

Artículo de investigación

**A role-playing game as a means of effective professional english teaching**  
**РОЛЬОВА ГРА ЯК ЗАСІБ ЕФЕКТИВНОГО НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ**  
**МОВИ ЗА ФАХОМ**

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**Abstract**

The article describes the experiment which substantiates the efficiency of role-playing games applying in legal English classes. The experiment was conducted in Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University (Ukraine) and H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University (Ukraine) in 2018–2019 academic years. 240 first-year students of the Institute of Prosecutor's and Criminal Justice and Law Faculty of the mentioned Universities participated in the investigation. The indicators for the evaluation the students' English fluency level were four groups of skills such as speaking, listening, vocabulary, and use of English. Research methods used in the paper are theoretical (conceptual and comparative analysis and synthesis), empirical (observation, discussions, testing, pedagogical experiment), statistical (Pearson  $\chi^2$  criterion). The algorithm of role-playing games was offered and peculiarities of communication exercises, games, and activities

**Анотація**

У статті описано експеримент, який доводить ефективність рольових ігор, що застосовуються на заняттях з англійської мови за юридичним фахом. Експеримент проводився у Національному юридичному університеті імені Ярослава Мудрого (Україна) та Харківському національному педагогічному університеті імені С.С.Сковороди (Україна) у 2018-2019 навчальних роках. У дослідженні взяли участь 240 студентів першого курсу Інституту прокуратури та кримінального правосуддя та юридичного факультету згаданих університетів. Показниками для оцінювання рівня володіння англійською мовою студентами були чотири групи навичок, а саме навички з усного мовлення, аудіювання, лексичні та граматичні навички. Методи дослідження, які використовуються у роботі, – це теоретичний (концептуальний та порівняльний аналіз та синтез), емпіричний (спостереження, дискусії, тестування,

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in teaching legal English were singled out. The effectiveness of teaching legal English with role-playing games has been confirmed by the method of mathematical statistics. It has been determined that a significant difference appeared between the experimental and control groups in favour of the first one, where the authors' algorithm of applying role-playing games was used systematically at English lessons to teach legal English.

**Keywords:** Legal English, role-playing game; student; teaching.

## Introduction

### Problem Statement

Global processes in the modern world have caused the necessity to speak at least one foreign language. As today one of the most common languages is English and its role is rapidly growing in it has become the language of science and education, innovative technologies and tourism. Moreover, mastering the English language helps to deepen knowledge in the field of professional activity. So, there can be, no doubt, that University graduates must be fluent in English. For this purpose teaching English at Universities is very important and must be effective. It is well-known, that communicative methods of teaching a foreign language are among the most efficient ones as they prepare students for communication and help to overcome the language barrier. Communication exercises, games, and activities may also be considered as a communicative means.

### Analysis of Recent Researches and Publications

Talking about communicative games in education it is necessary to note that learning possibilities of games have been known for a long time. Many outstanding teachers paid attention to the effectiveness of applying games in teaching. Different aspects of the problem using games for education (gamification) were researched by many scientists, in particular, E. Akdogan (2017), L. J. Justice & A. D. Ritzhaupt (2015), B. Martinson & S. Chu (2008), W. Twinning (2015), and others. The

педагогічний експеримент), статистичний (критерій Пірсона  $\chi^2$ ) методи. Запропоновано алгоритм впровадження рольових ігор та виокремлено особливості рольових ігор як ключових елементів комунікаційних вправ, ігор та завдань на заняттях з англійської мови за юридичним фахом. Ефективність впровадження рольових ігор з англійської мови за юридичним фахом підтверджена методом математичної статистики. Визначено, що істотна різниця між експериментальною та контрольною групами є на користь експериментальної, де алгоритм застосування рольових ігор систематично використовувався на заняттях з англійської мови за юридичним фахом.

**Ключові слова:** юридична англійська; рольова гра; студент; викладання

majority of modern studies describe different kinds of games applied in education. Among them there are works of S. El-Shamy (2001), F. L. Khaleel, T. S. M. T. Wook and N. S. Ashaari (2018), J. Moizer et al (2009), M. Mubaslat (2011), A. Wright, D. Betteridge and M. Buckby (2006), and others.

