



# THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SIMULATIONS IN EFL CLASSES

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## ABSTRACT

*The current article aims at providing general information about simulation, its effective use and importance in teaching English as a foreign language. The article deals with the term simulation and shows similarities and differences of simulations from other language activities, gives definitions by scientists and shows the role of simulations in foreign language learning teaching as well as improving writing and speaking skills. Suggestions, drawbacks and solutions by leading experts and how simulations are important in teaching foreign languages are discussed and proved in this article.*

**KEY WORDS:** *simulation, game-based technologies, critical thinking skills, communication, outcome, interaction, reluctant students, active participants, target language, observation;*

English has become the most widespread language on Earth and it is spoken in the British Isles, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and much of Canada and South Africa. In Shakespeare's time only a few million people spoke English. All of them lived in what is now Great Britain. Through the centuries, as result of various historical events, English spread throughout the world. Today, English is represented on every continent and it is the world standard language. Over 80% of the world's scientists read English. About 85% of the world's mail is written in English. And 90% of all information in the world's electronic retrieval system is stored in English. The number of people who speak English as a second foreign language will exceed the number of native speakers.

The English language has been an international language for only 60 years. It would be to think that English would replace other languages as many fear. Instead it may coexist with languages and allow strangers to communicate across linguistic boundaries. It may become one tool that opens windows to the world, unlocks doors to opportunities and expands our minds to new ideas. So a lot of young people are learning foreign languages and using the opportunities that are given them.

Most of the students learn foreign languages better and can easily improve their linguistic skills when teachers use different competitive innovative

technologies such as role plays, group work, pair work and other game-based technologies during their lessons. A simulation is one of the most widespread forms of such technologies which can improve students' language, communicative skills as well as critical thinking skills and feeling responsibilities.

It is apparent that the English language is certainly more than the prescribed texts and objective questions. Therefore, a student getting a distinction for English in a public exam does not mean that he has caught the passion for learning English. Nowadays, students' ability to put forth their ideas by means of effective communication is expected apart from scores that just test their writing ability. This new area of focus, known as communicative competence, leads language teachers to seek task-oriented activities that engage their students in creative language use. Trying to make our classes interactive can be challenging but it remains essential because the concerns over educational relevance and quality coexist with the imperative of expanding educational opportunities to everyone not excluding those who feel vulnerable to use English both inside and outside classrooms.

In order to get learners involved in the language class and to ensure active participation of every learner, certain techniques could be applied. The best ways of getting them drawn into the language class is through Simulations. Also they are fantastic materials for the



language teachers to use with young learners because of their unlimited benefits. Every teacher and student is creative if he is given the opportunity, time and support to express that creativity. Simulations for language teaching can be based on everyday materials. We should not be afraid to try out unconventional tools based on personal experience in the classroom. In this way, lecturers can incorporate their creative skills into the teaching of oral skills. Students when allowed to explore their creative skills find speaking in the English language interesting, relevant and productive. Creative and imaginative activities help alleviate problems that hinder language learning. [1]

**What is simulation?** Simulation is a language learning model which allows students to express themselves to their peers in a group setting, groups comprising usually three or four. It is related to Role Play, but in Simulation students retain their own personas and are not required to pretend to be someone else. In Role Play 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 the longer-term, more wide-ranging and complex. [2]

The length of the Simulation need not be connected to the complexity of the language skills which students bring with them to the exercise are what determines its linguistic complexity. At the end of the exercise the group will have arrived at some decision or series of decisions and choices which they will be expected to explain and justify. However, the process of the exercise is of at least as great importance as the product in the sense that the linguistic interaction among the students will determine its effectiveness and success.

Simulations are instructional scenarios where the learner is placed in a "world" defined by the teacher. They represent a reality within which students interact. The teacher controls the parameters of this "world" and uses it to achieve the desired instructional results. Students experience the reality of the scenario and gather meaning from it.

A simulation is a form of experiential learning. It is a strategy that fits well with the principles of Student-Centred and constructivist learning and teaching.

Simulations take a number of forms. They may contain elements of:

- a game
- a role-play, or
- an activity that acts as a metaphor.

