Experimenting with role-play in sub-Saharan students’ EFL classrooms

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Abstract
A class of adult sub-Saharan refugee applicants working as interpreters with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) were exposed to a curriculum with traditional and communicative methods, including role-play as a technique. In EFL classrooms comprised of sub-Saharan students (including this one) a focus on forms approach is often adopted, often at the expense of the ‘communicative’ approaches. By varying this, exploring these learners’ use and acceptability of role-play was the main objective of this study. Drawing on Africans’ tradition of verbally reciting and enacting events, rather than exclusively reading and writing them, this study experimented with the use of role-play and enactment with this class over a period of several months. Role play was found to give learners opportunities for vivid language practice, and experiencing the associated improvisations enabled them to flex their emotional, mental as well as physical muscles in a safe and controlled setting while learning English. As role-play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques, it helped learners develop fluency, class interaction, learner motivation and oral self-confidence. Role play also encouraged peer learning and the sharing of responsibility for learning between teacher and student. The topics chosen were related to students’ personal experiences and interests, raising their intrinsic motivation for participating and learning.

Key words: role-play, Arab and sub-Saharan students, EFL experimental practice, communicative technique, intrinsic motivation.

1. Introduction
1.1 Why diversify our teaching repertoire by including role-play in the English classroom?
As teachers, we may sometimes not spend enough time on encouraging our students to use their imagination while learning English, something which many of us can identify with. This is of particular importance if revealed during feedback to us. Role-play is beneficial as it may help teachers allow students to have more ‘space’ and liberty in the classroom. This also allows them and us to “reveal aspects of the human condition, life is nothing more than a grand series of improvisations” (Price, 1980) that would not be possible in the more traditional classrooms. Giving the space and opportunity for students to practice and experience these improvisations enables them to flex their emotional, mental as well as physical muscles in a safe and controlled setting while learning English.

The possible advantages experienced when including role-play in the ESL classroom are many and diverse, affecting learners, teacher and the general classroom environment. However, they are often underutilized and in certain classroom scenarios, are not used at all. Few references to the use of role-play in classes comprising sub-Saharan African students have been documented, and this case study aims to explore the successes and challenges associated with doing it. Drawing on Africans’
tradition of verbally reciting and enacting events, rather than exclusively reading and writing them, is the main focus of this body of research. The researcher (also the teacher of these students) experimented with the use of role-play and enactment with this class for a period of time covering six months.

Role-play involves giving students a role and assigning a purpose, or several purposes, for the students to accomplish (Brown, 2001). It is a communicative technique which helps develop fluency, class interaction, and learner motivation. In addition, role play encourages peer learning, and sharing the responsibility for learning between teacher and student (Ladousse, 2004). Indeed, role-play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, promotes classroom interaction, and motivation. It is the critical force behind second language learning through enjoyable experiences to which students can relate to (Anon, 2009; Harmer, 2007; Ladousse, 2004). When role-play relates to students’ experience and interests, it specifically raises their intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Kawachi, 2003).

In the ESL classroom, role-playing is a powerful tool. Stern (1983, p.213) suggested "role playing helps the individual to become more flexible" and "develop a sense of mastery in many situations, practicing communication in different social contexts and roles (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Therefore role-play for students broadens the world of the classroom, allowing the inclusion of the world outside; it also allows students to use a much wider range of language than when presenting the curriculum through exclusively traditional methods (Harmer, 2007).

Role-play also teaches cooperation, empathy for others, decision making skills and encourages an exchange of knowledge among students, and also between the teacher and students. It is therefore a good technique to vary the pace and interaction of the lesson, and to respond to the fundamental notion of variety in teaching, motivating students to be more interactive during the lesson (Anon, 2009). This has the dual advantage of lessening teacher talking time and having lessons that may be excessively teacher-led, while also encouraging student-centred interactions and learner autonomy.

Role-play can also allow the more hesitant and shy students to be more forthright in their opinions and behaviour as they can ‘detach’ themselves from self when ‘becoming’ the ‘new personality’ during the activity (Harmer, 2007). When students are enjoying an activity they are therefore not only learning, but also letting their guard down which facilitates their use of language for communication and even further learning. Success breeds success, and in this positive
feedback cycle, students should become more confident and capable of experimenting and succeeding with language. The shyness and fear of English that sometimes blocks learning often seen in classes following more traditional methods may therefore often be considerably reduced via the introduction of communicative approaches like role-play. Indeed, when students are submerged in a dynamic, fun activity, they are more open to new concepts and learning will occur. However, some concerns may exist. For example, could some students find role-play childish, and would it demotivate them? Or could ‘performance-anxiety’ before and during role-play actually block certain student-personality types, for example, when they are to be recorded? These are some of the considerations that were investigated in this body of research.

1.2. Course location, course background and participants’ possible need for role-play

1.2.1. Course location and background

The participants in this case-study refer to a class of adult sub-Saharan refugee applicants, who were working as interpreters with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs in the Mediterranean island of Malta. (Malta lays half way across one of the major sea-routes in the Mediterranean Sea used by immigrants when moving from North Africa to Italy.) The refugees were following an 18-month course in “English for interpreting in a refugee context”, which was an exciting and new experience for the teacher/researcher conducting this research, albeit a challenging one. The course has both an ESP (English for specific purposes) focus, and also a ‘general English’ one.

