

LEARNING TO SPEAK BY PLAYING A ROLE: ROLEPLAY IN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRAK

Kemampuan untuk berkomunikasi secara efektif dalam bahasa Inggris adalah salah satu keterampilan yang paling penting bagi siswa, terutama ketika belajar bahasa asing. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki efektivitas penggunaan teknik roleplay dalam meningkatkan kemampuan interpersonal siswa. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana kegiatan pembelajaran berbasis permainan dapat menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang interaktif, menumbuhkan rasa percaya diri, dan mendorong penggunaan bahasa yang lebih santai. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi siswa, wawancara guru, dan partisipasi siswa dalam kegiatan kelas selama proses pembelajaran. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa roleplay tidak hanya meningkatkan kemampuan tata bahasa dan cara pengucapan siswa, tetapi juga membantu mereka mengembangkan kemampuan mereka untuk berinteraksi dengan orang lain dalam berbagai konteks komunikatif. Oleh karena itu, teknik ini direkomendasikan sebagai strategi pengajaran yang efektif untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci : Roleplay, Keterampilan Berbicara, Pelajar Bahasa Asing

ABSTRACT

The ability to communicate effectively in English is one of the most important skills for students, especially when learning as an English Foreign language (EFL). The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using roleplaying techniques in enhancing students' interpersonal skills. Through a kualitatif approach, this study examines how game-based learning activities can create an interactive learning environment, foster self-confidence, and encourage more casual language use. Data is gathered through student observations, teacher interviews, and student participation in class activities throughout the teaching process. The study's findings indicate that roleplaying does more than only improve students' grammatical and pronunciation; it also helps them develop their ability to interact with others in a variety of communicative contexts. Accordingly, this technique is recommended as an effective teaching strategy to increase students' speaking skills in English language instruction.

Keyword: Roleplay, Speaking skills, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Speaking fluently and confidently is regarded as one of the most important abilities in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), especially for younger students. Speaking helps pupils communicate more easily and is essential to their ability to successfully convey their ideas, feelings, and thoughts. Speaking abilities enable pupils to participate actively in social and academic

contexts (Sukmawati et al., 2025). This is particularly true in junior high school, when developing speaking abilities is frequently associated with higher self-esteem, improved academic achievement, and engaged engagement in class activities. Speaking instruction is still quite difficult in many EFL courses, despite its significance. The difficulty lies not only in linguistic complexity but also in pedagogical

limitations, emotional barriers, and contextual constraints.

Young learners' opinions of teachers are both favorable and unfavorable when it comes to teaching and learning English. Young learners are thought by teachers to be highly engaged and easily bored when studying English. Songs, stories, and games, on the other hand, increase pupils' motivation, curiosity, and self-assurance while their language abilities are being developed (Nur et al., n.d.). Young learners' speaking skills require more than just memorizing dialogues and improving pronunciation. It includes boosting self-esteem, improving fluency, and promoting impromptu conversation. To inculcate language precision, traditional English teaching techniques like mechanical drills, rote memorization, and strict grammatical exercises have long been employed.

However, these approaches frequently overlook the communicative and pragmatic aspects of language use, as Al-Asna indicates (Al-Asna, 2024). Such boring methods may be disappointing to young learners who are more engaged by movement, creativity, and engagement. A dynamic and purposeful experience that encourages innovation and fun is what language learning should be. In this regard, the conventional classroom strategies may fall short, especially when students are expected to become confident speakers in a language they rarely use outside the classroom.

One of the most common challenges that young learners encounter when trying to improve their speaking abilities is psychological in origin. According to studies, many students suffer from a lack of confidence, a restricted vocabulary, a fear of making mistakes, and a general anxiety related to speaking in front of others. According to Emilizar and Sylvia, oral performance is severely hampered by these internal impediments (Emilizar & Sylvia, 2025). Jekhny and Bapir even argue that speaking is the hardest of the four language skills for EFL students, mostly because they don't have enough opportunities to practice speaking in real-world situations (Jekhny & Bapir, 2020). Learners frequently feel alienated from the language in settings where English is not utilized as a daily communication medium, which hinders their ability to become fluent or feel free to express themselves. Cruz and Wilkinson & Potts also point out that students who experience high levels of anxiety and poor motivation may develop a chronic feeling of

inadequacy, which inhibits their willingness to engage in speaking activities (Cruz, 2022; Wilkinson & Potts, 2022).

