2, Teacher's book with teacher's resources multi-ROM online practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hutchinson, T. (2014). *Project. 2, Učebnice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chráška, M. (2016). *Metody pedagogického výzkumu: základy kvantitativního výzkumu*. Praha: Grada.
- Klippel, F. (2008). *Keep talking: communicative fluency activities for language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ladousse, G. P. (2004). *Role play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paul, D. (2003). *Communication strategies*. Southbank: Thomson.
- Research Institute of Education in Prague (2007). *Frameworkd educational programme for basic education*. Prague: Author.
- Richards, C. Jack. (2015). *Key issues in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scrivener, J. (2011). *Learning Teaching: The essential guide to English language teaching*. Oxford: Macmillian.
- Švaříček, R. (2007). *Kvalitativní výzkum v pedagogických vědách*. Praha: Portál.

Thornbury. S. (2007). *How to teach speaking*. Harlow: Longman.

Ur, P. (1981). *Discussions that work: task-centred fluency practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ur, P. (1997). *A course in language teaching: practice and theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ur, P. (2012). *A course in English language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

- 1) V jakém ročníku právě studuješ?
  - a. 6. ročník
  - b. 8. ročník
  
- 2) Je pro Tebe důležité na hodinách AJ procvičovat „speaking skills“
  - a. Ano, pomáhá mi to se lépe vyjadřovat v angličtině.
  - b. Myslím si, že je to obecně užitečné do budoucna.
  - c. Ne, jelikož nevidím žádné zlepšení v angličtině.
  - d. Ne, je to pouze součást vyučování.
  
- 3) Jaká „speaking“ aktivita Ti nejvíce pomáhá zlepšit dovednost mluvení?
  - a. Role play
  - b. Dialog (rozhovor)
  - c. Diskuze
  - d. Drama – představení
  
- 4) Jak často se na hodinách AJ objevuje aktivita Role play?
  - a. jednou týdně
  - b. jednou za měsíc
  - c. dvakrát za měsíc
  - d. jiné
  
- 5) Jak často bys chtěl/a, aby se aktivita Role play objevila?
  - a. jednou týdně
  - b. jednou za měsíc
  - c. dvakrát za měsíc
  - d. jiné
  
- 6) Jaké zlepšení na sobě vidíš díky aktivitě Role play? (Co ti aktivita přináší?)
  - a. Méně se stydím mluvit v angličtině před lidmi (spolužáky).
  - b. Zlepšuji se v anglickém jazyce.
  - c. Dokáži mluvit více plyně v anglickém jazyce.
  - d. Nevidím na sobě žádné zlepšení.
  - e. Jiné

- 7) Kooperace mezi spolužáky během aktivity.
- všichni spolužáci spolupracují
  - většina spolužáků spolupracuje
  - ve skupině pracuje pouze jeden či dva žáci
  - aktivitě se nikdo se zájmem nevěnuje
- 8) Jakou roli při aktivitě Role play nejraději představuješ
- reálná postava, kterou můžeš (a budeš) prožívat každý den (číšník x host, doktor x pacient)
  - reálná postava, v situacích, kterou pravděpodobně nezažiješ (rozhovor se slavnou osobností v TV, v novinách)
  - fiktivní postava – Vámi vymyšlená postava (fantasy)
- 9) Používáš rekvizity (doktor x stetoskop, číšník x tác) během této aktivity?
- ano
  - ne
- 10) Jaké materiály používáte nejčastěji při aktivitě Role play?
- učebnice
  - pracovní list od paní učitelky
  - role card (kartička, kde je popsána tvá role/postava)
  - jiné
- 11) Dostáváte od paní učitelky zpětnou vazbu? (hodnocení)
- ano
  - ne
- 12) Kdy dostáváte zpětnou vazbu?
- nikdy
  - během aktivity
  - po aktivitě

