# Improving The students' Business English Communication and Intercultural Competence through Role Playing and Simulation

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## Abstract

Living in a global village needs an ability not only to communicate or to exchange information by using global languages such as English, but also to know other cultures as we get used to getting into contact with other people from culture other than our own. Intercultural understanding simply refers to the basic ability of people to correctly recognize, interpret, and react to other people, incidences or situations that are open to misunderstanding due to different cultural background meaning that they have different life, vision, religion, ethics, norms, laws, education system etc. Dealing with English language teaching especially for the learners of business communication, it has been widely recognized that they need not just knowledge and skill in the grammar of the target language but also the ability to use the target language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Classroom speaking activities that can be effectively used to get the goals mentioned are simulation and role-playing as the students 'stimulate' a real-life encounter such as a business meeting as if they were doing so in the real world, either as themselves or taking on the role of a character culturally different themselves (Harmer, 2001: 274) and when applied in the classroom, they are proven effective. This paper, therefore, tries to elaborate how to master both English as a means of global communication in different settings and intercultural communication understanding to avoid misunderstanding in the global world for the students of Business Communication by means of role playing and simulation in the classroom.

**Key Words:** Information exchange, cultural background, simulation and role-paying, business communication, misunderstanding

## 1. Background

In this globalization era, mastering one of international languages such English as it is spoken by more than 350 millions of native speakers along with 300 and 100 millions of English user as the second and foreign language is absolutely a necessity (Crystal:1997). It is used to get in touch with or to exchange information with other people all over the world, As a result, some important methods or approaches will be completely needed. There are some English teaching methods well known, among others are : grammar translation method, natural method, direct method, audio lingual method (oral-aural approach), community language learning, suggestopedia, communicative approach etc. Each of the method has its own characteristic and focus, whether they are focused on the learner or teacher, and this will bring some implications to the language teaching methods or techniques.

In teaching business English communication, for example, the teachers still use old-fashioned teaching methods or techniques as they merely focus on lexical and grammatical structure. The idea was that students should use language in controlled exercises until they have mastered its structure to high degree, and only then begin to talk freely.

In Indonesia, business English communication course is an integral part of the curriculum of business and management and the aims of the Business English course are as follows:

- To develop students reading, speaking, listening and writing skills in Business English in order for the students to understand a range of work- or business-related information and respond appropriately when required.
- To develop students' Business communication skills such as meeting, presentation, negotiation in order for the students to be able to interact in a range of work-or business communication.
- To familiarize students with basic business concepts in order for the students to be able to communicate effectively in international working environment.

To achieve the goals above, the teachers are supposed not to teach it by using old-fashioned teaching methods or techniques only focusing on lexical and grammatical structure. Besides, nowadays it is generally believed that the mastery of a language is more than that of a set of grammatical rules with attendant sets of vocabulary to be memorized. It is a dynamic resource for creating meaning. The teachers of business English Communication, therefore, should emphasize the importance of fostering students' ability to communicate in the foreign language rather than their skill in constructing correct sentences and improving communicative skills engaging students in learner-centered activities such as simulation and role playing has to become one of the most important components of the teaching process.

## 2. The Objective of The Research

The aim of the small qualitative research is to find out whether or not role playing and simulation are the effective teaching techniques in both improving the students' English business communication and their intercultural competence.

## 3. The Method of The Research

The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative method as it tries to describe the effectiveness of role playing and simulation as English teaching techniques to improve the students' English business communication and their intercultural competence primarily based on the data obtained from the library study, observation and interview given to the English teacher who teach Business English Communication and 24 students majoring in Business and Management especially who are taking Business English Communication. The procedure of how to get data needed for this research are as follows:

a. The researcher directly observed the classroom activity. He was provided by the log book to write down every activity taken place, such as what the teacher designed for the class activities by means of role playing and simulation, what the students did during the class meeting, how the students took part in the class activities, what the teacher's role was, how the classroom activity went on, how the students behaved, how students used their language and how the teacher did evaluation dealing with class activities, teaching techniques used, students' participation in each activity, the weakness and the strength of the students in using language functions and of their intercultural competence..

b. Researcher also used his opportunity to interview the teacher especially relating to the development of students' interest and development after they were given the simulation and role playing techniques.

c. Researcher also interviewed the students about what they could achieve and what they expected from their experience of taking different roles in any different culture and how they conducted self assessment in terms of their English language and their intercultural competence.

