



An Exploration of Data-Assisted or Data-Driven Role-Plays and Simulation and the ways in which these Advances in Second Language Learning may be Exploited in Zimbabwe either at School/University Level or Both

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ABSTRACT

Working on the assumption that role-plays and simulations help learners increase communicative skills and provide them a realistic opportunity to work with others in the classroom and outside or real world, the study sought to find out how data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations may be exploited in Zimbabwe either at school/university level or both so that the findings of the study could be linked to a broader topic of syllabus evaluation. This was through an assessment of three secondary schools representing the different contexts in which English is learnt and taught as well as one University. The study then queried the applicability of data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations in the different set ups and contexts so as to encourage further research in the area. It then proceeded to suggest possible solutions to the problems associated with using data assisted and data driven role-plays and simulations.

Keywords:

Computer assisted language learning, Role-plays, simulations, second language learning, second language acquisition (henceforth SLA), Data-driven, data-assisted, Zimbabwe school/university

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How can data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations be exploited in the Zimbabwean English as a second language learning context?
2. Does the Zimbabwean situation allow people to use data assisted and data driven role-plays and simulations?

BACKGROUND

Computerized role-plays and simulations are teaching methods that are in use in these recent years where language teaching has focused more on the learning process rather than the teaching of the language (Coleman, 1990; Higgins & Morgenstern, 1990; Taylor, 1990). The emphasis is not only on linguistic competence of the language learner, but also on the development of their communicative ability (Jordan, 1992; Meskill, 1990). To develop the learner's communicative ability, the teacher needs to create a scenario to teach the target language in a vibrant and interesting manner. Data-assisted and/ data-driven role-plays and simulations are therefore, vital in developing the learner's communicative ability as the learner goes beyond a text. This is so as role-plays and simulation require the learners to have a sound understanding of the text and be able to apply their knowledge outside the classroom and their own experience into the activities. With recent technological advances and developments in learning theory (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2000; Steinkuehler, 2005), the use of these tools in education has increased significantly, and the field of foreign language education has been influenced by this trend.

Therefore, working on the assumption that role-plays and simulations help learners increase communicative skills and provide them a realistic opportunity to work with others in the classroom and outside or real world, the study sought to find out how data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations in areas of second language learning that have advanced in technology, may be exploited in Zimbabwe either at school/university level or both. It also strove to find out how natural they can be, so that the findings of the study could be linked to a broader topic of syllabus evaluation. This was done in the context of the Zimbabwean English Language Syllabus being deemed to be a communicative syllabus. Moreover, the study then queried the applicability of data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations in the different set ups and contexts in which language is learnt in Zimbabwe so as to encourage further research in the area. Such contexts as the rural schools, where there is no electricity, no water, let alone the buildings to house the computers and the urban schools where there can be electricity, water, buildings and the computers but lack the relevantly and adequately trained personnel to

implement and direct Computers Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programmes. It then proceeded to suggest possible solutions to the problems associated with using data assisted and data driven role-plays and simulations.

DEFINITIONS

Defining has always been the most difficult part of scholarship as one cannot really say what something is and make everyone happy. Crookall (2010) humorously describes this difficulty in defining when he quoted Wittgenstein as he said of a game, that it is almost impossible to define, but one recognizes one when they see it. However, some attempts at definitions have been made as follows:

Role-play: the most simplified definition of role-play is "Role-play is any speaking activity when you put yourself into somebody else's shoes or you stay in your own shoes but put yourself into an imaginary situation" (Joanna Budden, 2008). This definition implies that students take on different personalities. It can also refer to the spontaneous acting out of a situation, by two or more persons who show the emotional reactions of the people in the situations, as they perceive them. In all the definitions two things that are outstanding are that role-plays are highly flexible learning activities that have a wide scope of variations and imagination. Therefore, they can easily be defined as learning activities whereby learners take on different personalities in a highly interactive manner.

Simulations: A simulation is an elaborate role-play, according to Tharnes (1998, 212). Simulations are where students act out a real life situation, for example, checking into a hotel, but do not act out a different personality (George and Daisy Stocker, 2007). From the above definitions, it is evident that role-plays and simulation can simply be defined as activities that enable students to act out different personalities in order to learn something out of it, in this case language.