A number of scientists analyze education games in conjunction with University students, namely L. Holubnycha and O. Shatrava (2017), J. Lean et al (2006), I. Kostikova (2018), J. Moizer et al (2009), E. Phillips et al (2010), S. J. Yeo (2018), and others.

However, the issue of effectiveness of applying communicative games at professional English lessons to teach legal English has not been the subject of detailed scientific investigation. Moreover, the researchers have not analyzed statistically the effectiveness of using role-playing games (sometimes abbreviated as RPG) to teach legal English.

### The Aim and Tasks

The **aim** of the paper is to analyze the efficiency of role-playing games at legal English classes for development English fluency and skills.

Main **tasks** of the research are 1) to work out an algorithm of using role-playing games; 2) to check the effectiveness of its use for teaching legal English to non-linguistic students; 3) to find out its influence on different language skills development.

## Materials and Methods

### Participants

The educational experiment was conducted in Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University (Kharkiv, Ukraine) and H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University (Kharkiv, Ukraine) at Law Faculty in 2018–2019 academic years. 240 first-year students of the mentioned Universities participated in the investigation. 120 students composed the experimental group (60 students were from Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University and 60 students from H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University). The same principle was used for the control group (60/60). Both groups were formed at random. The students from the experimental (E) group had English classes in accordance with the current curricular basing of the authors' algorithm and the students from the control (C) group were taught traditionally without application of the authors' algorithm.

### Research methods

According to the aim of the paper we have used the following research methods:

- 1) Theoretical: conceptual and comparative analysis and synthesis of pedagogical, methodological and linguistic literature on the subject of the research as well as for pedagogical experiment, which were necessary to develop the authors' algorithm, applied in English classes with the experimental group;
- 2) Empirical: observation, discussions, testing and pedagogical experiment itself. They were needed to investigate the influence of the authors' algorithm applying at English lessons with non-linguistic students on the level of the students' language fluency;
- 3) Statistical: Pearson  $\chi^2$  criterion required to assess the results of the pedagogical experiment.

### Research Procedure

The educational experiment included two tests (preliminary and final ones) and applying communicative role-playing games, proposed by the authors. At the beginning of the experiment the preliminary test was proposed for all the students taking part in the experiment. It was necessary to compare the changes of the students'

English level and to compare the results of the students' skills development in the experimental and control groups. At English lessons with the experimental group role-playing games were applied at least once a week.

The results of the pedagogical experiment were measured by evaluation of English proficiency level among the students of the experimental group and control ones.

To define the level the following criteria were chosen: skills of speaking, listening, vocabulary, and use of English checked by adapted English legal texts or partly adapted English legal texts. The level of listening, vocabulary, and use of English skills was checked by tests. As for speaking, it was an oral challenge.

The effectiveness of learning on the basis of the authors' algorithm for role-playing games was checked by the method of mathematical statistics. The pedagogical experiment was expected to demonstrate better students' results of the experimental (E) group compared with the control (C) one. So, at the beginning of the pedagogical experiment, a null hypothesis was suggested. Its essence was that there is no difference in the distribution of groups by quantitative indicators in the English language by the skills of speaking, listening, vocabulary, and use of English. To test this null hypothesis, Pearson  $\chi^2$  criterion was used. While carrying out this quantitative analysis, we considered the learners' points of both experimental and control groups.

## Results

### Algorithm for Role-Playing Games in the Education

As any algorithm has its own action and can be easily reproduced we have offered our own algorithm for role-playing games. The algorithm includes the following stages:

- Development the set of role-playing games as key elements;
- Selection of role-playing games, which may be performed via communicative approach, and its design, depending on a lesson aim and different circumstances (the level of English, students' readiness to play games, the learning content, etc.);
- Offering a role-playing game to students, explanation of its rules, conditions and results, which are

expected to be reached (students need to understand clearly what they should do and which result their teacher wants to get);

- Preparing equipment and handouts for role-playing games (if necessary there may be properties, accessories and so on);
- Division into teams, groups, or role distributions in a role-playing game;
- The process of a role-playing game performing;
- The possibility of team building in a role-playing game (the process of a role-playing game performing is conducted under the supervision of a teacher who may and should direct it to the necessary direction);
- The completion of a role-playing game;
- Result and analysis of a role-playing game.

