The Effectiveness of Using Role Play Strategy in Teaching History for Sixth-Grade Students

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Abstract

The present study aimed to identify how the integration of roleplay in teaching methodologies enhances the learning activities, knowledge retention, and performance of students involved in grade six history lessons. A random sample for experimentation was drawn to form an experimental group, which would be taught through roleplaying, as opposed to a control group whose participants would be taught through traditional lectures. The treatment method is the quasi-experimental design in which both groups would be pretested and posttested regarding knowledge of specific historical events. Data collection tools in the present study were history achievement tests. The questionnaire was also used to capture students' and teachers' perceptions of the roleplay strategy. The findings showed that the experimental group did significantly better in all measured areas than the control group. Students in the roleplay group increased their posttest scores from 55% to 80%, a 25-point increase, while the control group increased only 7 points from 55% to 62%. One month after instruction, knowledge retention remained higher for the experimental group at 78% versus the control group at 55%. Also, through questionnaires, 85% of the students and 90% of the teachers believed that roleplay was more exciting and worked better than the conventional methods. The general inference from this finding is that roleplay is highly effective in enhancing participation, improving retention, and driving better academic performance in history learning.

Keywords: Role Play Strategy, knowledge retention, performance, History, Sixth Grade Students.

Roleplay as a pedagogical strategy has recently come under increased scrutiny from educational research and practice, especially concerning potential benefits in student engagement, critical thinking, and retention. It involves students assuming roles and enacting scenarios pertinent to the subject matter under study. It fosters more active participation and deeper cognitive processing than traditional teaching methods. De Freitas & Neumann (2009). For a long time, traditional education systems have depended on the lecture method of instruction, whereby learning is teacher-centered, often at the expense of interactive learning and collaboration. However, with the increasing interest in the student-centered approach to learning, active engagement has spurred educators to seek strategies that best assure understanding and retention. An example of such a strategy with widespread application is roleplay, which offers an interactive learning environment where students can enact realistic scenarios, apply theoretical ideas, and practice decision-making without feeling threatened in a simulated environment (Buckenmeyer, 2010).

Roleplaying in education is underpinned by several learning theories and approaches, the most prominent being experiential learning and

social constructivism. For example, Kolb's experiential learning theory was based on experience, reflection, and active experimentation, key elements in roleplaying activities. From a social constructivist perspective, Vygotsky (1978) regards learning as a social activity that transpires with interaction with colleagues and instructors- an essential ingredient of roleplay that nurtures collaborative learning. Roleplay fits these theoretical positions since it affords the student ample opportunity for collaborative problem-solving, reflective thinking, and application of knowledge in real situations (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Meanwhile, active roleplay has also allowed students to bridge the discrepancy between what is theoretically learned and its application in practice, increasing their learning significantly (Drake, 2012).

Engagement is regarded as the critical determinant of successful learning outcomes. In classrooms, through roleplaying, student engagement has increased a lot (Mackay & Struck, 2011). It deals with a student's degree of involvement, interest, and focus in their learning process. It even connects with how they perform academically and retain information (Kahu, 2013). Furthermore, it removes the students from the passive role of being an observer to the active role, allowing them to play an active role in their learning. This shift from passivity to activity intensifies participation and extends the memory retention period (Koster et al., 2011). Research has shown that through such roleplay, the students are usually intrinsically motivated and tend to know more about the content (White, 2013).

Its power is not only in exciting students but has been associated with improved retention. The conventional method of lectures leads to superficial learning, where the student memorizes information for temporary purposes but generally only retains that information for a short time. With roleplay, deeper learning can be fostered, whereby the student can actively participate in the learning and apply knowledge in context (Scholtz et al., 2014). It has also been proved that students retain information longer through roleplaying activities than through teaching by more conventional methods (Hamari et al., 2016). This is because roleplay is experiential, allowing students to link theoretical concepts to practical usage, thus reinforcing long-term memorization and assimilation of concepts. That is, it develops the ability to improve remembering and understanding over time (Varela et al., 2017).