Data-assisted or data-driven role-play: Data-assisted or data-driven role-play refer to role-plays which are at least partially computerized, but where an important part of the action is not virtual but performed in real life or on a miniature terrain. Data-assisted role-plays attempt to combine the advantages of using a computer with those of real life role-plays. (Peterson 2010). It is necessary to give this longish explanation of an example of these as is outlined in Peterson (2010,78) who says:

"multiuser object-oriented (MOO) domains represent one of the earliest applications of computer-based simulation in language learning. Early MOO domains were based on role-

playing adventure games such as multiuser dimensions (MUDs). More recent MOO domains are browser based and facilitate real time interaction within the context of a fully programmable theme-based virtual world. In the MOO domains used in CALL, learners are presented with a simulated recreation of a real-world environment such as, for example, a town or university campus that incorporates user-created social spaces known as rooms. Users of these simulations have opportunities to engage in text-based interaction, create unique online personae, manipulate virtual objects, and traverse virtual space through the use of specific commands."

Data-assisted or Data-driven simulations: Crookall (2010,905), gives valuable insight into these in his editorial to the 40th Anniversary to Simulation and Gaming journal. They could be defined loosely as games that make use of computer technology and advanced video graphics and that are used for the purposes of learning and training.

INTRODUCTION

In these days of advanced information technology, the computer is fast becoming an indispensable teaching and learning tool (Li & Topolewski, 2002; Mich, Betta & Giuliani, 2004; Sørensen & Meyer, 2007; Stubbs, 2003). Instead of confining computers to acquisition of information technology skills, they should augment the learning and teaching of English as a second language. Following that role-plays and simulations have become either data-assisted or data driven, it is high time these advances are exploited at school, university level or both in Zimbabwe.

So much has been done, that is, research work, proposals, suggestions and purpotations as to what causes the high failure rate of English in schools. The outstanding, nagging truth that has come out of it all is that the Zimbabwean education system has failed to give pupils enough tuition for the successful acquisition of the English language. Many factors contribute to the highlighted truth. Some of the factors include poor teaching methods, the students' background, lack of resources (human, infrastructure and machines) and limited periods of learning and teaching English.

In addition, studies have shown that students are failing to communicate using the English language either orally or in the written form in classroom. The failure will then translate into pupils lacking or failing to reach the expected standards of communicative competence. This only points out that the classroom instruction is not enough (Gass, 2000). There is inadequate exposure of students to the necessary linguistic data, lack of practice and inadequate time as

far as preparations for language use and examinations are concerned (Long, 1985; Long, 1996). Furthermore, language is not offered in its natural form as language lessons are mainly conducted from a set textbook and mostly teacher fronted environments (Krashen, 1985; Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996). Thus, Chapelle (2001) claims that approaches to learning with computers based on the use of real-world communicative tasks are particularly effective in creating the conditions can be achieved through exposure to comprehensible target language (henceforth TL) input and the production of, in particular, modified TL output obtained through interaction.

Moreover, Zimbabwe is dominated by the Ndebele and Shona sociolinguistic context (Ngara 1977 cited in Mlambo 2009). This entails that those pupils from poor backgrounds, especially those who live in the rural areas, lack the exposure to the English language in its natural use. This is so because the context with the native speaker is limited or not there at all as their teachers are also second language speakers of the English language. According to Mlambo (2009), in rural Zimbabwe, English is limited to the classroom while African languages are used for general communication, a point made clear by Chimhundu (1998:32) when he argues, 'In their ordinary lives, the vast majority of Zimbabweans continue to use Shona and also Ndebele.' Hachipola cited in Mlambo (2009) reports that most people in these areas hardly ever speak English. This set up is different with the rich children because they get the exposure to the language through the television, radio and other social circles.

Another contributing factor is that there is high teacher pupil-ratio in most schools and this means lack of time for attention to an individual student. It is evident; therefore, that for students to succeed in their language learning there is need for exposure to the language. Special attention to the individual student and most of all a lot of practice of what they would have learned is also essential. The only way this can be achieved is through the integration of communicative teaching methods such as computerized data-assisted and data-driven role-play and simulations and the conventional methods in the teaching curriculum.

Scholarly evidence to support the above is awash. For example, Krashen (1995) argues that language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill but acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language. Krashen (1995) calls this natural communication in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding it. He goes on to say that this natural communication is what supplies "comprehensible input" in low anxiety situations, containing messages that the students really want to hear.