Analyzing peculiarities of communicative role-playing games for law students, we would like to identify the following aspects:

1. Absence of age limits (as a teacher can offer and adapt a game for any year of study and any group, filling in the role-playing games with the legal content that is needed at the moment, so, the students are able to learn the language, while interacting through communicative approach and enjoying games);
2. Possibility to involve any number of participants (in communicative role-playing games all students need to take part in a game);
3. Flexibility and variety of language situations for legal profession.

Another feature of role-playing games at English lesson for law students is that it can take different lesson time at a capture the whole lesson or combine several activities.

### The Proposals

As it is known, a role-playing game is a game in which players perform the characters' roles in a fictional scenery. Z. Deguang stresses that "role plays often consist of short scenes, which can be realistic or pure fantasy. Role plays may be enacted around everyday situations as well as around topical problems. One easily-obtained role play is from the text, which may be actual role play material. After learning the text, students can be asked to give a performance of it. This can improve their oral performance

generally and, of course, help students to understand what they have learned in an easy way. Furthermore, role plays are useful for generating free expression and the feeling of spontaneity in the language classroom" (Deguang, 2012, p. 804).

A. García-Carbonell et al underline "the participant in a role-play plays or acts a part, often before an audience. In a role-play, there is usually a minimum of background information and participants invent much of their scenario" (2001, p. 482).

There are a lot of role-playing games to teach law students. Some researchers offer different games, exercises, activities, tips, simulation for law in teaching legal case studies. E. Phillips proposes: "In all cases, the exercise will be written up, as a brief report, by the student concerned. The case study involves (a) a civil action for medical negligence, and (b) a criminal prosecution for gross negligence manslaughter." (Phillips, Clarke, Laycock, & Crofts, 2010, p. 3).

As usual teachers offer a mock court at which law students argue imaginary cases for practice.

S. Verner manages her students talking passionately and logically with a mock trial (Verner, n. d.). She underlined that "a mock trial has more to offer your students than familiarity with court procedures. Playing roles in a mock trial requires your students to speak clearly, logically and with conviction. They will need and develop confidence in their speaking abilities as they play formal roles in a mock court setting. So even if you and your students are not pre-law, give a mock trial a chance in your ESL classroom and you may find that your students' language abilities flourish, case closed!" (Verner, n. d.).

Our colleague S. Mykytiuk proposes some role-plays for law students. "Some of the role-plays that can be used are the following: 1) a trial participant extemporaneous speech; 2) a swappy role-play; 3) a Parliament debate; 4) a political nightmares role play – conduct an interview arguing points and commenting on the arguments presented); 5) consultancy presentation; 6) panel discussion/ forum/ talk show" (Mykytiuk, 2013, p. 223–224).

Among many communicative role-playing games used at English lessons with law students as an example in this article we propose the following one 'At the Trial' while leaning the topic 'Judiciary'.  
'At the Trial'.

The main goal of this communicative role-playing game is to develop students' communicative skills; the related goal is to intensify their motivation and cognitive activity. *The preparatory stage.* Students get a short description of a criminal case and the roles in a mock trial (a judge, a prosecutor, a defence lawyer, a defendant, a victim, two or four witnesses: one or two witnesses for the prosecution and one or two witnesses for the defence), and jurors. At home they need to write their speech and prepare the performance in the mock trial.

The criminal case may be like this: "A burglar broke into the cottage of a lonely woman who lives in a distant rural area. The burglary took place at 2 a.m. The woman, who is a martial arts expert, woke up and realised that someone had broken into her house. She went downstairs quietly and, without warning, attacked the burglar. She knocked him unconscious and then, losing control, she kicked him repeatedly. The burglar was badly injured and spent a long time in hospital recovering. Now the burglar is permanently disabled. The woman was arrested and is charged with using excessive power" (Cotton, Falvey, & Kent, 2008).

*The main stage.* The students play the game as if they were the participants of a mock trial.

*The final stage.* The teacher evaluates the students. Then they continue discussion and analyze the case.

Our personal experience has shown that the proposed games motivate students to be active at

a lesson, help to overcome the language barrier and intensify students' cognitive activity.

