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THE USE OF ROLE-PLAYING GAMES AT THE INITIAL STAGE OF LEARNING FRENCH (A2 LEVEL)

Abstract

This article examines the effectiveness of role-playing games in teaching French at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It analyzes their role in developing speaking skills, enhancing communicative competence, and reducing language anxiety. Studies show that role-playing activities facilitate active language use and shift learners from passive knowledge to practical communication.

Keywords: French language, A2 level, role-playing games, communicative competence, speaking skills.

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БАСТАПҚЫ КЕЗЕҢДЕ РӨЛДІК ОЙЫНДАРДЫ ПАЙДАЛАНУ (A2 ДЕҢГЕЙІ)

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақала CEFR жүйесіне сәйкес A2 деңгейінде француз тілін оқытуда рөлдік ойындарды қолданудың тиімділігін зерттеуге арналған. Зерттеуде рөлдік ойындардың сөйлеу дағдыларын дамытудағы, коммуникативтік құзыреттілікті қалыптастырудағы және тілдік кедергіні азайтудағы рөлі қарастырылады. Ғылыми дереккөздеріне сүйене отырып, рөлдік ойындардың тілдік материалды белсендіруге және тілдің практикалық қолданылуына ықпал ететіні көрсетіледі.

Түйін сөздер: француз тілі, A2 деңгейі, рөлдік ойындар, коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, сөйлеу дағдысы.

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ РОЛЕВЫХ ИГР НА НАЧАЛЬНОМ ЭТАПЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ (УРОВЕНЬ A2)

Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена исследованию эффективности использования ролевых игр при обучении французскому языку на уровне A2 согласно CEFR. Рассматривается их роль в

развитии устной речи, формировании коммуникативной компетенции и снижении языкового барьера. На основе научных исследований показано, что ролевые игры способствуют активизации языкового материала и переходу от пассивного знания к практическому использованию языка.

Ключевые слова: французский язык, уровень A2, ролевые игры, коммуникативная компетенция, устная речь, методика обучения.

Introduction

Teachers of French as a foreign language have increasingly begun to use effective language learning methods, one of which is role-playing. This is especially true at the initial stages, as it enlivens lessons. They help demonstrate how the target language works in real-life situations and focus on communication.

Role-playing is a very engaging activity, but it requires careful preparation, including defining the level, goals, and the desired outcome [1].

1. 1. The concept of role-playing games

Larsen-Freeman [2] wrote that role-playing is important in the communicative approach because it allows students to practice communication in different social contexts and roles. Role-playing is a very convenient learning tool that can be modified and reimagined in various ways. According to Ladousse (1987) [3], role-playing utilizes various communication techniques, promotes better speaking, increases classroom interaction, and makes learning more interesting. Here, everyone learns together, and both the teacher and students share responsibility for how the learning process unfolds. Role-playing helps students speak better in all situations and find common ground more easily. For those who are shy, role-playing is like a «mask» that helps them open up. It's also fun, and most students agree that learning is easier when it's fun. Typically, roles in role-playing games are clearly defined—either verbally or on cards. However, Kaplan (1997) [4] believes that role-playing games that only teach specific words and topics are not very effective because they don't show how people actually speak spontaneously.

In the context of role-playing games, teachers have a number of additional pedagogical functions. In particular, they must actively promote student motivation by stimulating their cognitive interest and emphasizing the relevance of the learning material, which fosters a so-called «tension to learn». Given that role-playing games simulate real-life scenarios, the teaching materials used should reflect real-life analogs. For example, blocks or sugar cubes can be used to simulate construction tasks. Role-playing games allow for the use of a variety of objects, including imaginary «extraterrestrial» toothbrushes, clocks, light bulbs, and keys. Role-playing is an effective method for increasing student engagement in the learning process. When implementing them in educational practice, the teacher's task is to determine the optimal activities, taking into account their accessibility and complexity for students, and to select appropriate roles and situations for role-playing in the classroom [5].

1.2. Analysis of scientific research

H. Yu (2023) [6] explores how role-playing games influence students' ability to communicate in a foreign language. The author used an experimental approach, dividing participants into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. Over the course of one academic semester, students in the experimental group regularly participated in role-playing games simulating real-life scenarios.

Analysis of the results revealed significant improvements in oral communication skills, fluency, and confidence among students in the experimental group compared to the control group. The researcher emphasizes that role-playing games create conditions for natural communication and help overcome language barriers. These findings confirm the usefulness of role-playing games for achieving level A2 in French, as they allow students to practice vocabulary and grammar in real-life communicative situations.