## Appendix 2

- 1) In what class do you study?
  - a. 6 class
  - b. 8 class
- 2) Is practicing of speaking skills in English classes important for you?
  - a. Yes, it is help to better communicate in English.
  - b. Generali I think, it is good for our future.
  - c. No, because I do not see any improvements.
  - d. No, for me it is just part of the lesson.
- 3) What speaking activity help you to improve your speaking skills?
  - a. Role play
  - b. Dialogue
  - c. Discussion
  - d. Drama – performance
- 4) How often do you play this activity in your English classes?
  - a. once a week
  - b. once a month
  - c. twice a month
  - d. other
- 5) How often do you want to play this activity in your English classes?
  - a. once a week
  - b. once a month
  - c. twice a month
  - d. other
- 6) What do you improve due to this activity?
  - a. I am less shy to talk in English in front of other people (classmates).
  - b. I improve my English.
  - c. I can speak English more fluently.
  - d. I cannot see any improvements.
  - e. Other

- 7) Cooperation between students during the activity.
- all classmates cooperate during the activity
  - majority works on the activity
  - Only one or two classmates works
  - Noone pay attention to the activity
- 8) What role do you like to play the most?
- real character, which you can (and will be) live everyday.  
(waiter x guest, doctor x patient)
  - real character, in situation, which you probably will never experience  
(TV interview with famous celebrity, newspaper)
  - fictional character – role created by yourself (fantasy)
- 9) Do you use props (doctor x stethoscope, waiter x platter) during this activity?
- yes
  - no
- 10) What materials do you use the most in the Role play activity?
- textbook
  - worksheet
  - role card
  - other materials
- 11) Does your teacher give you a feedback?
- yes
  - no
- 12) When do you get a feedback?
- never
  - during the role play
  - after the role play

### Appendix 3

- 1) Co uděláš, pokud během rozhovoru zapomeneš konkrétní slovo?
- 2) Jak se připravuješ před budoucím rozhovorem, situací, telefonátem v angličtině a zda-li o něm později přemýšlíš/hodnotíš?
- 3) Jak se zachováš, pokud bys nerozuměl během rozhovoru s anglicky mluvícím člověkem?
- 4) V jaké situace v reálném životě jsi využil zkušenost z Role play? (dovolená, výlet v zahraničí)
- 5) Jak konkrétně Ti aktivita Role play pomohla zlepšit „speaking skills“?
- 6) Jaké vidíš nevýhody v aktivitě Role play?
- 7) Jaká je atmosféra ve třídě během této aktivity?
- 8) Jaká témata (např. návštěva restaurace) bys potřeboval/a zahrnout do aktivity Role play? A proč?
- 9) Jaký máš názor na role cards? (jestli Tě omezují či naopak pomáhají)
- 10) Jakým způsobem Ti rekvizity pomáhají během aktivity?
- 11) Jakou zpětnou vazbu dostáváte?
- 12) Jaký máte názor na role play v online výuce?

## Appendix 4

- 1) What would you do if you forgot a specific word during the conversation?
- 2) How do you prepare before the conversation, situation or phone call in English and do you think about the conversation later?
- 3) What would you do if you did not understand during the conversation with an English-speaking person?
- 4) In what situation in real life did you use the experience from the Role play? (holiday, trip abroad)
- 5) Could you specify how Role play helps you to improve speaking skills?
- 6) What disadvantages do you see in the activity Role play?
- 7) What atmosphere is during the activity in the class?
- 8) What topics, for example at the restaurant, would you want to include in this activity? And why?
- 9) What opinion do you have on role cards? (help or limitation)
- 10) How do the props help you during the activity?
- 11) What kind of feedback do you get?
- 12) What opinion do have on online role play?

## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá hraní rolí ve vyučování anglického jazyka. Pozornost je věnována vlivu této aktivity na žákovy dovednosti, konkrétně mluvení. Ve výzkumné otázce je také zahrnut pohled žáka na zmíněnou aktivitu. V teoretické části jsou uvedeny obecné informace týkající se dovednosti mluvení a podstata jejího procvičování, komunikační strategie, popisu hraní rolí a jeho vlastnosti, výhody a nevýhody. Ke zjištění odpovědi na výzkumnou otázku byly využity následující metody: dotazník a rozhovor. Výzkum byl proveden na třech školách, z nichž se 200 dětí účastnilo dotazníkového šetření, a se 30 žáky proběhl rozhovor na dané téma. Výsledky prokázaly, že hraní rolí má na žáky velmi pozitivní vliv v mnoha směrech. Nejenže se žáci méně bojí vystupovat a mluvit před ostatními, ale také lépe komunikují v angličtině.