Applying communicative role-playing games at English lesson with law students has many advantages. Firstly, it facilitates the enhancing students' motivation to make efforts necessary to learn not core-subject and promotes consequently the development of speaking, listening and other skills. Secondly, it allows overcoming the monotonous lesson, when we have to repeat the speech sample close to real communication, with its inherent characteristics: emotionality, spontaneity, and purposefulness of speech influence while ensuring a context meaningful for lawyers. All these encourage students for communication, which is the main goal of teaching a foreign language (Jeong, 2018). Another advantage of communicative role-playing games is that students are able to provide language practice in different skills such as speaking and listening, vocabulary and use of English.

### The Analysis of the Results

From two groups (experimental and control ones) 120 students' tests were selected. Three statistical categories were identified in the first students' testing by the mentioned 12-point system: the first category of students – 12, 11, 10 points, the second – 9, 8, 7 points, the third – 6, 5, 4 points. Students with unsatisfactory points (3 – 0) did not study in the groups, therefore, they did not participate in the experiment. The number of students in each category in every group (empirical frequencies) is given in Table 1.

**Table 1. The results of the students' first testing that entered the random samples in the experimental (E) and control (C) groups at the beginning of the experiment**

Group	First category (12–10 points)	Second category (9–7 points)	Third category (6–4 points)	Total
E	32 (A)	50 (B)	38 (C)	120
C	42 (D)	48 (E)	30 (F)	120
Total	74	98	68	240

According to Pearson criterion,  $\chi^2$  was defined as the degree of difference between empirical and theoretical frequencies. The theoretical frequency  $f_{vij}$   $i$ -th category in the  $j$ -th group is calculated by the formula:

$$f_{vij} = n_i m_j / N, (1)$$

where  $n_i$  – is total number of students of the  $i$ -th category,  $m_j$  – is number of students of  $j$ -th group,  $N$  – is total number of students in the sample (in our case 240 students).

The empirical value of the criterion  $\chi^2$  can be calculated as

$$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^s \frac{(f_{eij} - f_{\tau ij})^2}{f_{\tau ij}}, \quad (2)$$

where  $f_{eij}$  – is empirical frequency of the  $i$ -th

category in the  $j$ -th group,  $r$  – quantitative criterion,  $s$  – quantity of groups.

For calculation of  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}}$  Table 2 was presented.

**Table 2. Calculation of the value  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}}$  for the test results at the beginning of the experiment**

Table cell of the first test results	Empirical frequency $f_e$	Theoretical frequency $f_{\tau}$	$f_e - f_{\tau}$	$(f_e - f_{\tau})^2$	$(f_e - f_{\tau})^2 / f_{\tau}$
A	33	37,00	-4,00	16,000	0,432
B	49	48,50	0,50	0,250	0,005
C	38	34,50	3,50	12,250	0,355
D	41	37,00	4,00	16,000	0,432
E	48	48,50	-0,50	0,250	0,005
F	31	34,50	-3,50	12,250	0,355
<b>Sum</b>	240	240	0	-	1,585

Thus  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}} = 1,585$ .

To compare the obtained value of criterion  $\chi^2$  with the table data it is necessary to calculate the number of degrees of freedom by the formula  $k = (r - 1) (s - 1)$ . In our case it is  $k = (3 - 1) (2 - 1) = 2$ . According to the tables of the critical values of the criterion  $\chi^2$  for this number of degrees of freedom with the significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$  we find  $\chi^2_{\text{contr}} = 5,99$ .

As  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}} < \chi^2_{\text{contr}}$  ( $1,585 < 5,99$ ), we come to the conclusion about accepting the null hypothesis that the researched groups do not differ from each other, that is, they are almost identical at the beginning of the experiment. The results obtained at the beginning of the experiment were the input data for assessing the effectiveness of learning with the authors' algorithm for role-playing games.

At the end of the experiment, we again used the

Pearson  $\chi^2$  criterion to check if there is a difference between the level of students' experimental and control groups after the experiment. In the course of quantitative analysis, a set of students from both experimental and control groups was considered.

From both sets we again selected 120 students' tests. The assessment was also carried out by the mentioned national Ukrainian 12-point system. Unfortunately, this time we have identified four statistical categories, as 2 students from control group at the end of the experiment received unsatisfactory points (3-1). So, the first category – 12, 11, 10 points, the second category – 9, 8, 7 points, the third category – 6, 5, 4 points, and the fourth category – 3, 2, 1 points. Data on the results of the students' tests of the experimental and control groups at the end of the experiment are demonstrated in Table 3.