N. Zhu's (2024) [7] study examines the impact of role-playing games on the motivation of students learning a foreign language. The author used questionnaires and observations to analyze the

behavior of intermediate-level students who actively participated in game-based communicative tasks.

The results showed that role-playing games enhance students' intrinsic motivation through interactivity, emotional engagement, and the opportunity to express creativity. Furthermore, students noted that role-playing games reduce their fear of making mistakes during communication. These findings are particularly relevant for French language teaching at the A2 level, as motivation plays a crucial role in students' subsequent progress during the initial stages of learning.

Balakina's research [8] focuses on the use of role-playing games as a tool for developing speaking skills in foreign language learners. The author analyzes the pedagogical potential of game-based methods and presents the results of experimental training.

According to the findings, the systematic use of role-playing games promotes the development of dialogic speech, enriches vocabulary, and improves pronunciation. Particular attention is paid to the fact that the game situations are as close as possible to real-life communicative scenarios. The study demonstrates that role-playing games are an effective means of developing the speaking skills necessary for achieving level A2 in French.

Livingstone's [9] classic work considers role-playing as one of the most effective approaches in communicative foreign language teaching. The author argues that participation in game scenarios allows students to apply language to solving practical problems, not just completing standard academic exercises.

Livingstone emphasizes that role-playing games facilitate the integration of grammatical, lexical, and sociocultural aspects of language into a unified communicative process. He notes that such practice helps students not only acquire linguistic units but also learn to use them in accordance with social norms and context, which is an integral part of language proficiency. Livingstone's research laid the foundation for understanding role-play as a powerful tool for developing all aspects of language proficiency.

In the work, Rod Ellis [10] explores the importance of using communicative tasks in the process of acquiring a foreign language. Although his research does not focus exclusively on role-playing games, the author emphasizes the importance of using activities that require active interaction between students. Ellis concludes that communicative tasks promote deeper and more durable learning of language structures because they are applied in a meaningful situation. Role-playing games are presented as one type of such tasks, allowing students to apply their language knowledge in conditions that simulate real-life situations. These findings confirm that role-playing games are an effective tool for teaching French at A2 level.

Jack K. Richards [11] in his study examines the fundamental principles of the communicative approach to learning foreign languages. The author highlights role-playing games as one of the most effective ways to develop communication skills. Richards notes that participation in role-playing scenarios helps students improve spontaneous speech, learn to use language for practical purposes, and adapt to different social settings. For students at level A2, role-playing games are especially valuable as they allow them to reinforce basic language structures in real-life communication situations.

Hairiye Kayi [12] in her research analyzes methods for developing speaking skills through role-playing games and other communicative activities. The author reviews modern approaches to teaching foreign languages. Research shows that role-playing games improve fluency, confidence, and the ability to respond quickly in dialogue. In addition, they help students expand their vocabulary and improve their pronunciation. The results obtained are especially relevant for those who are learning French at the initial stage.

Stephen Krashen's [13] theory explains the process of mastering a foreign language through obtaining understandable language material. Although Krashen does not directly address role-playing games, his concept helps explain why they are so effective. During role-playing games, students receive a significant amount of understandable language material from the teacher and their friends. The communicative context makes it easier to understand new phrases and promotes natural language

acquisition. Thus, role-playing games create a favorable environment for the development of language skills at A2 level.

William Littlewood's [14] research focuses on communicative tasks and their role in foreign language learning. The author argues that the learning process becomes more effective when students use language to achieve a specific goal. Role-playing is seen as a form of purposeful communication in which students must solve practical problems and interact with each other. The study demonstrates that role-playing, like other communicative tasks, encourages learners to actively use language, rather than simply passively memorizing rules. This promotes deeper understanding and more confident use of the target language in real-world situations.

Merrill Swain [15], building on Krashen's ideas, introduces the concept of «comprehensible output». While she doesn't focus on role-playing per se, her theory explains why the active speaking that occurs during role-playing is critical to language development. Swain argues that attempting to express one's thoughts when necessary to complete a task (as in role-playing) forces learners to pay attention to linguistic forms they might not have noticed during passive perception. This «pushes» them beyond their current knowledge and promotes more accurate and complete use of language, which is especially valuable at level A2.

Paul Nation [16], in his study of vocabulary acquisition, emphasizes the importance of using words in context. Role-playing, he believes, provides an ideal opportunity for this. When students act out specific scenarios, they are forced to use and memorize new words and phrases related to a specific topic or situation. This makes the memorization process more meaningful and long-lasting, which is especially important for A2 level students who need to build their active vocabulary.