These difficulties are frequently exacerbated by the teaching strategies used by many educators. According to Al-Asna, traditional teaching methods frequently put accuracy ahead of fluency, emphasizing grammar exercises and repetition over communication skills (Al-Asna, 2024). Although these approaches might enhance students' comprehension of structures, they seldom ever provide them the chance to utilize language in meaningful and true ways. Furthermore, they don't have the emotional investment required to keep young learners interested. Students may become disengaged and lose interest in learning a language if it turns into a monotonous, passive procedure. This emphasizes the need for more engaging, student-focused teaching methods that make speaking practice fun and accessible.

In response to these challenges, roleplay has developed as a promising strategy for strengthening speaking skills in EFL environments. Roleplay involves assigning pupils specific roles and having them act out scenarios that resemble real-life events. As stated by Retnowati et al., by retelling stories, students can develop "spoken language"—the skill of using words to manage cognitively challenging situations (Retnowati et al., 2023). With this method, students can practice speaking in a secure, encouraging setting free from the fear of criticism or unfavorable evaluation. Sukmawati et al. claim that roleplay fosters empathy and communication skills, promotes the use of contextual language, and increases creativity (Sukmawati et al., 2025). It turns the classroom into a stage where students can freely experiment with language, make mistakes without fear, and gain confidence through acting. Al-Asna affirms that roleplay, which combines language with movement, emotion, and imagination, is especially useful for enhancing the dynamic nature of learning (Al-Asna, 2024).

There are several advantages of using roleplay in EFL classes. It improves fluency and sentence structure in addition to helping pupils increase their vocabulary and pronounce words more clearly. More significantly, it encourages students, especially those who are timid or nervous, to speak English. Students are forced to

cooperate, negotiate meaning, and resolve communication problems in a collaborative setting created via roleplay. Such encounters foster collaboration and group problem-solving, as Rosmayanti & Yahrif observe (Rosmayanti & Yahrif, 2019). Additionally, by mimicking real-world language scenarios, roleplaying helps students get ready for conversation in the real world. Negara contends that roleplay can improve students' metalinguistic awareness, lessen language anxiety, and improve classroom dynamics (Negara, 2021). These advantages result in increased self-assurance, fortitude, and drive to learn for a large number of young learners

METHOD

A qualitative research design is used in the study on using roleplay to teach speaking to young pupils in order to thoroughly examine the experiences and viewpoints of both teachers and students with relation to this teaching method. The two primary topics that the study seeks to address are (1) How do EFL teachers implement roleplay strategies in teaching speaking to young learners? and (2) What are the perceptions of EFL learners towards the use of roleplay in developing their speaking abilities?. A variety of data gathering techniques, such as teacher semi-structured interviews, student questionnaires, and classroom observations, were used to accomplish these goals. A thorough analysis of the data was made possible by this methodical approach, which brought to light the advantages and difficulties of employing roleplay as a teaching tool to improve speaking abilities in EFL classes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The use of roleplay in teaching speaking to young EFL learners and its effects on language development were investigated in this study. The results of teacher interviews, student surveys, and classroom observations offer important new information about how roleplay improves seventh-grade students' speaking abilities in two school in Bogor. (1) How do EFL teachers implement roleplay strategies in teaching speaking to young learners and (2) What are the perceptions of EFL learners towards the use of roleplay in developing their speaking abilities are the two

research questions that guide the organization of the data.

The implementation of roleplay strategies by EFL teachers in the speaking learning process for young learners.

The study found that roleplay was a crucial Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach used in both institutions. Teacher A highlighted the school's motto, "Language is our crown," which reaffirmed the value of using the language actively, whereas Teacher B concentrated on making the classroom enjoyable and stimulating in order to lessen the difficulties associated with learning English.

Both teachers used planned preparing tasks prior to roleplaying. After introducing a theme and asking students to come up with related terminology, Teacher A had them practice pronouncing the words correctly. In a similar manner, Teacher B demonstrated proper pronunciation and expressions, explained new vocabulary, and displayed a dialogue on the board. Teachers decreased students' cognitive burden and boosted their confidence during roleplay by making sure they knew the language and pronunciation beforehand.

Collaborative learning was greatly aided by efficient grouping techniques. In order to provide younger students with advice from more experienced peers, Teacher A partnered seventh-graders with eleventh-graders. Teacher B, meanwhile, divided the class into diverse groups and paired more capable speakers with those who required more assistance. In addition to promoting peer teaching, this tactic created a safe space where children who were less secure could participate.

By using guided practice, both teachers assisted pupils in internalizing language structures. While Teacher B reinforced pronunciation through choral repetition, Teacher A let students rehearse dialogues in pairs before letting them practice in larger groups. These approaches highlight how crucial it is for language learners to acquire their skills gradually, with teacher modeling and repeated practice assisting students in moving from controlled to spontaneous speech.