Further, within this body of work, conceptions of learning that emphasize the social nature of SLA processes are the focus of attention from researchers

(Lantolf, 2000). This perspective draws on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and proposes a number of constructs hypothesized as playing an important role in learning. Central to this account is the concept of mediation, the process whereby higher mental activities are developed through social interaction involving the use of tools. According to this view, language and computers can be perceived as mediating tools that enable learners to acquire language through interaction with more knowledgeable peers (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Meskill, 1999). Language acquisition is facilitated by participation in collaborative dialogue involving construction of the TL. This form of interaction involving peer support (known as scaffolding) is linked to the notion of the zone of proximal development. This concept is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In this interactive state, learners can perform functions that they would be unable to perform independently.

Researchers have observed that network-based games, for example, not only provide immersion in engaging contexts rich in exposure to the TL, they further provide learners with ample opportunities to develop their L2 competency through collaborative TL dialogue with peers (Ang & Zaphiris, 2007). Therefore, data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations should be adapted for use in schools and universities as they can provide the natural communication. Of importance here is that these methods do not force early production in second language but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognising that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input and not from forcing and correcting production (Ho & Crookall, 1995 and Krashen 1989).

Moreover, network-based language teaching (NBLT) –“language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to one another in either local or global networks” (Warschauer & Kern, 2000) - can either be considered as a subfield (or variant) of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) or, more ambitiously, as the latest development in CALL. If compared with “traditional” (not network-based) CALL, in fact, NBLT shows a significant shift in the relationship between users and equipment; if in the former learners confronted – individually - with personal computers (PCs) and software, in NBLT they confront with other learners and/or human beings in general (Warschauer & Kern, 2000, Chapelle, 2001). It is not surprising, then, that technical development (the WWW) has somehow reshaped the ratio among the system actors (technology and learners) and reduced, de facto, the importance technology plays in CALL: ambitious projects of sophisticated intelligent systems seem to have lost their appeal to researchers, and CALL software designers are

mostly concerned with effective communication among participants and information sharing tools (Gruba, 2004).

Nor is it surprising that this development in CALL has occurred along with the so-called “social turn” in language learning theories (Block, 2003; Gruba, 2004), originating from research studies within sociolinguistics (Hallyday and Hymes): Firth and Wagner (1997) sparked debate when they proposed a view to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) broader than the predominant Input/Output technical and computational one. Although the debate has continued for some years, social theories of SLA have become a major field of inquiry within specialized literature, reaching the CALL field (Chapelle, 1997 and Salaberry, 1999). As a result, “language instruction was viewed not just in terms of providing comprehensible input, but rather as helping students enter into the kinds of authentic social discourse situations and discourse communities that they would later encounter outside the classroom. Some saw this to be achieved through various types of task-based learning, in which students engaged in authentic tasks and projects” (Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

This shift in SLA theory and practice resulted in a deep change as regards the approach to technology of which the so-called “computer-as-toolkit model” (Warschauer & Kern, 2000, Gruba, 2004) is significant: on one hand equipment is no longer the sole partner of learners, but rather a toolkit assisting them into their work; on the other, software become communication tools. As regards LSP, “English for Academic Purposes, for example, there has been a shift in emphasis from expressive writing toward helping students to integrate themselves into academic discourse communities through discussion and analysis of the nature of academic writing” (Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

As has been evident in the above evidence, for one to acquire TL there is need for exposure to natural context as well as using it in real life situations. This observation is very sound, as mere exposure to the second language is not enough Simone Torsani, in “A case study on simulation and role playing in an online LSP course” argues that it is worth remembering that the “communicative approach” is only one among a number of other approaches for language teaching/learning, although it is at currently the leading one (Gruba, 2004). Although “Communicative competence” might seem an overworked phrase, it must be borne in mind that it introduced the concept of “language use” in a real situation, underlining the importance of what is said in a given context rather than only how it is said, where “how” means if correct or not. It should not be surprising, then, that “simulation and gaming theory relates clearly to communicative language acquisition, especially in the area of interaction and experience.” (García-Carbonell et al., 2001). This implies that there is need for integration of both the grammatical and communicative teaching methods. G. Hardley agrees when he argues that the text book can offer “artificial, contrived sentences” aimed at teaching certain grammatical points. This translates to vocabulary teaching whereby there are single sentence

settings from which to infer meanings. B. Mc Laughlin (1987, 51) says language in the classroom stresses on language structures, it does not teach pupils how to communicate. This is the reason why teachers prescribe further readings to students seeing the limitations of the classroom. In light of the above, it seems worthwhile for teachers to actually create this natural situation in the classroom by using data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations.