**Table 3. Final students' testing results that entered the random sample in the experimental (E) and control (C) groups after a final test at the end of the experiment**

Group	First category (12-10 points)	Second category (9-7 points)	Third category (6-4 points)	Fourth category (3-1 points)	Total
E	29 (A)	68 (B)	23 (C)	0 (D)	120
C	21 (E)	51 (F)	46 (G)	2 (H)	120
<b>Total</b>	50	119	69	2	240

With Pearson  $\chi^2$  criterion at the end of the experiment the null hypothesis that the students' distribution into groups and categories are independent variables was checked again. And it means that there is the difference between them in the experimental and control groups at the end of the experiment while testing in quantitative indicators. An alternative hypothesis is that: the distribution in the categories depends on the distribution in the groups, that is, there is the

difference in quantitative indicators in the experimental and control groups at the end of the experiment. It is a result of teaching and learning based on the authors' algorithm for role-playing games in the experimental group. The calculation was carried out using the same technique applied in processing the results of the first test at the beginning of the experiment.

For calculation  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}}$  table 4 was presented.

**Table 4. Calculation of the value of  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}}$  for the test results at the end of the experiment**

Table cell of the final test results	Empirical frequency $f_e$	Theoretical frequency $f_r$	$f_e - f_r$	$(f_e - f_r)^2$	$(f_e - f_r)^2 / f_r$
<b>A</b>	29	25,00	4,00	16,000	0,640
<b>B</b>	68	59,50	8,50	72,250	1,214
<b>C</b>	23	34,50	-11,50	132,250	3,833
<b>D</b>	0	1,00	-1,00	1,000	1,000
<b>E</b>	21	25,00	-4,00	16,000	0,640
<b>F</b>	51	59,50	-8,50	72,250	1,214
<b>G</b>	46	34,50	11,50	132,250	3,833
<b>H</b>	2	1,00	1,00	1,000	1,000
<b>Sum</b>	240	240	0	-	13,375

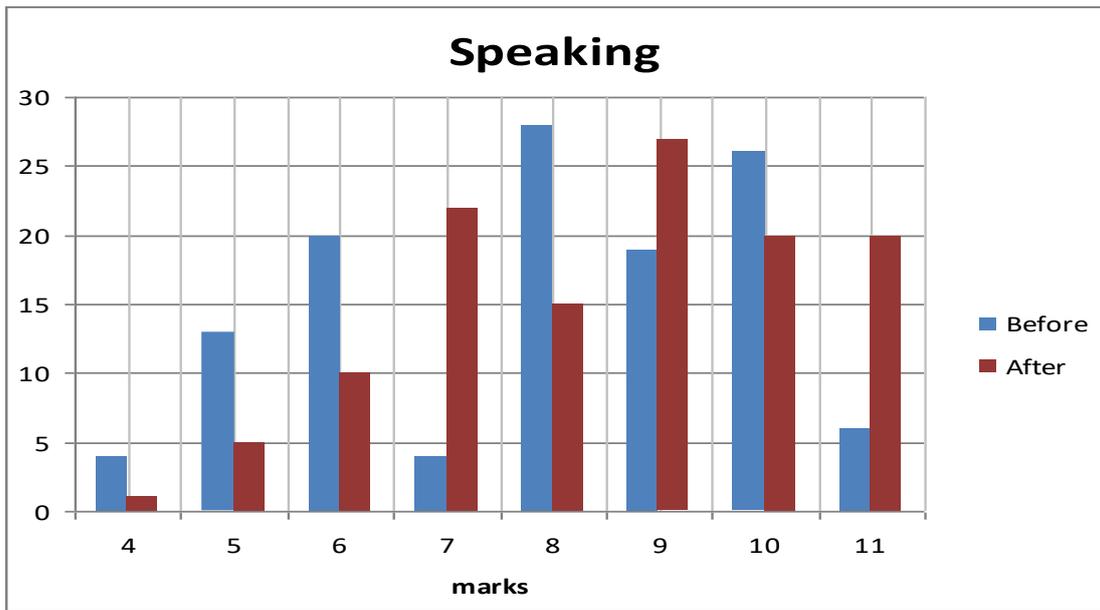
Thus,  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}} = 13,375$ . Since in this case another statistic category was added ("unsatisfactory marks"), the number of degrees of freedom increased  $k = (4 - 1)(2 - 1) = 3$ . With the help of the tables of the critical values of the criterion  $\chi^2$  for this number of degrees of freedom from the significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$  we find  $\chi^2_{\text{contr}} = 7,81$ .  $\chi^2_{\text{emp}} > \chi^2_{\text{contr}}$  ( $13,375 > 7,81$ ), that is, the null hypothesis about the absence of dependence in the distribution of groups must be rejected.