In the work on language learning strategies, Rebecca Scarcella and Rebecca Oxford [17] note that role-playing can be classified as an «active language use» strategy and a «social strategy». Active language use is manifested in the need to speak and respond, while the social strategy is manifested in cooperation and interaction with other learners. Research shows that these strategies promote faster and more effective language acquisition, making role-playing a valuable tool for A2-level students, helping them not only learn the language but also learn how to learn.

2. 1. Types of Role-Plays for French Learners at Level A2

2.2. CERCL Level A2 Description

CEFR: Descriptors of Speaking and Interaction (Level A2)

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), level A2 corresponds to a beginner-level user who can interact in simple and predictable everyday situations.

In speaking, a learner at level A2 can describe people, living conditions, daily activities, and personal experiences in simple terms, using short, isolated sentences or simple phrases. They can also connect ideas using basic conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *because*.

About oral interaction, the CEFR specifies that a learner at level A2 can engage in simple, direct exchanges on familiar topics. They can ask and answer questions, request information, and respond to simple statements in everyday situations. However, interaction remains limited and often requires assistance from the interlocutor to maintain the conversation. Thus, level A2 is characterized by basic interactive competence, allowing the learner to participate in short dialogues in familiar contexts while remaining dependent on a structured environment and language support [18].

At level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners are expected to communicate in simple, everyday situations that require the direct exchange of information. Therefore, role-plays should be based on familiar topics and address real-world communication needs (Council of Europe, 2020). One of the most common categories is role-plays that simulate everyday interactions. These include greetings, introductions, and conversations about hobbies and everyday life. For example, students might role-play a scene where they are *new classmates meeting for the first time and exchanging personal information*. Such role-plays help reinforce basic vocabulary and typical expressions.

Another important category is *shopping and interacting* with shop assistants. In these scenarios, students practice purchasing items, asking prices, and asking for help. For example, a bakery role-

play might involve a customer ordering baked goods and interacting with a shop assistant. This type of activity promotes the acquisition of transactional language and common phrases commonly encountered in everyday life.

Travel-related role-plays are particularly useful for French learners, as they prepare students for real-life interactions in a French-speaking environment. Situations such as purchasing train tickets, asking for directions, checking into a hotel, or requesting tourist information help students develop practical communication skills.

Healthcare role-plays also promote communication skills. Students can role-play as patients and doctors, describing symptoms and receiving medical advice. These exercises expand topic-specific vocabulary and encourage spontaneous communication.

Finally, educational and social role-plays focus on communication in an academic setting. Examples include *asking teachers for clarification, discussing class schedules, or participating in group projects*. These scenarios reflect the communication challenges students might encounter in an academic setting.

2.3. The Benefits of Role-Playing for Learning French

Role-playing is a valuable tool for students studying French at the A2 level, offering numerous educational benefits.

One of the key benefits of role-playing is the development of speaking skills. As Thornbury (2005) [19] notes, speaking effectiveness increases when students are allowed to actively and repeatedly use language in real-life communicative scenarios. Role-playing creates precisely these conditions, stimulating lively participation and interaction.

Another significant benefit is increased learning motivation. Traditional language learning methods, often based on exercises and mechanical tasks, can lead to a decrease in student interest. Role-playing, on the other hand, introduces elements of creativity, collaboration, and self-expression, making learning more engaging (Ladousse, 2004).

Furthermore, role-playing helps overcome the fear of learning a foreign language. Many students experience anxiety when speaking in front of an audience. In role-playing, students speak from the perspective of fictional characters, which relieves psychological tension and promotes more fluent communication. This is consistent with Krashen's (1985) theory of a low «affective filter», which facilitates language acquisition.

Role-playing also promotes vocabulary retention and contextual language acquisition. Instead of memorizing isolated words and phrases, students encounter the language in meaningful situations. This contextualized practice strengthens long-term memory and improves the ability to apply acquired knowledge in real-life situations (Ellis, 2003).

Conclusion

In conclusion, scientific research demonstrates that role-playing games are highly effective and produce positive results in foreign language learning. They contribute to the development of communicative competence, the removal of language barriers, and increased motivation during foreign language use. At the A2 level, students can use the vocabulary and grammatical structures they've learned in situations that more or less closely resemble real-life communication. Therefore, this method is one of the most effective and efficient for teaching French at the beginning stages.

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