Innovation in Language Learning - 19th Edition

When Does a Role Matter?

Perceived Role Enjoyment and Impact in an ELT Simulation

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The Role Design Problem

- Distinct abilities give each participant something to contribute
- Some benefits occur automatically
- Participants may struggle to recognise their influence

What makes a role feel worthwhile?

Roles, Purposeful Tasks and Agency

Roles	Functional responsibilities within a shared situation
TBLT	Communication directed towards a practical outcome
Agency	Meaningful action and recognisable consequences

(Ellis, 2003; Fendt et al., 2012; Jones, 1995; Murray, 2017)

Research Questions

01 How did participants rate role enjoyment and perceived role impact?

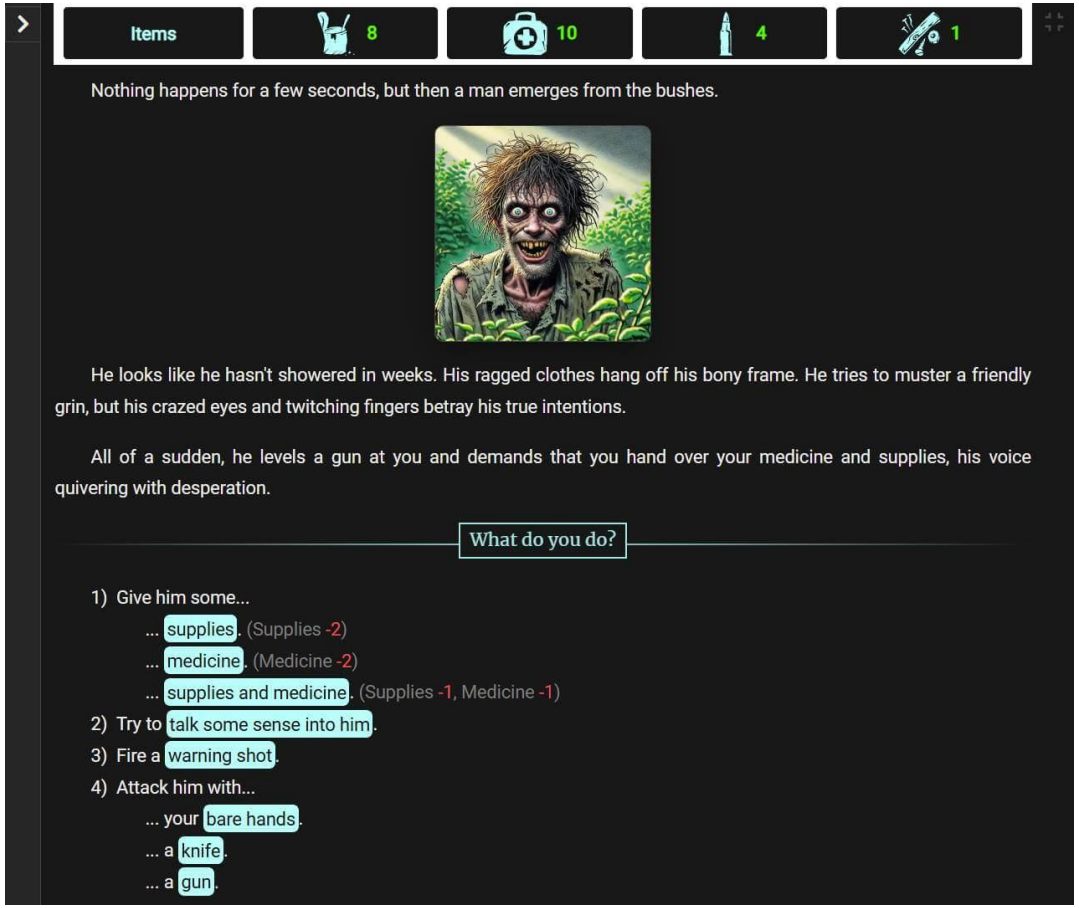
02 How did they describe the contribution of their roles and what changes did they suggest?

03 What are the design implications for creating roles in ELT simulations?

The Dying Embers

Civilian survival in a fictional city at war

- *Twine SugarCube 2* with a branching narrative
- Groups of 3–4 sharing one device
- Face-to-face discussion and majority voting
- Briefing, action and debriefing



6 Survival Roles

Role	Function
Cook	Food provision and edible products
Fighter	Combat
Medic	Healing
Pathfinder	Information about the surroundings
Scavenger	Resource collection
Tinkerer	Crafting unique items



Participants and Data Collection

5

classroom sessions

81

participants attended

62

valid journals with consent

- ELT teacher-training programmes at Masaryk University
- Data collected in 2025
- Expected entry level B2, not independently measured

Role-Related Journal Items

Required Ratings

'I enjoyed playing my role'

'I feel like my role was impactful during the playthrough'

1 = strongly disagree 10 = strongly agree

Optional Written Response

'How else might your particular role affect the game? (What changes to it would you like to see implemented)'

62 ratings for each required item. 39 optional written responses. 23 blanks.