## 4. Literature Review
## a. language and culture

Language as a means of communication whether it is verbal or non verbal, written or spoken cannot be apart from culture as it provides a means of encoding a community's knowledge beliefs and values, i.e. its culture (Holmes, 2001:329) besides the language one uses expresses what he knows, he feels, and he believes. In other words, the ability of using a foreign language must be in line with that of

understanding the culture where the language is used as  Brembeck says, "To know another's language and not his culture is very good way to make a fluent fool of one's self."

Levine (1993:84) stated that in language, there are unspoken rules of speaking and they exist in every language but differ significantly from culture to culture. These rules have to do with permissible degrees of directness, politeness and formality and they affect many of functions of communication. In a small talk, for example, before leading to interesting conversation or discussion, in America,  people usually begin to ask appropriate questions for their initial small talk such as *"How long have you lived here?" , "Do you like living here"?,  "What do you do?", "What are you studying? (to a student)" or " What do you think of weather we've been having?"*  and  they will not begin their initial small talk by asking inappropriate questions such as *"Are you married?", "How much money do you earn?" How much did you pay for your car?", What is your religion?", or "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?"* (Levine, 1993:85)  even though they are still common in some countries especially Indonesia. Therefore, culture always influence the language used, in whatever the areas are: social, politics, even business.

 In a business world, the use of language appropriate with the culture involved is very important in order to avoid a misunderstanding or misperception that might make a business transaction failed. Therefore the mastery of intercultural competence is so essential that it will sometimes influence on the failure or success of our business. Samovar (2004:304) explains that to interact with an Arab, you should know his or her values regarding gender, hospitality, pride, honor, and rivalry. You should also know that Islam is a regulator  of behavior as well as a religion and that Arab males engage in a very direct eye contact. You should even learn about the Arabic language because your communication with Arab will improve if you know that or  if you were going to Japan, you might benefit from advice about gift giving, the use of first names, greeting behavior, indirect speech, politeness, the use of business card, the importance of group harmony, social stability, the use of "yes" and "no" and the like (Mc Daniels, 2000: 312-324).

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that language and culture are interrelated,  and language cannot be taught without culture. Therefore, the more business English students know language and its culture, the better they will be working in international environment.

## b. Intercultural competence

According to Barrett,M. et.al (2013:10), Intercultural competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to:
- understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself
- respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people
- establish positive and constructive relationships with such people
- understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural 'difference'

Intercultural competence therefore involves an awareness of the role of language competences in intercultural encounters. It also involves an awareness that, within intercultural encounters (as in all interactions), participants may have different levels of competence in the language(s) being used, which can create asymmetries or power differentials within the interaction. More generally, how people interpret, and communicate within, intercultural encounters is shaped by the languages and cultures which they bring to those encounters. An individual's intercultural competence is never complete but can always be enriched still further from continuing experience of different kinds of intercultural encounter.

While the definition of intercultural competence provided above states that such competence involves respecting people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself, it is important to distinguish between respect for people and respect for actions. Human beings and their inalienable human rights, and the dignity and equality of all people, should always be respected, but there are limits on the respect which should be accorded to actions: respect should be withheld from actions

which violate the fundamental principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Actions which violate these principles should not be condoned on the grounds of 'cultural difference'.

### c. Role Playing

Role playing is one of the whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, which increase motivation (Ladousse, 1994). Based on the fact, role playing as one of teaching techniques used by the teachers is a particularly effective way of providing communication practice for the students of a Business English course, and it is invariably popular due to the fact that the students in role playing have a situation to work with and their role card will state who they are, what they want or have to do, and what their attitude is. Besides, These kind of roles are definitely based on their different culture of the doers. Therefore, in addition to practicing their business English communication, the students also study different cultures that they may have in international working environment.