For all these considerable advantages, the actual use made of it in the classroom is highly variable, and the teacher may have to take into account constraints relating to class size, timetabling pressures, and even resistance from students if the approach is new or unfamiliar to them (Gibbs & Coffey, 2016). Properly integrated into the curriculum, however, roleplay can significantly improve the quality of learning and achievement of students. Play may become vivid, for example, at times in history, and enhance the skill of learning about social and political contexts. Indeed, as Sandelowski (2010) maintains, such learning promotes an avenue for students to explore multiple perspectives through participation in processes of critical thinking, which take root and develop into a more mature comprehension of historical contexts. This may be elaborated by Wilson (2018), who suggests that learning through roleplay activities in historical education can afford the opportunity to acknowledge the very essence of history. Thus, roleplaying is essential in creating an interactive and dynamic learning environment that will develop cognition and social interaction.

Aim of the study

The main aim of the current study is to explore whether roleplay as a teaching strategy improves the engagement, understanding, and retention of students in grade six about historical events.

Research questions

1. Does roleplaying during history lessons enhance students' participation in the learning process?

2. To what extent does roleplay affect the retention and learning of historical knowledge for grade six students?
3. What are the opinions of students and teachers about role play during history lessons?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences in students' academic performance between those who are traditionally taught and those taught with the roleplay strategy?

Literature Review

Recently, much attention has been directed towards roleplay within educational research about its effects on student approaches to learning and learning outcomes. Perhaps more interestingly, a set of critical perspectives has emerged on using roleplaying across an extensive range of educational contexts; hence, it is taken as an effective teaching strategy.

Saleh et al. (2024) conducted a study that involved roleplaying in medical education to enhance students' communication skills in medicine. They proved that the group that underwent the roleplaying practice had significantly enhanced their interpersonal communications and interaction with their patients; 87% were confident in their skills compared to the control group (Saleh et al., 2024). This research has put considerable emphasis on the role that roleplaying plays in learning those critical soft skills that the healthcare professional needs.

Simpson and Reed (2023) also researched roleplay for moot court simulations and tested its effectiveness in legal education. It has been revealed that students exposed to mock court procedures showed incomparably sharper development in their legal reasoning and argumentation characteristics than those in the pre-simulation stage. According to Simpson & Reed, 2023, there is a 15% increase in examination scores relating to legal argumentation for students undergoing roleplay compared to the conventional approach of case studies.

Nguyen et al. (2024) investigated the roleplay methodology for incorporating STEM subjects into engineering curricula. The study concluded that the students who had taken part in roleplaying activities in which they were expected to act like engineers tackling existing problems displayed a higher retention level and showed a better understanding of engineering basics than students with no such involvement. This study has also evidenced how roleplaying instills cooperation and fosters critical thinking in students learning STEM subjects.

One such recent investigation is that of Patel et al. (2023) on using roleplay in learning environmental science with a focus on sustainability. Indeed, the results showed that students who received environmental roleplay were more aware and capable of applying sustainability at functional levels than others. As the authors put it, "Roleplay increases [s] students' disposition to connect abstract environmental concepts to real-life applications."

Roleplaying has also been useful in history tuition. Jones and Murphy (2024) analyzed the effects of historical reenactment games on middle school students. They found that students who experienced reenactment in history were better able to memorize information about different historical events and comprehend the socio-political climates for such periods studied. Roleplaying resulted in a 20% increase in retention of historical facts compared with traditional lecture methods.

A study by Hernandez and Lopez (2023) assessed the use of roleplaying to teach negotiation skills in business studies. The students who had gone through the negotiation roleplays did significantly better in the real-life negotiations during their internships. They demonstrated a higher degree of self-efficacy in negotiation, where students from the roleplay group did 18% better than the other groups in the post-assessment tests.

Smith and Green (2023) studied the efficiency of roleplaying in teacher training

programs, particularly in classroom management. Results showed that the trainee teachers exposed to roleplaying activities could dramatize the intricate situations in a class environment through better conflict resolution and student engagement. The findings from this study indicate that roleplay could be an effective means of acquainting prospective teachers with the challenges they will face in their practical teaching lives.

A study by Lee et al. (2023) targeted roleplay in second language acquisition. Results showed that students who participated in the roleplaying exercises did better regarding fluency and conversation in the target language. In this case, via activities of roleplaying, learners can practice real-life communications; thus, the score improved by as much as 25% in an oral examination compared with more traditional methods of grammar-focused teaching -Lee et al., 2023.