1.2.2. Participants’ possible need for role-play

Initial student feedback showed that these students wanted opportunities to develop both fluency and accuracy, preferably through tasks that reflected their life-experiences, were interesting, and met their daily needs. But the resulting strategy in class had resulted in a somewhat repetitive approach, as students initially ‘insisted’ on a solely present-practice-produce (PPP) approach to grammar lessons (Scrivener, 2005). This fairly conservative and traditional method only initially worked successfully with the group, despite it being their own specific request. Indeed, students subsequently started to lose focus and interest, and consequently language progress was not as positive as expected. As a result, a test-teach-test (TTT) form of methodology (Ibid, 2005) was also used. This made the presentation of language more challenging as it first examined students for what they actually knew, allowing the
teacher to later focus on what aspects of language the students truly needed.
In order to further diversify, enhance and improve the learning experience, task based learning (TBL) based on the communicative approach (Thornbury, 2006), was another method introduced to this class. This is in accordance to the current consensus about TBL that “people learn a language best by actually using the language to achieve real meanings and achieve real outcomes… This belief has brought into the classroom a wide range of activities designed to promote language use such as role-play” (Willis, 1990, p.1).
While the use of role-play is widely encouraged by TBL, it may also have a significant role in the ‘authentic output’ phase of PPP and TTT (Scrivener, 2005). Role-play can therefore be adapted to a wide range of teaching methodologies. The teacher (researcher) therefore planned to use role-play as a technique for motivating across a broad range of lesson-types over several months.
All students in this class were authentic applicants for refugee status, and had also worked as interpreters. They therefore personally had the experience of the refugee applicant interview process, making it an ideal topic for introducing role-play to them. Topic choice is important as ‘tangibility’ is highly motivating for students, so in the first lesson with them using the role-play technique. TBL is characterized by tasks having an alternative, ‘tangible’ outcome, other than purely linguistic, where ideally “learners use whatever target language resources they have in order to solve problems” (Willis, 1996).
Classroom teaching methodology was diversified to also include task-based learning (TBL), allowing for the easier introduction of role-play. However, there were still several challenges, including fundamental concerns as to how to adopt role-play in tasks. Interaction with peers and students during teaching over previous months also had resulted in fresh class feedback which the teacher (researcher) helped refine the research methods to be used in this study.

1.2.3. Student- and peer-feedback on teaching methods
Feedback can be summarized as follows:

(i) peers suggested classes were overly teacher-led; students may have failed to be given enough opportunities to think creatively and express themselves independently and fully, or take initiatives in class;

(ii) students said they wanted to use English to communicate, doing things that reflect their life-experiences and needs; fluency was said to be important, but not at the cost of accuracy. They felt they were not given enough opportunities to think creatively and express
themselves independently and fully, or take initiatives in class is a particular concern.

The teacher (researcher) felt that many of these issues could be collectively addressed by the inclusion of role-play in the timetable. The first role-play lesson with the class was therefore set-up to have research objectives for both teacher and learners, as described in the next section.

2. Research objectives

There were three main objectives for this research, namely to deliver a lesson based on role-play, and determine the students’ and the teacher’s perceptions and views of how successful it is in the English language classroom.

2.1. Objective 1: To plan and deliver a lesson based on role-play having specific aims

The lesson focus was mainly a ‘skills-focus’ (speaking/listening), but there also was a ‘systems-focus’ (grammar, formulating questions).

The main aims were to:

(i) give an opportunity for students for the simultaneous use of linguistic skills and systems, and cognitive processes through role-play. This gives an opportunity for students to practice communicating in a different social context, and adopting different social roles, through a task which is meaningful to the learner.

(ii) revise the basic rules for formulation of questions and have an opportunity to use them while performing a meaningful task.

A subsidiary aim was to:

(i) help the teacher and students evaluate students’ own perceptions on the use of role play as a regular feature in the TBL component of their overall syllabus.

2.2. Objective 2: To measure students’ perceptions on the use of role-play in the classroom

The evaluation of the students’ perceptions on the use of role-play within a task-based learning framework in the classroom aimed to measure and assess:

(i) Motivation: the critical force which determines whether a learner embarks on a task at all (Anon, 2009);

(ii) Creativity: “broadening the world of the classroom to include the world outside” (Harmer, 2007, p.353);

(iii) Enthusiasm: the ‘enjoyment’ element in class (Ibid, 2007, p.353);

(iv) Student-centeredness: motivating my students to be more interactive in our lessons (Anon 2009);

(v) Fluency: language is learnt “by using it” (Thornbury, 2006, p.223);

(vi) Accuracy: refocusing on particular structures (Skehan, 1996);

(vii) Utility outside class: accent on meaningful tasks, a critical factor to activate linguistic learning (Ibid, 1996);
(viii) Overall willingness to repeat role-play activities in their English classes.

2.3. Objectives: To measure role-play’s effects on the teachers’ professional development
The teacher’s self-reflection and peer-feedback during class observation indicated that classes were excessively teacher-led, and with too much teacher-talk, resulting in students not being allowed sufficient independence or creativity. However, student feedback indicated that they appreciate the teacher’s role “as a source of input and as an interactional partner” (Thornbury, 2006, p.225) so the issue of ‘teacher-talk’ being excessive and inappropriate, or not, was not so clear-cut.
Therefore the second objective of this experimental practice was to explore such concerns. The teacher/researcher aimed at measuring/assessing the effect of role-play use on the teacher-class interaction; in particular, if it facilitated:
(i) Varying class interaction: All types of class interaction have their importance and allowing this variety encourages students to work flexibly...independently or communally. For example, by working alone, students have more situations when they can reflect upon things; when working in pairs, this encourages use of language and exchange of ideas; when interacting with the teacher, this allows students to see models of language as presented by the teacher, facilitating further exchange of ideas etc.
(ii) Encouraging corrections among students: This reduces the excessive reliance on centralized teaching that is time-consuming, and under-uses the students as a source of knowledge;
(iii) Reducing teacher-talk: This reduces the amount of ‘echoing’ and helps limit teacher-talk to what is useful, and which directly helps students learn. This is also good as it limits teacher-talk to what is personable, this helping to foster a pleasant environment in class, also indirectly helps learning;
(iv) Give more ‘space’ to students: This allows students to ask questions, therefore allowing them to fully clarify any concerns;
(v) Student independence: Allowing students to develop a sense independent from the teacher and excessive ‘scaffolding’, leaves them to experiment with language and ideas; they often learn as much from their errors and those of others as from their successes.