There are many advantages of role playing as a teaching technique in Business English Course (Strelchonok, 2012:579) as seen below:

- Role playing is a task-based learner-centered activity which is usually based on real-life situation.
- It gives the students the opportunity not only to practice the new language that they have been working on in the course but also to know new habits or cultures of the different people they play. In other words, they also develop their intercultural competence.
- It helps to make teacher aware of gaps in their knowledge, language and culture that they need to practice and learn.
- it provides useful practice in the kinds of language and culture the students may eventually need to use and apply in similar situations outside the classroom, in work-or business-related context.
- Role playing can help the teacher to assess the progress of the students as they are fully involved in their activity the teacher can observe their actions and also keep a check on their language they use and on the culture of the people they play. The role of a teacher is no longer that of instructor-corrector-controller who dominates the class but becomes more of a facilitator allowing her/him to wander freely round the class, giving help where needed, assessing the performance of individual students, noting language mistakes. The teacher can address some of the points arising from these observation in feedback session in terms of their language performance and intercultural competence after the role playing.
- In addition to providing fluency practice and developing intercultural competence, role playing also involves the development of critical thinking: the ability to generalize from examples, to draw analogies, judge priorities, infer causes, on the other hand debating skills: listening to what someone else has to say, not interrupting, speaking relevantly and clearly, being articulate, arguing the issue through, on the other hand.

### d. Simulation

Simulation is a language learning model which allows students to express themselves to their peers in group setting, group comprising usually three or four. t is related to role playing, but in Simulation student retain their own personas and are not required to pretend to be some else.

In role playing one student might be told that she is a supermarket checkout assistant whilst another is a customer. students might also be given fairly tight guidelines outlining the nature of their exchange or the language points they are expected to cover. In Simulation the group members would not be expected to place emphasis only on a given set of language points, and effective communication should be the outcome, rather than the strictly correct use of vocabulary and structures. The group is given a task which may last a single period or stretch over a number of sessions. These tasks may range from the fairly short to longer term, more wide range and complex (www.languages.dk/methods/methods.html).

Although role playing and simulation are similar, there are also significant differences as mentioned by Strelchonok, (2012:580) below:

- Simulations involve more participants.
- They take longer than role playing activities.
- They are generally suitable for more advanced learners as the language used is more advanced and complex.
- The focus is on general fluency rather than specific language functions.
- There are no constrains (i.e. on role cards) on how the participants behave. Each participant has a role but how they act out that role is completely up to them.
- Simulations take quite a lot of preparation but if they work well they can be reused in the future class.
- Because of the competitive nature of the simulation, simulations are invariably popular with the students and they get intensely involved in them as the activity progresses.

According to Jones (1982:4-7), simulation has the following characteristics:

1. *Reality of function*: the students must not think of themselves as students, but as real participants in the situation.
2. *A simulated environment*: the teacher says that the classroom is an airport check-in area, for example.
3. *Structure*: students must see how the activity is constructed and they must be given the necessary information to carry out the simulation effectively.

In business context, according to Harmer, simulation can make students stimulate' a real-life encounter such as a business meeting as if they were doing so in the real world, either as themselves or taking on the role of a character culturally different themselves (2001: 274).

## 5. Results

After having been trained  the techniques of role playing and simulation in a business context, in which they stimulated a real-life encounter such as a business meeting, either as themselves or taking on the role of a character culturally different themselves, students of business English class are found that they:

- have better knowledge of how they use language functions in business context appropriately
- have better awareness of different cultures;
- get more positive attitude towards any different cultures, such as giving response appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with other people
- are able to establish positive and constructive relationships with other people
- get the opportunity not only to practice the new language that they have been working on in the course but also to know new habits or cultures of the  different people they play.
- are provided with useful practice in the kinds of language and culture they may eventually need to use and apply in similar situations outside the classroom, in work-or business-related context.
- are provided with fluency practice and intercultural competence development, so that they have an opportunity to develop their critical thinking knowing that they practiced to be  able to generalize from examples, to draw analogies, judge priorities, infer causes, on the other hand they have been trained to experience their debating skills, such as listening to what someone else has to say, not interrupting, speaking relevantly and clearly, being articulate, arguing the issue through, on the other hand.