In addition, as Ngara (1982), cited in Mlambo (2009) observes, most English as a Second Language teachers in Zimbabwe are also English second language speakers so they are not perfect. Therefore, there is need to expose learners to naturally occurring language in order for them to be proficient as they cannot access it in class through their teachers. Thus, although this is said, it is not enough as Zimbabwean texts (for example, Step Ahead English "O" Level Series is written by Shimmer Chinodya) are written by Zimbabwean second language speakers who might not have that naturally occurring language that the second language learner so much desires. Moreover, these second language teachers access their English through fiction reading which is not a natural occurring environment.

In light of the above, it is pertinent to consider the role of the computer in English as a Second Language. Taylor (1980) on computers in schools says it is a tutor-tool-tutee, that is, the computer is the teacher aid or student as he/she can easily key in information and train the computer to one's own ends. It also enables the student individual attention with its huge storage capacity and patience. To add, computers also help develop students' skills for the real world as students work with regular practice becoming more exploratory and highly experienced hence the students' ability to learn is enhanced (Kettemann 1993). It also allows flexibility.

Moreover, teachers are able to make better-informed decisions or choices on teaching materials. Data-driven learning (DDL) build learners competence by giving them access to the facts of linguistic performance and internalized intake is quite helpful in the language acquisition process. It also actively involve students in the making of meaning for example, by looking at various examples, students use an inductive method to construct grammar rules. To support, Stevens (1995) asserts that , rather than impose language on them, when using a computer, students have control of language, can formulate and invent meanings for themselves thus learners have control of their learning process. In light of the above, it is imperative that computers be introduced in schools as language teaching and learning aids. Thus, they can be used in data-driven role-play exercises.

Also, corpora based studies are the basis of accurate, empirically justified linguistic observations on which to base Computer Assisted Language Learning materials in the classroom. Although these views of SLA differ in focus, they share a number of common themes. These include the beneficial effects of exposure to

learner-centred TL interaction in an engaging environment. The literature emphasizes the motivating nature of data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations, the apparent reduction in affective barriers, and the new opportunities offered to learn outside traditional educational settings (Scarcella & Crookall, 1990). Central to these perspectives is the view that computer assisted simulations and role-plays offer a stimulating educational experience where learners are immersed in the TL and can mobilize their linguistic resources in a beneficial social context (Crookall, Coleman, & Versluis, 1990; Noel, Crookall, Wilkenfeld, & Schapira, 1987). Researchers have also noted their suitability for task-based learning (Garcia-Carbonell et al., 2001) and the development of cross-cultural skills and knowledge (Mak & Crookall, 1995). So high schools and universities could start thinking of introducing corpus linguistics in their language lessons to expose learners to naturally occurring language if they wish their students to develop communicative proficiency language use.

METHODOLOGY

The research used a mixed methods approach (but more inclined to the qualitative mode) mainly using questionnaires and oral interviews from a study population of potentially thousands of secondary schools and eleven universities, a sample of three secondary schools and one university was purposively chosen, respectively in order to get a composite picture of how teachers and lecturers are exploiting data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations in their teaching of English as a Second language. The semi-structured interview as a tool was chosen to encourage detailed qualitative comments through professional discussion, in addition to getting answers to pre-prepared questions. The secondary schools chosen are a variety; one is a former group A, the second one is from one of Harare's oldest high density suburbs and the other one being in the farming areas. The university is the oldest, state run and well established in the country. This sample has chosen as it is quiet representative of some of the major categories of secondary schools and universities respectively, in Zimbabwe. However, the researcher does not argue that this sample is a true reflection of what is prevailing countrywide and urges for the generalizability of the results of this study; it is just but a sample. Nonetheless, these teachers and lecturers were an accessible population owing to time and practical constraints. Although a small sample, these teachers and lecturers could be considered representative of the different types of teaching communities in Zimbabwe both at secondary school and tertiary level. The following questions were asked:

- Have you used data-assisted and data-driven role-plays in your classrooms? How many times?
- Do you think your students benefit from these activities? If yes, how?

- What kind of difficulties did you experience when using data-assisted and data-driven role-play?

The interviews were conducted in the period of 3 weeks and lasted about 20 minutes on average. All interviews were taped and the results analysed.