3. Materials and research methods
3.1. Class and student profile
This was a single mixed level class of sub-Saharan African pre-intermediate and intermediate students, grouped together to learn English for interpreting purposes with the United Nations Refugee Commission in Malta. Overall, the course lasted for eighteen months, and was currently in its fifth consecutive month when this study
was conducted. Many students worked during the day, so their attendance was unpredictable, and the initial class of 20 students had been down-sized to around 16 regularly-attending and highly motivated students.

The class was truly multiethnic with students hailing from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somali, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (individual profiles have not been presented to respect confidentiality). The ethnic mix, however, brought some initial tension to the class due to distrust and even dislike among the interpreters (students). The presence of both male and female students also created tension in class, and all women but one had, at this point, withdrawn from the course. Despite the teacher’s previous experience in teaching mono-national classes of single-gender students in Africa, this class was initially a substantial challenge. The teacher (researcher) also felt a certain amount of distrust and inverse-racism directed towards him – perhaps to be expected as all students had been detained for several months, and even a year, under conditions having a certain degree of hardship. Some had been released just a few weeks before starting to attend this course.

At the start of this course, it had been clearly a challenge for the teacher to gain the students’ confidence to the point where they could function as a class. To achieve this there was a need for the teacher to focus mainly on the more traditional approaches for teaching (e.g. PPP), which the students were very keen on, initially, as they considered it to be the ideal way to learn new grammar and vocabulary. But they rapidly grew impatient, as frustratingly much of the new language taught to them, perhaps being decontextualized, was rapidly forgotten. This was evidenced by lessons with a focus on accuracy where students often failed to recall new words or grammar structures that had been covered even just a few days previously. Methods that encouraged students to talk freely about themselves in class, and share their poignant and diverse experiences and backgrounds, were felt to be more useful for creating a meaningful context for practicing new language learnt in the classroom.

Despite the challenges, generally speaking fluency had gradually improved appreciably over the previous few months, as had the general social interaction in class. At this point it was imperative for the teacher to continue fostering the positive class environment, as many students had said they have no other opportunity to speak and learn English in such a congenial environment. Therefore students were motivated, but it became evident that diversification of teaching methods and approaches were necessary, with emphasis on those having a communicative
approach such as task-based learning. Different techniques and topics were clearly necessary to ensure the freshness of TBL, and role-play was one such technique. Topics students considered interesting were not hard to come by, and included those from their range of African experiences, those while travelling to Europe, and all those associated with their new life in Europe.

Finally, the need for more linguistic accuracy also became evident (and also asked for by certain students), so the flexible framework for task-based learning (Willis, 1996) was adopted to specifically allow for a focus on language.

3.2. Timetable fit and resources

The lesson involving role-play was part of a series of lessons stretching over an 18-month period being given to selected African asylum applicants in Malta. They were specifically engaged by the United Nations Refugee Commission to serve as English interpreters during the interviews of prospective asylum seekers who could not participate in an interview using English. The teacher-researcher was entrusted with teaching both general English and ESP to them, namely one appropriate to the needs of interpreters, and also develop a curriculum that is useful and motivating. The course was in its fifth month when the role-play lesson on which this study is based was conducted.

Lessons were held in the evenings as students were all workers or actively seeking work. These other work commitments were in addition to their engagement with UNHCR as interpreters, as the latter employment was only on an hourly-basis, according to the needs of the organization. The late hours that necessarily had to be utilized did not, overall, facilitate all the students as the majority used public transport and lived very far away either in private homes or refugee centres. Initially, several evening hourly slots were allocated for this language course. However, these were condensed to one or two-hourly sessions per week to make the lengthy trip from their homes or place of work to the lesson more worthwhile.

The texts followed during the course consisted primarily of ESP materials for translators and interpreters, generated in-house, i.e. by the United Nations Refugee Commission (UNHCR). Reference to several of the better-known ‘general English’ course books was also made. The UNHCR was very encouraging in the development of experimental practice of various methodologies and techniques for teaching English, and this lesson formed part of that strategy.

Additional materials and resources were used, particularly for this role-play lesson and included the use of a grammar book giving detailed explanation: Swan, M. (1995), Practical English Usage,
This formed the basis for the selection of grammatical items, namely ‘basic rules for formulating questions’. The complete language analysis used in the course of the lesson can be found in Table 1. The meaning, spelling and pronunciation of words (via phonemic script) were acquired from the MacMillan dictionary online, accessible from http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/do. Numerous questionnaires were employed to collect feedback from students, the teacher and UNHCR personnel on various aspects of the lesson, students’ performance and teacher’s classroom management. Finally, a computer program was utilized to record students enacting role-play ‘interviews’ so as to allow students to listen to their interviews and those of other students.

3.3. Assumptions
As this was the first time all students were to use role-play in the English classroom in this English course, and as they were not familiar with it being used as a communicative means of learning, it was essential to choose and enact a scenario that was familiar to the students to increase their comfort level. In fact, all the students in the class had applied to be considered as political refugees and were been interviewed as part of the application process. In fact, this was one of the roles to be enacted, the assumption being that being familiar would increase the students’ sense of personalization and also the ease of enacting it, allowing them to focus on the production of language. Most students had also worked as interpreters, and were therefore thoroughly familiar with the interview process and types of question that are be asked by the interviewer, and how they are generally answered by the refugee applicant. Most students also had previous exposure on how to formulate questions in English correctly from the daily experiences of their life.

3.4. Anticipated problems and solutions
As students were working on one or several jobs and often had fairly unpredictable hours, and as public transport was also being used, the problem of late arrivals was a daily reality. A solution to this was to organize students in such a way that they were to work in pairs or small groups, allowing latecomers to be involved into the task with help stemming from their peers when it came to explain what was needed to be done. This would work well for students in both the interviewer and applicant role if slightly late. Students which would arrive very late would not be able to participate directly as an interviewer or refugee applicant, but would still have be allocated an active role in class critically assessing other students in the roles of interviewers and applicants.
Another problem in this particular class was the personal differences and incompatibilities shown by certain students with others. These were generally based on ethnic lines or nationality. They could therefore be quite unwilling to involve themselves cooperatively with certain other students for planning performing and reporting on the task at hand during the lesson. A solution to this was to allow the students to form their own working pair, comprised of one interviewer and one refugee applicant.