## Conclusion

Learning a language as a means of communication not only deals with the language form or rule of language but also the culture of the target language or the cultures of different English users as language and culture are interrelated besides, language cannot be taught without culture. Teachers can teach both language form and culture at the same time by simulation and role playing in their classroom activities. Based on the writers' experience to the business communication learners, simulation and role playing as teaching techniques are good, fun and motivating and can allow hesitant students to be more forthright in

their opinion and behavior than they might be when speaking for themselves, moreover, the students can use a much wider range of target language and culture than some task-centered activities may do. In brief, by using teaching techniques above, business communication learners can learn both the rule of the English language as an international language and different cultures of different English users since they can learn them both from their own performances or from others as a result, their intercultural communication understanding is much better.

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To give an example of how this procedure can be followed in class, I will apply Ladousse's 11 factors to Crookall and Oxford's (1990b) "Island Game." The "Island Game" is both an extended ice- breaker and collective decision-making activity which can help develop a range of skills in the target language. The simulated situation is one in which the group has been stranded on an island. A volcano will erupt in 30-60 minutes, so an escape plan must be implemented quickly. There are lifeboats to carry all to safety on neighboring islands, but an overall group consensus must be reached on who will go where, with whom, etc. The procedure is shown in the following figure:

**Level:**

      Advanced

**Time:**

      11/2 hours for the main game, 1 hour for follow-up

**Aim:**

Ice breaking, developing skills in decision making and cooperation.

**Language:**

Language skills are used to reveal things about oneself, express agreement and disagreement, persuade, defend a point of view, elicit cooperation, analyze data, and make judgments. Different skills are enhanced such as listening, understanding directions, initiating, speaking, writing and reading.

**Organization:**

Whole class and small groups of 3-7 students.

**Preparation and Warm-up:**

Students must not talk. They are given information on lifeboat numbers and capacities, neighboring islands, etc. Each student must complete a "personal profile" with accurate information on sex, age, nationality, background, employment, practical skills, etc., and with the top three preferred islands indicated.

**Procedure:**

The group makes decisions to reach a consensus. The teacher makes sure that everyone stands up and moves around. Changes can be made (such as boats being declared unseaworthy, or islands declared out of bounds) when a group seems to have made a decision "too easily." The time until the volcano explodes is periodically written on the board.

**Follow-up:**

Small groups rank order and discuss the five main factors that led to their decisions about forming groups, choosing islands and escape boats, etc.

**Variation:**

Each group develops a society on its new island, complete with a political structure. They draw up a set of guidelines, or constitution, for the community.

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Other examples of role playing/simulation, such as the famous people role play, extraterrestrial game, reception game, and design competition, have already been mentioned.

Here are five more brief examples from Ladousse (1987):

1. What do I look like? Students, in turn, try on props and accessories such as a white coat, glasses, wig and hat. The other students comment on their changed appearance. Follow-up discussion can focus on uniforms we wear in our daily lives.
2. Picture role plays. Students identify with persons in photographs, write his/her imaginary biography, and interview each other in their roles. This provides practice in simple past tense.
3. Neighbors: may I borrow? Students practice making polite requests. They are given picture cards showing cooking ingredients that they either need or have a lot of. They explain what they are cooking, and must borrow ingredients from each other.
4. Group improvisation. Two students improvise a scene, and others join and leave the improvisation, tying their roles and exit into the improvisation. As with the "design competition," this follows the unstructured, "divergent" model.

5. Role switching. Students role play persons in a conflict. On the teacher's signal, roles are switched. Discussion can center on how strong emotions are expressed in different cultures.

In conclusion, when the role playing/simulation technique is employed, it should be integrated with other language learning activities, given the preparation and care which is required in any language learning method, and adapted to student needs and level. If these guidelines are followed, it can be a rewarding experience for both the students and teacher.

6. Result
7. Conclussion

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A. Results


B. Conclusion

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