Consequently, we come to the conclusion that it is necessary to adopt the alternative hypothesis about the presence of dependence in the distribution of groups in the table. In other words, the level of students' English in the experimental and control groups at the end of the experiment

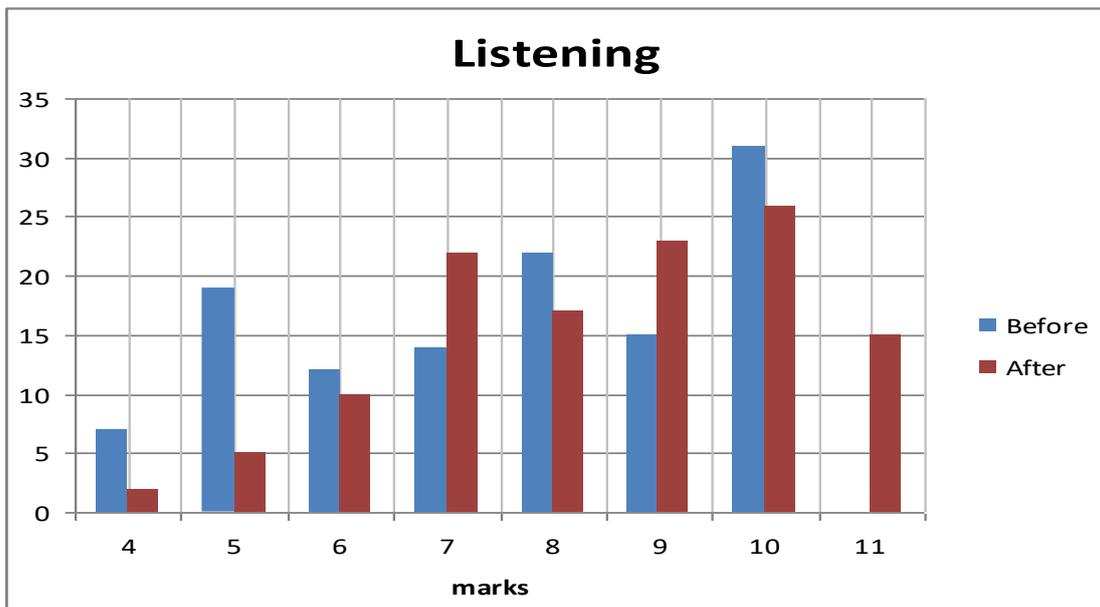
is different because of teaching and learning on the basis of the authors' algorithm for role-playing games used in the experimental group. So, the expected result of teaching and learning effectiveness due to the authors' algorithm for role-playing games has been confirmed by the method of mathematical statistics.

As one of our tasks was to find out the influence the authors' algorithm for role-playing games on the language skills such as speaking, listening, vocabulary, and use of English, we compared the results inside the experimental group. The summarized results (in speaking, listening, vocabulary, and use of English) in the experimental group are demonstrated in the figures 1-4.