Another concern was that possibly many students would find role-play childish and boring, or at any rate feel that it is not an appropriate activity and technique for the English classroom. The solution to this was to choose the topic for role-play very carefully. In fact it reflected very much on their own personal experience as prospective refugee applicants themselves, and this would strongly encourage personalization and schemata activation at the pre-task stage of the lesson. Furthermore, students were already interpreters working during the interview process (or new, prospective interpreters), so they were highly motivated to fine-tune their English for this task as it had very direct relevance to their interpreter career.

A final problem consisted of the possibility of performance anxiety. Students were not used to enactment of roles, particularly not in a foreign language (English) and would almost certainly want to ‘save face’ in front of other colleagues (interpreters). More traditional approaches such as PPP or TTT often allow a more secure framework for students to perform with ‘scaffolding’, namely the needed support to ensure their success. The solution to this concern was therefore to supply the same degree of scaffolding, albeit in a different form to ensure the ‘success’ of the students ‘performing their role play. To do this the teacher would have to circulate at all times and address issues, such as those concerning grammar, syntax, lexis, word chunks, pronunciation etc., and support and boost students’ confidence.

3.5. Method (lesson procedure)
3.5.1. Pre-task
A pre-task, led by the teacher consisted of a discussion on (i) the journey(s) from Africa to Malta, reasons why people emigrate, risks taken etc. (ii) interview process which they experienced as a refugee applicant and also viewing the interviewer when present as the interpreter. The aim was to motivate students by activating schemata through brainstorming ideas about immigrants and asylum-seekers, and to encourage personalization.

The teacher then demonstrated a role-play with a UN staff-member, enacting the applicant-interviewer roles during an applicant’s interview to seek refugee status.
The aim of this was to describe task through example, give students greater self-confidence and get students to assume roles and act-out the interview process, bringing in their experience and existing language knowledge. Students were told they would each perform a role-play as both a refugee applicant and interviewer of such applicants. When doing the role-play they would evaluate other students’ performance.

3.5.2. Task: planning
Each student pair drafted and rehearsed questions and answers for the interview together, exploring both topic issues and needed language. The student ‘interviewer’ wrote down a list of questions, and student ‘applicant’ mentally (or with notes) organized a storyline. They swapped roles, so each student experienced being both an applicant and interviewer. The aim of this was to encourage students to utilize existing linguistic knowledge and life-experience, coupled with creativity and imagination through roles.

Meanwhile, the teacher circulated and addressed questions relating to language, encouraging students to help/correct each other. This created a sense of security among the students with minimal ‘invasive’ behaviour on the teacher’s part.

Students rehearsed and edited their roles ‘in private’ with teacher’s help before they ‘went public’ with the role-play in front of the other students. This allowed the students to learn via discussion, evaluate and practice within a private space prior to ‘going public’ in front of the class. In the moment that students who were not enacting the role-play, they were given a questionnaire to fill-in, evaluating the students doing the role-play.

3.5.3. Task: reporting and performing
Student pairs enacted role-play, which was recorded. The class listened and critically assessed both interviewer and applicant for language, attitude and style, and compiled the questionnaire. The class also had the task to assess the ‘interviewer’ for attitude and interview technique, and the ‘applicant’ for the credibility of his story as to why s/he be accepted as a political refugee. The task success was measured (i) for the interviewer-student: by the ability shown in drafting realistic questions using language that is accurate, unambiguous and appropriate, and (ii) for the applicant-student: by answering fluently, accurately and credibly.

Each student had the opportunity to be both applicant and interviewer. The teacher did not pass comments at this stage as this would have biased the students while compiling the questionnaire evaluating the student-pair doing the role-play.

This part of the lesson stage gave students an opportunity to practice public speaking, use language prestigiously and allow listening...
students to increase their exposure to spoken (target) language. It also allowed performing student-pairs to improve elements of language, style etc. through feed-back from the students and teacher who had to fill-in a feed-back questionnaire. To achieve the actual objectives of the task, the (i) applicant-student: presented a convincing story in clear language and was given feedback about language competency and also the probability of being ‘accepted’ by the other students (enacting a ‘class refugee committee’) as a political refugee; (ii) interviewer-student: had to professionally orchestrate the interview process with ‘appropriate’ language and demonstrate ‘employability’ for this profession (N.B. these students were being trained to be interpreters for such interview scenarios).

3.5.4. Task: post-task listening
The teacher previously drafted some ‘interviewer questions’ with the help of professionals working in the field. This assured political correctness but also to ensure that the ‘interview’ would be as authentic and relevant as possible. The teacher and UNHCR personnel read them as a ‘model of a fluent speaker’ doing the same task, particularly modelling the pre-identified ‘language focus’ (see Language Analysis – basic rules for formulating questions, Swan (2005), p. 474-475). The complete list of questions is found in Table 5.

The procedure involved the teacher in the role-play of an interviewer, and students, in turn did a role-play of being the interviewees while other students noticed the form, meaning and use of the questions being modelled. The aim of this was to observe a ‘good model’, and for students to ‘notice’ and self-correct the form of the questions to be used, and also to ‘notice’ the situational-relevance of the questions.

3.5.5. Language focus task
For the language focus task, students underlined errors in their own interview questions and made corrections. To do this they used the question-models proposed by the teacher in the previous phase of the lesson, the post-task listening. The teacher circulated around the classroom to address students’ issues, and guide the students towards achieving the correct question forms. These helped students to include new language they had ‘noticed’ the teacher model into own role-play script, and give them an opportunity to raise their linguistic level. This was important as students were to ‘perform’ the role-play again, this time including not only any language they had known before the lesson, but also that learnt during the course of this lesson.