Instruments: questionnaires and interviews

The researcher gathered qualitative data by interviewing the three teachers and one lecturer using a tape recorder from a set of open ended and close ended questions. The data was then transcribed and analyzed. Two hours of class observation were also used for triangulation purposes. The questionnaires which also comprised of both open ended and close ended questions were distributed to all the pupils and students in the classes whose teachers and lecturer interviewed, each class with an average of fifty pupils and one hundred and fifty first year students majoring in English. The questionnaires distributed in the schools were all returned and just over two thirds of those distributed at the university were also collected.

Data analysis

Data was mainly analyzed qualitatively by picking the prevailing thematic trends both in the transcription and the questionnaires.

Research findings

The research was aimed at finding out how teachers of English as a Second language are exploiting technological advances in the teaching and learning of ESL through the use of data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations in their teaching. The findings of this field research concurred with most of the literature that had been reviewed on the subject matter. The findings are outlined below.

At school A, in Harare, the researcher was able to gather that the teachers are aware that they should employ data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations such as multiuser object oriented (MOO - one of the earliest applications of computer-based simulation in language learning) as communicative approaches to teaching and learning of English as a Second language and indeed they sometimes use them. One teacher actually argued that data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations have improved students' participation in language learning. The students are also aware of them and enjoy them. However, both teachers and students cited that they cause noise and disorder as the large class has to go to a computer lab that has the computer and Internet connectivity. This lab is also mainly used by students of computers, therefore, less likely available for language learning as the classes do not have computers as yet. Thus, they do not have them as much as they would prefer.

At school B, also in Harare, the teacher I interviewed said that s/he was aware that there are data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and s/he explained them soundly. S/He, however, said s/he does not use it as the timetable is restrictive. These sentiments were echoed in the light of data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations not using measurable or quantifiable lines that can prove to authorities that s/he really teaches. This shows that the syllabus and the expectations of the school officials are actually restrictive as the same teacher goes on to say that if s/he uses data-assisted and data-driven role-play s/he would achieve a lot especially in registers.

Commenting on the students' reception of these exercises he said that they take them negatively since they take them to mean that he (the teacher), will not be prepared for the lesson hence will take these exercises as gap fillers. However, the pupils themselves are aware of role-plays but they never use them in class. They did not give any reasons why but said they think role-plays could be helpful if used as the former improves their speaking and creative skills such that translating it into written language becomes simpler.

Another interview with a teacher at Chipadze Farm Secondary School in Bindura which is a satellite school in the newly resettled areas of the farming community proved that teachers are very much aware of the existence of communicative teaching methods such as role-plays and simulations. The teacher confessed however, that she does not use them because the pupils under her are not so, if at all, competent in English. They cannot even construct meaningful sentences in English, let alone act out a scene in English. Instead, she uses drilling and exercises.

In addition, she also confessed that if the pupils could speak English well with a little difficulty, she would use it as it would enable the pupils her guidance to master and use the language in its natural context. She went on to narrate an ordeal she once suffered when she tried it. She said it was disastrous as the pupils vehemently shouted "nos" and "why don't you try something else". She, however, said she would have desired to use them as they would improve the learners' proficiency. This could be so as the learners will be using the language in its natural context, therefore, they will get to know which words to use in which situations and circumstances. On the other hand, the pupils I interviewed did not know what role-play and simulations are so they did not comment.

Coming to the university, the lecturer argued a possibility of integrating this novelty in the teaching and learning of the language but cited hindrances such as lack of or limited resources as the language laboratory is small and has old and mostly malfunctioning equipment. Most of the students who responded mid-way through their first semester had actually never been to the language laboratory for simulations, rather they were aware of these from theory and individual reading in different methods in the teaching and learning of the TL.

In brief, what was gathered from the research is that teachers are fully aware of what data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations are but most of them do not use them in their teaching. The reasons they cited have something to do with the limitations and restrictions of, firstly, the Ordinary Level English Language Syllabus, and secondly, the schools' timetable and thirdly, the expectations of the District Education Officers and other school authorities such as the headmasters and head of departments. These authorities emphasize on written exercises thus putting teachers under pressure to deliver.

Therefore, the teachers are left with little or no room/time at all to experiment with role-play and simulations. To add, these exercises are also seen as excuses for having not prepared and planned for the lessons than the "more serious" writing exercises and drills. Furthermore, school authorities have cited these activities as encouraging indiscipline and noise in the classroom, so they should be avoided or at least be minimised to maintain discipline in the classroom.