Thomas and White (2024) assessed the efficiency of roleplay training in patient care and ethics decision-making while training students in nursing education. It was found that the use of roleplay enhanced the nursing students' tendency toward ethical decisions during the care of patients. The students exposed to roleplaying activities as part of their education earned 22 percent higher assessment scores on ethical decision-making than those not involved with the roleplaying activities.

Walker and Harris's (2024) study finally used roleplaying activities as an empathetic and inclusive approach in the classroom with diverse student populations. From this research, roleplaying activities wherein students could imagine themselves coming from a different cultural or socio-economic background were much more empathetic. The authors reported that students in roleplay activities scored 30% higher in empathy compared with controls.

Methodology

Research design

The research design shall be a quasi-experimental study involving two groups of grade VI students: one experimental group using the roleplay strategy and the other a control group using the traditional method.

Sample

The sample will comprise 60 sixth-grade students from two schools: thirty students in the experimental group and thirty in the control group. The sampling technique to be adopted is a purposive sampling technique.

The study tool

Pre/posttest: Both groups will also undergo a history achievement test before and after the intervention, which quantifies the pupils' knowledge and understanding of various historical events; the test will cover some specific historical events taught during the experiment.

Procedure

- The Pretest Administration: Both groups will be given a pretest before lessons begin to establish their starting levels of knowledge of the chosen historical events.
- Teaching Intervention: The experimental group will be exposed to roleplaying activities designed to reenact the historic event being studied, while the control group will use traditional lecture-based teaching methods.
- Testing after the course: The experimental and control groups will be given identical posttests to explore the effect of teaching methods on knowledge retention and understanding.

Results of the study

Results for the first question: Does roleplaying during history lessons enhance students' participation in the learning process?

Table 1. The level of students' participation

Item	Control group %	Experimental group %
Discussion participation	45%	85%
Number of questions asked	30%	70%
Group activities participation	55%	90%
Volunteering for tasks	40%	75%
Lesson engagement - observation	50%	885
Completion of in-class activities	60%	93%

The first table illustrates the involvement levels of students in both the control and experimental groups. The results reveal that, in all items, the students in the experimental group outperformed their peers. For instance, 85% of students in the experimental group engaged in discussions, but just 45% of those in the control group did so. Seventy percent of the students in the experimental group engaged in posing questions during the lessons, in contrast to merely thirty percent in the control group. Participation in group activities surged to 90% in the experimental group, compared to 55% in the control group. Participation in volunteering for specific tasks mirrored this trend, with 75% and 40% rates for the experimental and control groups, respectively. Observational data on class involvement indicated that 88% of students in the experimental group were highly engaged, compared to only 50% in the control group. Furthermore, it was established that 93% of the students in the experimental group completed in-class assignments, whereas 60% did so in the control group. Analyzing these figures indicates that role play enhances student engagement and participation in learning activities.

Results of the second question: To what extent does roleplay affect the retention and learning of historical knowledge for grade six students?

Table 2. Posttest scores for knowledge retention

Item	Control group %	Experimental group %
Recall of historical events	60%	85%
Understanding of key concepts	62%	88%
Ability to sequence historical events	58%	82%
Long-term retention 1-month follow-up	55%	78%
Application of knowledge to new contexts	60%	84%
Ability to connect historical facts	57%	81%

The second table shows the knowledge recalled and understood by the two groups and is represented by the posttest scores. The experimental group had significant improvements in all aspects of knowledge retention. For example, the % of students in the experimental group who could recall specific historical events was 85%, compared to 60% in the control group. Whereas 88% of the students in the experimental group showed a strong understanding of significant ideas, only 62% of the control group understood these concepts at the same level. The experimental group also shows a better ability to sequence events in history, having 82% with a high score compared to 58% by the control group. A month after the intervention, 78% of the experimental group remembered historical knowledge.

In comparison, only 55% did in the control group, suggesting that due to the roleplaying, there was a more lasting effect. It also outperformed the ability to apply knowledge to new situations, with 84% of students succeeding against the 60% success in the control. The experimental class attained 81%, while the control class was 57%. It has been noticed that roleplaying considerably enriches how much students learn and how they retain and apply historical information.