3.5.6. Language focus: follow-up
Students then re-enacted the role-play of being interviewers, using
another student as an interviewee. The aim this time was also to use the ‘upgraded’ language, namely to use a wide range of question forms as modelled by the teacher. The other students who were observing compiled a questionnaire to evaluate the ‘interviewer’s’ and ‘applicants’ performance, specifically the form, meaning and use, and also how appropriate the formulation of questions was, according to situation and what was being asked. Pronunciation, speed and clarity, stress and intonation were also evaluated.

The main aim of this stage in the lesson procedure was to give students a final opportunity to enact role as interviewer including newly-acquired aspects of language and get feedback from peers and teacher.

3.6. Evaluation tools
A very important part of this study was to evaluate if role-play can have a significant role as an alternative to other lesson-types for sub-Saharan learners of English. This is of particular interest as Arab and sub-Saharan learners of English are often perceived to be mainly deductive learners enjoying more traditional methods of teaching English such as PPP (Mallia, 2012; Mallia, 2010). Gathering feedback and information regarding students’ performance and capacity to learn and enjoy this type of lesson was therefore of central importance. The evaluation was performed primarily through a series of questionnaires, each having a 5-point scale (very good, good, average below, average, poor). These were compiled at different moments during and after the lesson by the various people (teacher, students, UNHCR staff members), and are summarized below.

The students and teacher during the task reporting-performing phase of the lesson compiled a questionnaire to assess the student ‘interviewer’ and student ‘refugee applicant’ for vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speed and clarity, stress, intonation and interview technique. The ‘interviewer’ was also assessed for, attitude and ‘employability’ as an interpreter, and an overall rating. The ‘applicant’ was also assessed for story credibility and possibility of achieving refugee status.

After the language focus phase of the lesson; students had to re-enact the interviewer-refugee applicant role-play again and demonstrate upgrading of their own language. Both the ‘interviewer’ and ‘applicant’ were assessed for accuracy, pronunciation, speed and clarity, stress and intonation.

At the end of the lesson the students, teacher and a UNHCR sociologist and refugee expert evaluated the lesson. They rated it for giving students the opportunity to develop their motivation, creativity and enthusiasm. The lesson was also evaluated for its
student-centeredness and also for the opportunity it gave students to learn language that was actually useful outside class. Being given full opportunity to practice speaking as a skill, for both fluency and accuracy was also enquired. Finally, the possibility and acceptability of having regular role-play in class was examined.

After the lesson the students and a UNHCR sociologist and refugee expert also evaluated the teacher, compiling another questionnaire, and evaluating several points. One example was the ability of the teacher to vary class interaction; this included students working in pairs, trios or in small groups, alone, or with teacher, at different moments of the lesson.

Another point that was considered was the teacher being able to facilitate and encourage students to work flexibly, in other words demonstrate being able to work independently or communally. Encouraging corrections among students, ‘peer-correction’, with the aim of helping them develop a sense of confidence and foster communication was another attribute on which the teacher was evaluated.

‘Echoing’, whereby the teacher repeats things said by the students without a specific purpose was also assessed. As Scrivener (2012, p.192-193) says, ‘In many classrooms (when in whole-class mode) all interaction tends to always go via the teacher....as a result students never have to what anyone else says; they can mentally switch off for a few seconds while any student speaks because they know that what the students says will be repeated pretty soon by the teacher’.

The ability of the teacher to use own teacher-talk judiciously and with a purpose was also evaluated. For example, teacher-talk can be a valuable and useful source of input for students such as when discussing grammar and vocabulary, or for modelling pronunciation; this was also assessed. Teacher-talk can also be used to foster relations between the teacher and students, such that teacher-talk aids in strengthening the role of interactional partner with students; this too was assessed.

Teacher-talk, with no specific purpose, and generally to be avoided, was the last aspect of teacher-talk to be assessed. The ability of the teacher to create and give space for student questions, creating a class environment to allow them to fully clarify any concerns was also evaluated.

Finally, the teachers approach in class that allows and favours student to become more independent as learners, and encourage learner autonomy to develop was also assessed. A 5-point scale (very good, good, average below, average, poor) was again used to perform the evaluation.

4. Results and conclusions
4.1. Results, objective 1: To plan and deliver a lesson based on role-play having specific aims

4.1.1. Topic choice for role-play

The rationale behind the topic choice was an important consideration as this was the students’ first exposure to role-play during this course, but also in sharp contrast to the teaching methodology used in class until that point of the course. Role play, as a teaching technique was also markedly different from that experienced by the students when receiving their education in their own home countries. To reduce the possible negative impact of role-play as a novel teaching technique in the English classroom for these students, it was felt to be imperative to choose a topic which was familiar, interesting and useful for all students.

The pre-task the enquired about learners’ journeys from Africa to Malta, explored reasons why people emigrate, the risks taken and other points. It also explored the interview process which they all experienced as genuine refugee applicants. The topic was close enough to go beyond role-play, and constitute ‘real-play’. This certainly activated schemata through brainstorming ideas, but was only a safe topic to adopt as the teacher was thoroughly familiar with the students and knew this would not be emotionally disturbing to the point that it could disrupt learning in the classroom.

4.1.2. Creation and execution of lesson plan and its evaluation

Creation of a lesson plan did not pose any particular difficulties. The pre-task was successful in immediately involving the students due to the careful choice of topic as previously discussed. Demonstrating the role-play between ‘interviewer’ and the ‘interviewee’ was both highly useful seeing many of the students learned readily through example; finding a native speaker that was also confident and comfortable with the topic and routine was not an issue. The lesson largely followed suggestions based on task-based learning (Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996).

During task planning adequate time given to the students to draft and rehears questions and answers generated immediate confidence. Although lengthening the lesson, allowing students to swap roles ensured they doubled their speaking time, each being both an applicant and interviewer. They also fully utilized their existing linguistic knowledge and life-experience, coupled with creativity and imagination through both roles. Recording of students efforts also added a further incentive to ‘performing seriously’, further to it being for them to analyze. The inclusion of non-linguistic points for assessment, such as ‘how credible was the storyline’ of the ‘student’ claiming refugee status, or ‘how employable’ was the ‘student’ playing the part of the
interviewer, made the role-play the more interesting and challenging due to its real-life relevance.