Simulations are characterized by their non-linear nature and by then controlled ambiguity within which students must make decisions. The inventiveness and commitment of the participants usually determines the success of a simulation. [2]

Simulations promote the use of critical and evaluative thinking. Because they are ambiguous or open-ended, they encourage students to contemplate the implications of a scenario. The situation feels real and thus leads to more engaging interaction by learners.

Simulations promote concept attainment through experiential practice. They help students understand the nuances of a concept. Students often find them more deeply engaging than other activities, as they experience the activity first-hand, rather than hearing about it or seeing it.

Simulations help students appreciate more deeply the management of the environment, politics, community and culture. For example, by participating in a resource distribution activity, students might gain an understanding of inequity in society. Simulations can reinforce other skills indirectly, such as Debating, a method associated with some large-scale simulations, and research skills.

According to Ken Jones "A simulation is an event. It is not taught. The students become participants and shape the event. They have roles, functions, duties and responsibilities – as ecologist, king, manager, explorer, reporter, survivor, administrator – within a structures situation involving problem solving and decision making." [3]

The teacher's role in simulation is a controller. He introduces the simulation and then observes and assesses. He does not interfere. It is a good position for monitoring the language, communicative skills and behaviour of the students.

There is no pretence in simulations – it is a reality of function in a simulated environment. Simulations and language are inseparable. Spoken language, written language or both can be used.



The language in simulations has two main characteristics – it is functional and cohesive. It has certain functions because the participants have their role and their problems to solve, jobs to do, tasks to fulfil. Therefore they have to choose appropriate language to achieve what they want to. It is a matter of the students to suit the language to the situation. Because there are usually a lot of opportunities for interaction, action and reaction in simulations, the other participants can deal with their colleague's inappropriate use of language. Although two participants start with opposite view, the situation brings them together. Because of the structure, the language is cohesive. [4]

Besides above mentioned characteristics simulations have another advantage. Students have fewer opportunities to learn from speaking practices and methodologies. Even worse, in a mixed-ability set up, working with students who are reluctant to maintain and extend conversations also limits already skilled students' opportunities for language use. Getting such students to speak English is one Herculean task for the teachers of English. More effective and innovative teaching techniques are required for tackling this complex language problem that is prevalent in the English classes of every rural set up. Some strategies beyond urging students to "speak English" are repeatedly called for. Yet, there is no authentic solution found subsequently. So every English teacher is pre-occupied with these persisting questions, "How can we challenge our students to speak and to participate?", "How can we motivate students who are not able to visualize the importance of the English language in the everyday world and subsequently do not see the need to master it well?" [5]

The answer to these questions is – simulations. They are really one of the most effective techniques to encourage and motivate reluctant students to speak the target language in the classroom.

Motivation is an integral part of simulations. It is one of the most important and interesting reasons for using simulation in teaching. The functions, duties and responsibilities given to the participants arise motives. The intensity of motivation depends on the quality of simulation. If the simulation is good, well prepared, stimulating and provocative, there is likely to be strong emotional component, which leads to motivation. The motivation may be strengthened by the participants' appreciation of being powerful, responsible for decision-making. They "own" the simulation.

Motivation can help to break down shyness, differences of sex, race, colour or status. Ken Jones mentions that simulation is a good event for students to get to know to each other and for a teacher get to know the students. A good simulation can be an icebreaker and can provide an interesting experience, which is good for social relations. Icebreaking may be needed not only at beginnings, but also always when a frosty situation occurs. Routine can be one of the reasons. Not all the simulations are good for breaking ice. A suitable simulation for that must be fully participatory, must not have any passive or part – roles and should involve a lot of interaction among the students. [3]

Students need opportunities to be active participants in tasks that require them to practice communication with their teachers, peers, and others. It involves shared experiences in a particular situation. Simulation is a kind of technique that consists of the scenario of role-play. A simulation is similar to role play except that in a simulation the participants are free to take their own decisions and are not directed in any way by constraints laid down on a role play.

The use of simulation techniques has been reported to be of high motivational value by researchers. According to Chauham this is one of the most distinctive features of simulation which makes it acceptable at all levels of teaching because if any teaching technique succeeds in creating motivation in learners all other problems may be drastically reduced.[5]

Another expert Watson explains that the use of simulation techniques where students are allowed to project themselves into new classroom roles helps to improve classroom dialogue, active participation and transfer of learning. Through active discussion, students discover how the language works.