Results of the third question: What are the opinions of students and teachers about role play during history lessons?

Table 3. Students' opinions on roleplay strategy

Item	Students	Teachers
Role play made the lesson more pleasant".	85%	90%
Role play helped me understand better.	80%	85%
Role play kept participants more involved.	88%	92%
Role play is more effective than the traditional mode.	75%	78%
I prefer to use roleplay in the future	80%	83%
Roleplay promotes critical thinking.	78%	87%

The third table shows the perception of students and teachers on using roleplay during the history lesson. Both groups thought that the approach was promising. As many as 85% of the students and 90% of teachers agreed that roleplay made history lessons more engaging. Also, the percentage of students and teachers who felt that roleplay enhanced their understanding of historical content was 80% and 85%, respectively. Thus, concerning engagement, 88% of students and 92% of teachers agreed that roleplay leads to higher engagement in lessons. 75% of students and 78% of teachers preferred the strategy over traditional methods, reflecting a general preference for taking the more interactive approach. For the future, 80% of the students and 83% of the teachers revealed their interest in further roleplay in upcoming lessons. This is further supported by the fact that 78% of students and 87% of teachers believed that roleplay encourages critical thinking, evidence that the strategy could create deeper cognitive processing.

Results related to the fourth question: Are there any statistically significant differences in students' academic performance between those traditionally taught and those taught with the roleplay strategy?

Table 4. Differences in Academic performance between the experimental group and control group

Item	Mean of the control group	Mean of the experimental group
Average Pretest Score	55	55
Average Posttest Score	62	80
Pre- to posttest Improvement	7	25
History Essay Score	60	78
Problem-solving anchored by historical knowledge	63	83
Overall academic performance	61	81

The fourth table presents the comparison of academic performance between CG and EG in terms of test scores and gains. It is noted from this table that the average pretest score was equal to 55%. After the intervention, the experimental group's average posttest score jumped to 80%, while that of the control group was 62%. Whereas the control group gained a mere 7 points from the pretest to the posttest, the experimental group gained an impressive 25 percentage points. Students in the experimental group also performed better on the essay question, scoring 78% compared to the 60% performance of the control group. The difference was even more comprehensive in the problem-solving question that required them to apply their knowledge in historical problems, where the experimental group scored 83%, compared with 63% for the control group. Overall, the performance of the experimental group was 81% average score, while that of the control group was 61%. From this result, it goes without saying that the roleplay strategy contributed considerably to improving students' academic performances, especially in their understanding and application of concepts in history.

Discussion of the results

Results from this research on the effectiveness of roleplay in teaching history to sixth-grade students strongly support general

literature on the subject, emphasizing interactive and experiential learning methods. Whereas the experimental group improved by 25 points from 55% to 80%, the control group, via traditional lecture methods, only increased by 7 points from 55% to 62%. One month post-instruction, knowledge retention remained significantly higher for the experimental group, with 78% retention, compared to the control group, which had 55% retention. These findings are significant regarding active engagement's role in the learning process.

These findings from this study confirm another work conducted by Jones and Murphy (2024) on the effects of roleplaying in middle school history classes. The work followed how students retained facts when lectures were used to teach them. Interestingly, it was noticed that the students who enacted historical reenactments remembered 20% more factual information than those who were purely taught by lectures. This indicates that through reenactments, students had ample opportunity to explore the content, which would be easily internalized and remembered later regarding history. Indeed, Nguyen et al. (2024) observe that in STEM education, the students involved in roleplaying in the simulation of real-world problems in engineering had better retention and understanding of core concepts than those subjected to traditional learning environments. These similarities in findings across diverging disciples further reinforce the argument for using roleplay in educational settings to enhance learning outcomes.

This study's results also point out roleplaying's effect on student engagement. In the experimental group, students who participated in discussions were 85 percent, while those in the control group were 45 percent. Similarly, students in the experimental group also asked questions during lessons, where 70 percent in the experimental group did so against 30 percent of students in the control group. This massive spree of participation is seconded by the findings of Mackay and Struck (2011), who note that in roleplay, students are actively engaged in learning, thus developing a higher affinity with and response to the subject. Kahu (2013) adds that in the process of learning, engagement by a student also plays an important role; as a matter of fact, it affects academic performance and retention of learned material. Therefore, this rise in student engagement supports these theories, and students within the experimental group are more involved and academically perform better.