The teacher’s ‘focus on form’ stage of TBL was successful in presenting ‘typical interviewer’ (see Language Analysis – Table 1). The aim of using this to present a ‘good model’ for students and for them to ‘notice’ and self-correct the form of the questions to be used was effective. It also achieved its purpose of helping students to ‘notice’ the situational-relevance of the questions. Students were also allowed time to correct their own interview question errors, using the question-models presented by the teacher. It was seen essential to get the students to ‘perform’ the role-play again using new and / or corrected language the second time round they performed the role play.

Another important aspect of this experimental lesson was to collect information, and evaluating the lesson. This was achieved successfully through the series of questionnaires with a 5-point scale (very good, good, average below, average, poor). As these only required the ‘ticking’ of boxes, they were very time-effective: a lot of information was collected with little time and effort.

4.2. Results, objective 2: To measure students’, teacher’s and other observers’ perceptions on the use of role-play in the classroom

4.2.1. Quantitative analysis of the success of ‘interviewer-interviewee’ role-play lesson

This was afforded by one UN personnel, the researcher and sixteen students, referred to collectively as the ‘assessors’ (18 people). ‘Motivation’, ‘creativity’, ‘enthusiasm’, ‘student-centeredness’, ‘fluency’, ‘accuracy’, ‘utility outside class’ and ‘regular use of role-play in class’ for each students were individually assessed. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Role-play was said to increase students’ ‘motivation’ observed during the lesson, and 77.70% of the assessors rated it as being ‘very good’ and 33.3% as ‘good’. None of the students considered motivation to be average or lower. However it will have to be seen if this motivating effect is persistent over time. There is a possibility that with repeated role-play in class, once the novelty has worn off, motivation may drop.

The assessors also said that role-play had a positive impact on their ‘creativity’ with 88.8% of the assessors saying they were ‘very good’ and 22.2% saying it was good’. Again, none of the students considered creativity to be average or lower in the role-play class.

The assessors agreed that role-play had a positive impact on their ‘enthusiasm’ with 44.4% of the assessors saying they were ‘very good’, 33.3% saying it was ‘good’, and 22.3% saying it was ‘average’. None of the students considered
creativity to be below average in the role-play class. Regarding the aspect of ‘student-centeredness’, all assessors (100%) rated it as ‘very good’. The advantages of a communicative approach over more traditional approaches were therefore made very evident by the use of role-play. However, one disadvantage was that once certain students finished their roles they were not always interested in listening to others and giving feedback; they had to be regularly encouraged to do so.

‘Fluency’ was rated as being better than other classes not involving role play by 88.8% of the assessors, and 22.2% classed it as ‘average’; none considered fluency in role-play classes as below average. However, the teacher and United Nations evaluator did not feel there was any general improvement over the course of this particular lesson, possibly because of the ‘fear’ of being recorded. (Paradoxically, this contrasts with the students-assessors who all rated it as ‘very good’.) The ‘fear aspect’ would probably become less influential as more lessons involving role-play are repeated, and students’ fluency would probably further improve.

The assessors agreed that role-play had a positive impact on their ‘accuracy’ with 77.7% of the assessors saying they were ‘very good’, 33.3% saying it was ‘good’. None of the students considered accuracy to be below average in the role-play class. The assessors agreed that the ‘utility outside class’ of the role-play lesson was ‘very good’ (66.6%), while 11.1% said it was ‘good’, and 22.4% said it was ‘average’. None of the students considered this to be below average in the role-play class. ‘Utility’ was defined as the combination of ‘topic, vocabulary, accuracy and fluency, and how these would be positively affected and useful for use outside the class’.

All students were enthusiastic and willing to have ‘regular class role-play’ activities, mixed in with other class activities. Most of the assessors (55.5%) said that the regular use of role play would be ‘very good’ for this type of class profile, another 33.3% said it is ‘good’ and 11.2% said it was quite normal (‘average’).

### 4.2.2. The role-play lesson and its use for aiding the language focus (formulating questions)

A quantitative analysis of this was afforded by the researcher and sixteen students, referred to collectively as the ‘assessors’ (17 people). Results are summarized in Table 3.

Students were assessed for the following oral skills: speech ‘accuracy’, ‘pronunciation’, ‘speed and clarity’ and ‘stress and intonation’. For ‘accuracy’, almost half the students (45.25%) graded their colleagues as ‘very good’, 43.88% as ‘good’, 9.37% as
‘average’ and only 1.5% as ‘below average’. ‘Pronunciation’ was said to have been ‘very good’ for 23.37% of the respondents, ‘good’ for 62.64%, ‘average’ for 10.87% and 3.12% as ‘below average’. For ‘speed and clarity’, 26.5% of the students graded their colleagues as ‘very good’, 61.06% as ‘good’, 9.37% as ‘average’ and only 3.12% as ‘below average’. ‘Stress and intonation’ was said to have been ‘very good’ for 28.12% of the respondents, ‘good’ for 59.37%, and ‘average’ for 12.50% of the respondents.

Students therefore tended to perform better for the above-mentioned parameters during communicative classes adopting role-play as a technique. This was stated by the students post-lesson when comparing their colleagues’ current performance to that in the more traditional lessons; the latter often did not have a clear and relevant context.

One reason suggested for ‘speed and clarity’ and ‘stress and intonation’ is that when students are given the opportunity to use language in a real-life context, they are made to feel more at ease, and also gave them greater motivation as the task, being of direct interest to the students. Students confirmed that topic choice being related to students’ personal experiences and interests helps generate self-confidence and motivation to speak. Another explanation afforded was that when ‘getting into the role’ people feel less shy and self-conscious, and can focus on producing language naturally with fewer inhibitions.

In particular, one of the greatest hurdle when students try to upgrade their language, namely ‘stress and intonation’ was greatly aided by the ‘natural’ situation in which students felt themselves to be in, helping them speak ‘naturally’ and removing the feeling that class tasks were ‘contrived’, as sometimes happened in the more traditional lessons.