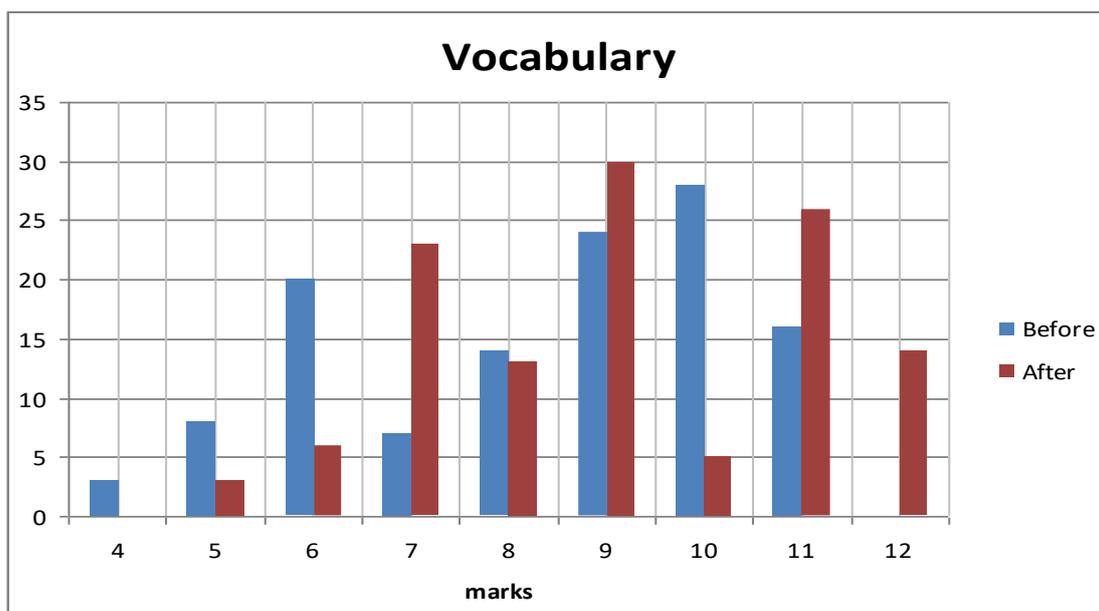
Figure 1. The results before and after the experiment in the experimental group in speaking.



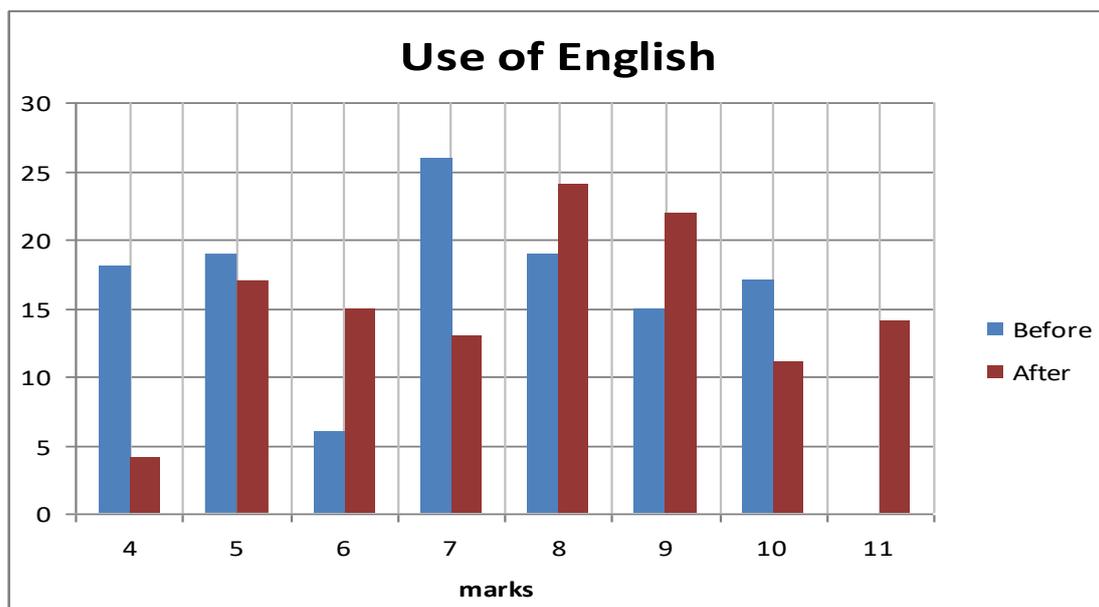
2. The results before and after the experiment in the experimental group in listening.