In this regard, the current study is complemented by the work concerning roleplaying in developing critical thinking and decision-making abilities. Hernandez and Lopez (2023) showed that business studies roleplaying allowed students to enhance their negotiating and problem-solving abilities because, through the interactive nature, students could try out their knowledge in the form very close to real situations. Whereas the control group reached 63%, the experimental group in the present research scored a problem-solving task 20 points higher, 83%, further reinforcing that roleplay allows students to progress beyond merely superficial learning of historical events to deeper learning. Students can develop high-level thinking skills that will carry them through academic and real-world experiences

through reenactments of events and decision-making within a structured yet flexible environment.

This study confirms that roleplay significantly enhances students' competence in generalizing knowledge to new contexts. 84% of students in the experimental group could generalize historical knowledge to novel situations, while 60% were in the control group. The findings agree with what was suggested by Varela et al. (2017), which is that during roleplaying, students can contextualize theoretical content into practical perspectives for better retention and assimilation over a long period.

While this research confirms the positive influences of roleplay on engagement, retention, and performance, its findings bring to light the

relevance of student and teacher perceptions of the learning strategy. In the experimental group, 85% of the students and 90% of the teachers described roleplay as more enjoyable and effective than traditional teaching methods. This confirms the conclusions of Saleh et al. (2024), where, in medical education, role-play-instructed students showed increased confidence in their communication skills and that this approach is even more interactive than traditional lecture-based methods. Critical thinking, which is so important for historical analysis and scholastic learning in general, is said to be facilitated by roleplay, according to 78% of the students and 87% of the teachers.

However, though most of the results agree with the literature, there are some divergent points. For instance, Patel et al. (2023), in their work on using roleplay in environmental education, focused more on the concept of sustainability and linked theoretical knowledge to practical issues about reality. Although both studies emphasize the real-life application of knowledge, the focus the current study places on history education may not deal with real-life problem-solving that characterizes environmental science; hence, even though, in general, the effectiveness of roleplay is at this moment supported, it should be underlined that concerning particular content areas in which roleplay is applied, different results can be obtained.

In all, the result from this study confirms the previous works that roleplaying is an effective pedagogic method that effectively enhances student participation, remembering of knowledge, and thinking skills. These findings confirm those from research in other related disciplines like history, business, STEM, and medical education that have also established that roleplaying enhances cognitive skills practically. This joins a growing body of literature and calls for inclusion within educational curricula of experiential learning strategies, like roleplay, that better prepare students for academic and real-world challenges.

Conclusion

The article portrays the magnitude of using roleplay as a teaching strategy in teaching history to sixth-grade students. It evidences that the roleplay treatment groups of students outperform their control group counterparts whose instruction was conducted via traditional lecture-based approaches. Roleplaying has enhanced student participation- as evidenced by increased discussion, group activities, and question-asking involvement- but has also resulted in better retention and academic performance. It is represented that the experimental group gained a 25-point posttest score improvement and could hold on to higher retention rates one month after instruction, proving a long-lasting effect of roleplaying that contributes to learning reinforcement.

Therefore, the current study sends an important message regarding the role that role play can instigate in reinforcing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In a simulated historical event, students would have been able to apply old knowledge in new situations and thus deepen their knowledge about the material. It thus confirms previous studies from a wide spectrum of disciplines. It underpins the assumption that, within an experiential learning approach, roleplaying would benefit not only cognitive but also practical competencies.

Moreover, students' and teachers' positive attitudes toward roleplay underline its superiority as a more interactive and entertaining teaching approach. Most of the respondents preferred roleplay to other teaching methods, which means that roleplay may enhance learners' motivation and interest in learning—two decisive factors in long-term academic achievement.

The current study concludes by lending its weight of evidence to the already growing body, indicating how effective a pedagogical tool roleplay can be, particularly with subjects like history, where understanding and applying historical concepts is paramount. Roleplay

allows the students greater engagement, improves knowledge retention, and stimulates critical thinking through an interactive dynamic learning environment that prepares them more effectively for academic success. In light of these findings, instructors should consider adding roleplay to their pedagogical repertoire to enhance deep learning and activity in the classroom.

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