Students also felt that operating in a safe and controlled setting while learning English, namely that afforded by ‘entering the persona’ within the role-play lesson. This specifically helped them remain calmer when producing language orally, as opposed to, for example when the same students performed in a ‘focus on forms lesson. Students felt this was a primary reason why they and their colleagues’ confidence and performance for ‘accuracy’ and ‘pronunciation’ was better.

4.2.3. The role-play lesson and its utility for the oral language use and exchange of ideas (discourse)

A quantitative analysis of this was afforded by the researcher and sixteen students, referred to collectively as the ‘assessors’ (17 people). Results are summarized in Table 4.

Students were assessed for the following language skills:
‘vocabulary’ and ‘grammar’. Post-

lesson discussions with the
students revealed that role play
was found to give them
opportunities for vivid language
practice that strongly stimulate
them to recall and utilized known
vocabulary and ‘word chunks’ in a
genuine, contextualized way. The
safe and controlled setting while
learning English through role-play
also helped them experiment and
use grammar more readily.
Consequently, most students
(63.2%) scored ‘above average’,
33.5% as ‘average’, or how they
would perform in a traditional
lesson, and only 3.3% as ‘below
average’. for their use of
vocabulary this indicates that
setting a clear and familiar context
as afforded by role-play aided the
students in their lexical usage.
Slightly over half the students
(50.8%) scored ‘above average’,
35.8% as ‘average’, or how they
would perform in a traditional
lesson, and only 13.4% as ‘below
average’ for their use of grammar.
This also indicates that the clear,
familiar context and calm setting
during role-play helped students in
their grammar production.
Students were also assessed for
aspects related directly to the task,
namely the role play, (also making
the class activity more meaningful)
mainly in their role as an
interviewer/interpreter, and in their
other role as an interviewee (each
student had these two successive
roles). In their role as an
interviewer/interpreter, students
were assessed for: ‘interviewing
technique’ (42.1% ‘above
average’, 51.5% ‘average’, 6.4% ‘below average’), ‘attitude during
interview’ (53.1% ‘above average’,
42.1% ‘average’, 4.8% ‘below
average’), and ‘employability’ with
the United Nations as an
interpreter/interviewer (48.4% ‘above average’, 34.4% ‘average’,
17.1% ‘below average’).
In their role as an interviewee,
students were also assessed for:
using English to describe their
story with ‘credibility’, namely the
story while escaping from
problems in their home country,
their journey across the Sahara
Desert, and sea journey across the
Mediterranean Sea to Malta
(46.9% ‘above average’, 46.9%
‘average’, 9.4% ‘below average’).
They were also assessed for
‘interview technique’ (45.3% ‘above average’, 46.9% ‘average’,
7.4% ‘below average’), and the
probability of being ‘granted
refugee status’ (43.5% ‘above
average’, 35.9% ‘average’, 20.3%
‘below average’).
Equal importance was given to the
discussion and development of the
non-linguistic components of the
role-play as were the linguistic
aspects. This reinforced the
concept that role-play affords the
students a real-life, and highly
useful opportunities in the
language class where students can
freely experiment with language in
a contextualized scenario. Special
sub-skills were also learnt,
practiced and evaluated: for
example, students practiced the skill of delivering an interview (as an interviewer), and also of how to structure their responses as an interviewee. Insights of how they ‘came across’ during interviews via paralinguistic features such as facial expression and body language (in addition to linguistic features) were also valuable aspects that were assessed that have an importance that goes beyond the language classroom. The use of language to sound convincing and credible was another feature assessed – important for real-life future job-interviews, emigration interviews etc.

It is easy to understand why students were so eager to perform and make the fullest use of their stored language. The role-play topic provided an appropriate context: one that was enjoyable, relevant and useful, in and out of the language classroom. This markedly raised the learners’ intrinsic motivation for learning through the beneficial processes of contextualization and personalization, as experienced in other learning situations worldwide (Cordova and Lepper, 1996).

4.3. Results, objective 3: To measure role-play’s effects on the teachers’ professional development

The students’ perceptions were elicited about the teacher in class during and following the role-play lesson. These were linked directly with the teacher’s own professional development aims scheduled for the use of role-play lessons with sub-Saharan students of English.

The quantitative analysis of the lesson was afforded by one UN personnel and eight students, referred to collectively as the ‘assessors’; the researcher was omitted, being the ‘teacher’ under assessment. The teacher’s aims being assessed specifically included the following:

1. The ability to vary class interaction, for example to encourage students to work in pairs, small groups, alone, or with teacher. This was said to be ‘very good’, ‘good’ and ‘average’ by 33.3%, 55.5% and 1.2% of the assessors, respectively;
2. The teacher’s ability to encourage students to work flexibly, at times independently, and at others communally was said to be ‘very good’ and ‘good’ by 44.5% and 55.5% of the assessors, respectively;
3. Ability to encourage correction among students, fostering confidence and communication was said to be ‘good’ and ‘average’ by 66.6% and 33.4% of the assessors, respectively;
4. Managing to reduce ‘echoing’, i.e. teacher repeating students’ words without a specific purpose was said to be ‘very good’ and ‘good’ by 22.2% and 77.8% of the assessors, respectively;
5. Using teacher-talk: as a source of input, e.g. grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation etc. was said to be
‘very good’ by 88.8% and ‘good’ by 12.2% of the assessors;
6. Using teacher-talk: as an interactional partner with students was said to be ‘very good’ by 100% of the assessors;
7. Managing to reduce ‘teacher-talk if with no purpose (i.e. ‘echoing’) was said to be ‘very good’ and ‘good’ by 22.2% and 77.8% of the assessors, respectively;
8. Allowing space for student questions, i.e. allowing them to fully clarify any concerns, was said to be ‘very good’ by 77.8% and ‘good’ by 22.2% of the assessors, respectively;
9. Ability to allow students to be independent and to ‘self-develop’ by learning from own errors as well as from their successes, was said to be ‘very good’ and ‘good’ by 77.8% and 22.2% of the assessors, respectively.