**Figure 3.** The results before and after the experiment in the experimental group in vocabulary.



**Figure 4.** The results before and after the experiment in the experimental group in use of English.



The analysis of the diagrams has shown that, firstly, all the students in the experimental group demonstrated better results in all the skills; secondly, vocabulary skills got the best development, speaking skills were the second, listening skills were the third, and less development got skills use of English. Probably, it may be explained by the fact that the authors' algorithm of gamification was directed, basically,

to communication, so, the communicative skills as speaking and listening got better development. In addition, as our aim was to develop communicative skills, we have not paid the special attention to use of English and grammar. The experimental group students improved their vocabulary skills better on average almost two times more. In our opinion, the reason may be that vocabulary, on the one hand, is used

frequently in the spoken interaction, on the other hand, it is the basis for speaking, listening as well, which we were trying to develop most of all.

Thus, the results approved that the authors' algorithm of gamification at English lessons with non-linguistic students really improved the students' English in speaking, listening, vocabulary, and use of English.

### Discussion

As the necessity of foreign language fluency is grooving rapidly many leading researchers consider the problem of efficient ways of teaching foreign languages to be relevant and study it thoroughly. The analysis of their researches allows concluding that the mentioned problem exists in many countries all over the world. It becomes the subject of many studies. The scientists offer different ways to improve foreign language teaching in higher education. One of the ways is to use role-playing games.

We agree with the scientists about the effectiveness of role-playing games, they research the educational opportunities and success of communication role-playing games at English lessons. They stress that such games really have positive impact on students' motivation, satisfaction and interest to learning foreign languages. In addition, it improves the language. While conducting our experiment we also applied such games. S. Verner writes: "If you decide to give your ESL students the opportunity to participate in a mock trial, you will see the confidence that develops from public speaking and logical argument...They will have experience in presenting as well as interviewing and deliberating, all valuable language skills. A mock trial may not be the best fit for every ESL class, but those that take the chance will find that it was a meaningful and memorable experience for your students!" (Verner, n. d.).

We support the idea of other English teachers who demonstrated the influence of gamification on the adequate implementation and relevance to students' experience. In our opinion, games really improve students' speaking, vocabulary, listening comprehension. We agree with S. Mykytiuk, who underlines the improvement of soft skills as well: "Role-playing is used in English classes for law students also to teach advocacy skills by providing training and experience in making oral representations on behalf of a client (making opening and closing arguments, questioning witnesses), interviewing, counseling and negotiating. In these activities

special attention is paid to legal jargon, persuasiveness of arguments, argumentation strategies, etc." (Mykytiuk, 2013, p. 223).

We really appreciate S. Verner's research, she proved the efficiency of applying games for law education (n.d.). We have tried different authors' recommendations, and can conclude that applying communication role-playing games as well as other communication exercises, activities, tips contribute to communication development largely. So, we have proposed a set of communication role-playing games, which we used in the classroom. They have proven themselves well.

It is no doubt, a legal trial role-play is the effective technique as well. We agree "language of oral advocacy is effectively taught with the support of a legal trial role-play. Each student receives a summary of the case and is assigned a role in the trial (an expert witness, an attorney etc.). This activity takes some time to research roles and prepare arguments, discuss their propositions with other members of their team etc." (Mykytiuk, 2013, p. 224).

Following views of different scientists who promote role-playing games and confirm their effectiveness, we agree with their large opportunities for foreign language teaching. Supporting all the mentioned researchers and underlying wide opportunities of using communication role-playing games, we argue that games are the effective means of professional English communicative teaching.

### Conclusions

Thus, the results of the experiment allowed us to come to the following conclusion:

- 1) The specially designed authors' algorithm for communicative role-playing games suitable for professional English language teaching promotes the increase of the foreign language proficiency, fluency, skills among the non-linguistic law students;
- 2) The result comparison of the pre-test and final test in the experimental and control groups allowed to prove statistically the effectiveness of applying the authors' algorithm at English lessons with law students at non-linguistic Universities;
- 3) The experimental investigation of the influence of the authors' algorithm for communicative role-playing games at

professional legal English allowed to compare the level of the studied skills development in the experimental group at the beginning and at the end of the experiment: the best students' achievements were in vocabulary, speaking skills development got the second place, listening skills development became the third, and use of English skills development showed the last result.

So, using the authors' algorithm for communicative role-playing games (as a key element) at English lessons for law students indicate the relevance of its application in a foreign language teaching.

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