Students showed interest and understanding during performances by utilizing props, gestures, and expressions

creatively. Every week, Teacher A conducted role-playing exercises in the school hall, while Teacher B evaluated each student separately on fluency, confidence, and pronunciation. Both instructors gave prompt comments. While Teacher B concentrated on individualized evaluations to make sure students knew their areas of strength and growth, Teacher A promoted peer collaboration.

The perceptions of EFL learners towards the use of roleplay in developing their speaking abilities.

The results of the questionnaire showed that students' confidence, speaking skills, and involvement in class had significantly improved.

Roleplay increased pupils' confidence in speaking English, according to the majority of students (92% in School A and 65% in School B). The mentorship from older students in School A may have contributed to the increased confidence levels by offering more linguistic and emotional support. The majority of pupils (78% in School A and 47% in School B) said that roleplaying helped them remember words and pronounce them correctly. Roleplaying in an environment where words are employed in meaningful discussions improved memory. One possible explanation for the disparity between the schools is that Teacher A promoted more impromptu conversations, while Teacher B relied more on prewritten dialogues.

Roleplay was well received by students in both schools; 44% of students in School A and 47% of students in School B strongly agreed that it added enjoyment to the lectures. Nonetheless, a few pupils from School B voiced moderate dissatisfaction, perhaps as a result of the roleplay's execution being less flexible than that of School A. There was a noticeable change in the students' capacity to use English outside of the classroom. Only 22% of students in School B strongly believed that roleplay assisted them in using English in everyday contexts, while 75% of students in School A strongly agreed. This disparity implies that School A's strategy, which featured a variety of themes and peer mentoring, improved the facilitation of practical language usage.

However, the variation between schools highlights the influence of implementation methods. School A's peer-

mentoring system and flexible themes appeared more effective than School B's structured, script-based approach. This difference suggests that while roleplay is beneficial, its success depends on how it is adapted to students' needs and proficiency levels.

The results of this study offer strong evidence in favor of the view that speaking a foreign language entails meaningful communication with the goal of effectively communicating intended messages, rather than only mastering grammatical correctness. This strongly supports (Cameron, 2021) claim that speaking should not be seen as a grammatical exercise but rather as a tool for genuine communication. Students were given the opportunity to participate in communicative practices that enabled them to naturally and purposefully convey their thoughts and ideas through the incorporation of roleplaying exercises.

According to Hyeon Choi and Sinwongsuwat, the effectiveness of these exercises demonstrates the move away from conventional rote learning techniques and toward more communicative language teaching (CLT) frameworks. (Hyeon Choi & Sinwongsuwat, 2024) Because roleplay mimics authentic language usage and meaningful interaction in a controlled yet adaptable classroom setting, it is a powerful tool for promoting CLT's emphasis on these two key components. Roleplay in this study gave students practical chances to improve their confidence and fluency, bolstering the idea advanced by Suvarnaphaet and Suvarnaphaet that speaking competency is a measure of a learner's entire capacity for meaningful communication (Suvarnaphaet & Suvarnaphaet, 2023).

Furthermore, this study supports Geçkin's (2022) claim that language teachers need to set an example of communicative competence and offer useful techniques to help students become more proficient speakers. Roleplaying naturally encourages students to practice critical communication skills including taking turns, providing clarification, and reacting appropriately skills essential for successful verbal communication. Because roleplay is participatory, students can participate in dynamic interactions that mimic actual conversations rather than monotonous, mechanical language drills. Because roleplay

places language learning in a meaningful environment and allows learners to integrate language structures while using them naturally, Khamouja et al. highlight that roleplay promotes deeper language competency (Khamouja et al., 2023).

The current study supports these assertions by demonstrating that roleplay provides an environment in which students can gain the social and pragmatic skills required for genuine communication in addition to practicing language. The excitement and active engagement of young learners during roleplay exercises is another noteworthy finding from this study. According to Phillips, young learners are very active people with short attention spans, which is in line with this observation (Phillips, 2003).

Compared to traditional teaching techniques, roleplay seems to hold students' attention better since it incorporates social contact and physical movement. Young learners' cognitive and emotional developmental phases are well-suited to the lively, fun nature of roleplay, which offers interesting, entertaining, and instructive exercises. This study bolsters Phillips' argument for interactive activities that speak to children's and adolescents' developmental traits, such as roleplay, storytelling, and songs, by showing how roleplay encourages long-term motivation and engagement in young learners (Phillips, 2003).