None of the teacher’s persona development aims that were being assessed were graded as “below average’ or ‘poor’. The positive results were probably linked to the teacher thinking through these issues prior to this lesson, therefore increasing awareness. Another explanation can be afforded on the premise that when lessons having a communicative slant, such as those incorporating role-play, they tend to support many positive teacher classroom management practices. These include, for example, reducing teacher talking time, making the lesson learner-centred etc. Most, if not all of the teacher’s personal development objectives were largely met solely by shifting the focus from the teacher (reducing teacher-centeredness) to the students, therefore creating a learner-centred classroom environment through role-play

5. Conclusions

A focus on forms approach is often adopted with adult African learners with their approval, and even insistence as it closely mirrors their previous learning experiences in the home countries. However, the very same students may end-up being disillusioned by their own progress and diminishing enthusiasm for subsequent learning. The lack of sufficient progress for particularly speaking and writing, namely adequately communicating through the ‘productive skills’, is one of the resulting major concerns. A teaching program that has a marked bias towards a focus on forms does achieve progress, but often at the expense of the ‘communicative’ competencies.

The idea of drawing on Africans’ tradition of verbally reciting and enacting events, rather than exclusively reading and writing them by using role-play as a communicative technique was perceived to be a successful approach by students and observers alike. Role play was found to give learners opportunities for vivid language practice, and experiencing the associated improvisations enabled them to flex their emotional,
mental as well as physical muscles in a safe and controlled setting while learning English. This generally does not only diversify and enrich the learning experience, but also helps students to retain new language.

The topics chosen were related to students’ personal experiences and interests, raising their intrinsic motivation for participating and learning. A balance needs to be found between finding topics: they should be sufficiently interesting, relevant and able to be ‘personalized’ by the students. Yet the topics must not be too sensitive and emotional, as this would lead students to be distracted away from the main purpose of the lesson, which is experimenting and learning language.

This study has shown that as role-play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques, it helped this class of Sub-Saharan students to break-away from their habitual learning methods in the English classroom. It helped the students develop fluency, class interaction, learner motivation and oral self-confidence in a quasi-natural, and enjoyable way. Role play also encouraged peer learning and the sharing of responsibility for learning between teacher and student. The study has also highlighted the overall highly positive features of role-play when applied to adult Sub-Saharan students of English. It is highly recommendable even for those groups that may initially resist changes from their habitual ‘traditional’ learning methods to this communicative technique.

Table 1. Language Analysis: ‘basic rules for formulating questions’
(Swan, 2005: pp.474-475)

Form

1. Auxiliary verb before subject:
   Have you been detained before?     NOT   You have been detained before?
   Why are you asking for another job?   NOT   Why are you asking for

2. Only the auxiliary verb before subject
   Have you been detained before?     NOT   Have been you detained before?
   Why were you asking for another job?   NOT   Why were asking you for another job?

3. If there is no auxiliary verb use ‘do’, ‘does’, or ‘did’.
   Did you travel by boat?     NOT   You travel by boat?
   Does the government repress civilians?   NOT   The government represses civilians?

4. With ‘do’, ‘does’, or ‘did’, use the infinitive without the ‘to’.
   Did you travel by boat?     NOT   Did you travelled by boat?
   Does the government repress civilians?   NOT   Does the government represses civilians?

5. ‘Do’ is not used with other auxiliaries
   Can you tell me your date of birth?     NOT   Do you can tell me your date of birth?
   Have you applied for asylum before?   NOT   Do you have applied for asylum before?

Pronunciation, meaning and use: In this lesson’s context, this lexis is used to help formulate questions.

Do /du/ used for forming a question or negative (auxiliary verb);
Does /dəz/ 3rd person singular of the present tense of do;
Did /d ə/ the past tense of ‘do’;
What /w t/ used for asking which thing/action/idea something is;
Where /weə(r)/ used for asking what place someone or something is in, or what place they go to;
When /wen/ used for asking at what time or situation something happens;
Why /wa/ used for asking the reason for something;
Which /w t / used for asking for a specific choice from a limited number of possibilities;
Who /hu/ used for asking which person is involved in something, or what someone’s name is.

Table 2. Quantitative analysis of the success of ‘interviewer-interviewee’ role-play lesson (17 students and teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Very good (%)</th>
<th>Good (%)</th>
<th>Average (%)</th>
<th>Below average (%)</th>
<th>Poor (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-centeredness</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility outside class</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea of having regular role-play in class</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Results for the role-play lesson and its use for aiding the language focus: formulating questions (17 students and teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Very good (%)</th>
<th>Good (%)</th>
<th>Average (%)</th>
<th>Below average (%)</th>
<th>Poor (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>45.25</td>
<td>43.88</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>23.37</td>
<td>62.64</td>
<td>10.87</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed and clarity</td>
<td>26.50</td>
<td>61.01</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and intonation</td>
<td>28.12</td>
<td>59.37</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Summary of role-play lesson and its utility for the oral language use and exchange of ideas (17 students and teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Above average (%)</th>
<th>Average (%)</th>
<th>Below average (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewing technique*</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>6.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview technique**</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>7.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story credibility</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>9.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee status probability</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* e.g. reducing bias, letting applicant speak fully, not suggesting answers etc.
** e.g. gives clear answers, confidence, able to follow his/her story etc.

Table 5. Model questions presented to students for role-play

General
What is your full name? What is your mother’s name? What is your nationality? When and where were you born? What is your religion? What is your tribe? Do you have a profession? What is your marital status? Do you have any children? Do you siblings? What is your educational background?

Home country
Are you a member of a political party? Were you ever arrested, imprisoned or detained? Have you done military or national service in your country? Can you tell me your habitual
residence in your home country? Did you ever face personal or family problems in your home country or outside your home country?

Travel and destination
Could you tell me the countries you passed through during your trip? How long were you in each country you visited before coming to Malta? Do you have family, relatives or friends in Europe?

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