Data Analysis

Ratings

- Frequencies, medians and IQRs
- Spearman's rank correlation
- Ordinal responses retained

Written Responses

- Inductive qualitative content analysis
- 61 segments, including 58 coded
- At most one code per segment

High Ratings Overall

10

Median enjoyment

IQR = 2

9.5

Median perceived impact

IQR = 2

Spearman's ρ = .701

95% CI [.541, .812], p < .001

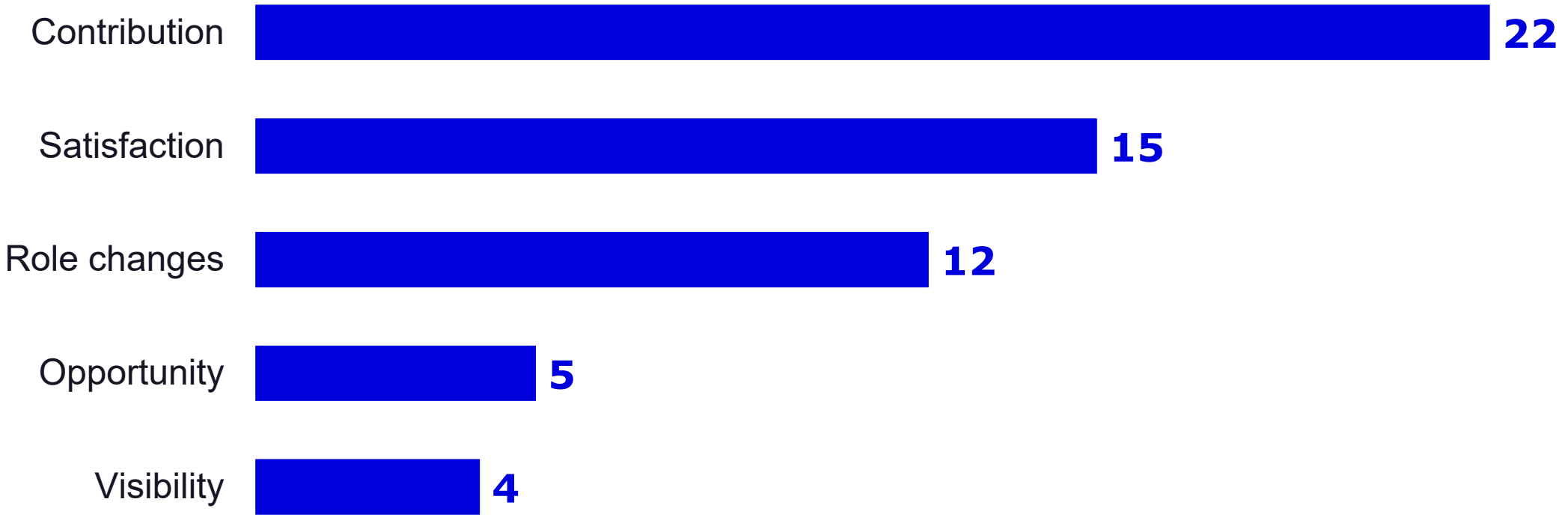
N = 62. Maximum ratings: enjoyment 33/62 (53.2%), impact 31/62 (50.0%).

Ratings by Role

Role	*n*	Enjoyment Median (IQR)	Perceived impact Median (IQR)
Cook	9	9 (2)	10 (2)
Fighter	**13**	**8 (4)**	**7 (6)**
Medic	13	10 (2)	9 (2)
Pathfinder	11	10 (1)	9 (2)
Scavenger	9	10 (1)	10 (0)
Tinkerer	7	10 (2)	10 (0)

Note. IQR = interquartile range. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 10 = strongly agree.

What Participants Wrote About



58 coded segments from 39 responses. Counts represent segments, not participants.

Recognising a Contribution

- Cook and scavenger: food and extra supplies
- Pathfinder: information for decisions
- Medic: support that influenced risk-taking

'We sometimes made more risky choices because if we got hurt it would be easier to heal' (P45, medic)



Opportunities Depended on Group Choices

Fighter account	Enjoyment	Impact
P10: no opportunity to use the fighting skill	8	4
P58: group deliberately avoided fighting	9	7
P13: enjoyed an aggressive playstyle	10	10



Unclear Effects and Constrained Use

Recognising Effects

- Some medics, fighters and pathfinders were unsure what their role had changed
- Benefits could be difficult to attribute

Using Abilities

- Injuries limited one scavenger's contribution
- A medic in another group reported ample opportunities

Changes Participants Suggested

Broader Abilities	Rationing food, avoiding attention, assessing threats
Decision Responsibility	Combat decisions and scavenging strategy

12 segments: 9 suggestions without clear criticism, 3 critical evaluations

Design Implications

- Recurring benefits make contributions easier to identify
- Automatic perks can leave little room for active involvement
- Readable feedback can clarify a role's effects
- Broader uses can preserve relevance across different playstyles

Communicative Responsibilities in ELT

Role expertise can give participants a reason to speak

- Explain information relevant to the decision
- Justify a proposed action
- Respond to peers before the group vote

When Does a Role Matter?

- When participants can use its expertise
- When they can recognise its contribution
- When it gives them a part in decisions

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For ELT, connect that expertise to a reason to communicate

Thank you for your attention!

Any questions?

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