Not just that, they are able to sort and order the information gathered and relate it to the lesson. The teacher in all possible ways guides the students but it is the students who actually discover for themselves how they can effectively carry out the acquired information that they received from simulation activities. [6]

In addition, you can build in opportunities for success rather than failure by ensuring that tasks are at an appropriate level of difficulty and that every lesson contains some "take-away" value, something that helps students leave the class knowing that they have moved forward in their learning. This could result in students' growing sense of confidence in writing a



paragraph, in using some appropriate expressions to communicate with friends and neighbours, in understanding useful vocabulary items, and so on.

Simulations also can help to break down cultural or ethnical prejudices.

When using simulations there are the following benefits:

- appease students' demand of realism in learning language
- increase of motivation, students' one as well as teachers' one
- typical teacher – student relationship breakdown (students are responsible for reaching their goals themselves)
- cross-cultural comparison and identification
- reduction of stress (it is one of the crucial points in successful language learning)
- possible noteless teacher's monitoring

Simulation has its own advantages and disadvantages, besides above mentioned benefits it has some drawbacks:

- reinforces students' faulty pronunciation;
- allows students to misunderstand and misuse new vocabulary and structures;
- works best with already effective speakers of the target language;
- requires preparation which detracts from target language contact time;
- might allow less motivated students to withdraw from participation;
- leaves teachers feeling ineffective or excluded;

Despite the drawbacks there are recommended solutions, according to these solutions teachers...

- conduct the preparation stage through the medium of the target language;
- ensure that the Simulation is of relevance and interest to the students;
- construct groups containing mixed or differentiated levels of ability depending on their students' needs;
- monitor the groups' language and participation levels during the simulation;
- base subsequent remedial work on observations taken during monitoring.[5]

Following above mentioned advantages and solutions the teacher may give the groups or students a simulation activity. By the end of the exercise the teacher will have gained an impression of how the students and groups performed in general terms, and

whether the exercise in itself was successful as an exercise.

In evaluating the efficacy of the exercise, the teacher must bear in mind whether the following questions may be answered positively:

- did the groups know what they were doing?
- were they able to operate without the assistance of the teacher?
- did they operate effectively and carry out all tasks as required?
- did they make decisions and exercise options?
- were all students/groups reasonably well motivated?
- were the bulk of linguistic interactions realistic and natural?
- did the students themselves feel the exercise was of benefit?

Although it is difficult to give a student a grade for work carried out as part of a group, by using the recorded material, or notes made during observation, the teacher will be able to assess each student diagnostically on the criterion of whether the majority of interactions would have been comprehensible to a fluent speaker of the target language.

It is for the teacher, in accordance with her institution's guidelines, to determine which levels of pronunciation and usage of vocabulary and structure students have reached as part of the exercise. No guidelines can be given without reference to local practice vis-a-vis grading in general.

Most language teachers are always foraging for ideas to keep the class „afloat“ in the sea of indifference and passivity. Although it is difficult, the EFL instructor can indeed help students develop the motivation to speak English and create the available situations to practice it and move students toward acquisition of their second language with the help of the above mentioned task-based activities. Using task-based learning to teach English does not fall into the well-trying comfort zone of traditional teaching. The average teacher feels comfortable with the prescribed textbook. This unfortunately denies students the opportunity to immerse themselves in the English language. It is necessary that teachers try using other materials as a teaching resource.

According to Genesee (1987) “activity-based approach provides opportunities for students to experience a much wider range of speech events and to use a much wider range of speech acts than is possible in



conventional medium-oriented classes in which the language is taught as a subject, or even in message-oriented classes in which regular content is taught through L2.” Therefore, using strategies such as Simulations and Language Games help students to recognize the value of the use of English and setting up situations in which it seems almost necessary to do so will keep students focused on using English in their EFL class—perhaps the only time they will have extended practice in their target language. [6]

To sum up, it is important to mention again that when using simulations resources and time are required to develop a quality learning experience with simulations. Assessment of student learning through simulation is often more complex than with other methods. Simulated experiences are more realistic than some other techniques and they can be so engaging and absorbing that students forget the educational purpose of the exercise. If your simulation has an element of competition, it is important to remind the students that the goal is not to win, but to acquire knowledge and understanding. At the end we can say that simulations are really effective in foreign language lessons and they can help students to feel free during lessons and improve their most needed skills.

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