Nonetheless, they were all keen on having more of these exercises as they confessed that they surely increase the second language learner's proficiency. Thus, with the advent of data-assisted and data-driven language learning and uses of computers as teaching aids, lessons could be carefully planned to incorporate these proven useful teaching and learning approaches. Moreover, since the use of computers could be at an individual's level, issues of noise and discipline can be minimised or totally eradicated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, it is evident that three teachers really think data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations could be integrated as major parts of the teaching methods. Therefore, the Zimbabwean English language syllabus planners should provide a communicative approach to the teaching of English by emphasizing the use of data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulation. The emphasis on the twin-activities could go a long way in enabling the learner to meet the language (s)he is learning in its natural context hoping that it transfers to writing as natural as possible.

In addition, data-driven and data-assisted role-plays and simulations would go a long way in maintaining discipline and lower noise levels in the classroom as they could be programmed for individualized access and use.

Furthermore, data-driven and data-assisted role-plays and simulations could actually go a long way in reducing the high teacher-pupil ratios that characterise most of the language classes. This can be achieved as the latter can give almost every pupil an opportunity to interact with either the teacher or other pupils in networked computers. For emphasis, these technological advances in English as a Second Language and Computer Assisted Language Learning

should be seriously considered and integrated in the school syllabus.

However, in as far as exploiting data-driven and data-assisted role-plays and simulations at university level could be a little bit difficult. This is so because the students who actually come to the university are required to have passed ordinary and advanced level English. This requirement on its own assumes that they are competent and proficient in English. Therefore, introducing these activities at this stage could not be an ideal thing to do as it would seem like a step backwards. In any case, the language course (citing the course offered at the English Department, University of Zimbabwe as an example) does not really center on the students' proficiency and communicative competence. Rather, there seems to be a generally perceived notion that these students are good by virtue of having excelled in their English courses at secondary and high school levels. In this light, I would recommend that students at these institutions be made aware of such developments so that they may become competent and use them when they leave university to teach in the secondary and high schools.

To add, the English as a Second Language as a course at the University of Zimbabwe is mainly concerned with teaching or making pupils aware of the developments in the field of applied linguistics in as far as language acquisition is concerned. Therefore, the teaching of these hypothesis and theories does not seem to require the communicative approaches such as data-assisted and data-driven role-play and simulations as it is assumed that students are already proficient and competent in English (both spoken and written) as highlighted above. Data-assisted and data-driven role-plays and simulations seem most applicable to high schools and beginners of English as a Second Language. They could also be applied to beginners of a second language other than English at university level, such languages as French and Spanish and language improving courses as communication skills.

Limitations

The only limitation was the time and scope of the study as it was a mini-project; I could not delve into the rigors and full-scale study of the implications and application of role-plays and simulations in more schools than the three I managed to. Another hiccup was that some teachers at some schools were not so keen on receiving me, fearing that I was an official from the ministry. This slowed my progress as I had to go at length trying to explain who I was and the nature of my research despite the fact that I had an introductory letter. Nonetheless, the study was a revelation as I managed to carry out field research and interact with both teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

Role-plays and simulations have become data-assisted and data-driven and these advances could be exploited in Zimbabwe either at secondary school or university level. The use of these interactive teaching and learning methods could contribute immensely in reducing the continued failures in English as a Second language by pupils at high school. Furthermore, they could also enhance the communicative ability of students at tertiary institutions. More so, with the donation of computers by the president of Zimbabwe as well as the extensive rural electrification program, the use of computers in language teaching and learning with role-play and simulation software is long overdue.

In addition, role-plays and simulations develop pupils' insight into some problems of human relations that are difficult to obtain in any other way. This can be achieved through handling situations which might otherwise be heavily charged with emotion. They also help students look objectively at their own behavior by providing common experience about which the class can talk. Another purpose of role-plays and simulations is that of illustrating principles from the course content through exciting motivation in the learning process. This is achievable since these methods arouse and maintain interest; they develop increased awareness of one's own and others' feelings.

Consequently, they also provide a concrete basis for discussion and help; students see ways of applying principles studied in abstract terms. Resultantly, the participants are given an opportunity to express themselves and foster cooperation as well as develop initiatives. Notably, role-plays and simulation also add dimensions of realism and promote variety of teaching activities, heightening students' awareness of psychological and social problems. To sum, Teed's (2008) assertion, "Walk a mile in shoes" is good advice. Zimbabwe's children will learn to respect others if they are used to imagining themselves in others' place. In essence, role-play and simulations go a long way other than just being a very good teaching method.

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