Positive reinforcement during roleplay sessions not only kept young learners interested but also significantly increased their likelihood of continuing to participate. According to Braun and Clarke, positive feedback is highly received by young pupils and can motivate continued effort and increased engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Teachers' encouragement and appreciation during roleplaying activities increased students' willingness to take chances and express themselves verbally, according to the study's observations. This research emphasizes how critical it is to have a secure and encouraging learning environment in the classroom where kids can try new words and grow from their errors. Their efficacy was further increased by the careful selection of the roleplay scenarios and materials to fit the learners' interests and developmental needs. Age-appropriate material promoted a learning environment that encouraged active

conversation and helped sustain students' attention.

The findings of this study also support the many advantages of roleplay that have been reported in the literature. The beneficial effects of roleplay on learner confidence and the decrease in speaking anxiety are among the main conclusions. This bolsters the findings of Sartain et al.'s study, which shows that roleplay can dramatically boost student involvement while reducing anxiety and dread associated with speaking a foreign language. According to Khamouja et al., roleplay's contextualized and realistic nature helps people internalize language patterns by allowing them to utilize English in meaningful, real-world contexts, which improves accuracy and fluency (Khamouja et al., 2023). Students may practice language in ways that feel relevant and helpful thanks to the real-world communication scenarios incorporated into roleplay, which eventually improves retention and application (Jaelani et al., 2020).

Additionally, by expanding students' content knowledge and intercultural competency, the transdisciplinary and cultural components occasionally included to the roleplay scenarios enhance the language learning process. Roleplay, according to Aura et al., can promote international competency by placing language acquisition in a broader sociocultural framework. In addition to enhancing language skills, this all-encompassing method helps students gain social awareness and comprehension, which are essential elements of effective communication in today's interconnected world (Aura et al., 2023). Teachers can assist students relate language learning to larger social problems and make their learning more relevant and meaningful by incorporating cultural themes and contemporary issues into roleplaying exercises.

The study also emphasizes how roleplay can be used as an instructional technique for formative assessment. Teachers were able to give prompt, helpful comments to students by seeing their roleplay performances, which helped them pinpoint their areas of strength and growth. This method of evaluation supports Keezhatta's view that roleplay is an effective assessment method that provides a performance-based, real-time gauge of speaking abilities (Keezhatta, 2020). Roleplay evaluates

students' communicative language use in context, as opposed to standard assessments that frequently concentrate on discrete language elements. In the end, this ongoing feedback loop promotes reflective learning and scaffolds students' speaking progress, which results in more efficient and long-lasting language acquisition.

This study supported earlier empirical research by demonstrating that roleplay greatly improves young learners' vocabulary, fluency, and self-confidence (Piscesa et al., 2024; Puspita et al., 2023). Students can freely experiment with language without fear of failure or ridicule because roleplay creates a safe and inviting environment (Wasilah & Sukasih, 2024). This supportive learning environment in the classroom encourages risk-taking and innovative language use, which benefits both language development and academic achievement. According to the results, roleplay is an effective teaching strategy that fosters language proficiency and student motivation..

However, roleplay's efficacy as a teaching strategy varies widely and is largely dependent on a number of contextual elements. The success of roleplaying exercises was found to be significantly influenced by the teacher's facilitation. According to Dimastoro et al, learner types, preparedness, and instructional context all affect how effective roleplay is (Dimastoro et al., 2022). The advantages of this approach are more likely to be maximized by teachers who adeptly create roleplay scenarios that are suited to the learning preferences and ability levels of their pupils. Higher engagement and better communication outcomes were found in this study when situations were tailored to the interests and language skills of the students. Alternatively, poorly designed roleplays that were overly complicated or failed to take learners' needs into account caused confusion and frustration. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to act as facilitators, mentors, and motivators while modifying roleplay to accommodate a variety of learners.

Furthermore, the appropriateness of the material was yet another important consideration. Roleplay exercises should have content that is fascinating, relevant, and suitable for the cultural and developmental context of the learners. According to this

study, using well-known themes and situations increased students' willingness to engage and openly express themselves. Students were more engaged and motivated when they felt that the materials had meaning and were relevant to their life. This result is consistent with past studies that support the use of developmentally and culturally sensitive instructional materials to maximize language acquisition (Philips, 2003).

Another crucial factor in the success of roleplaying exercises is student preparedness. The benefits of roleplaying activities are typically greater for learners who possess a sufficient vocabulary, a basic understanding of grammar, and a certain level of vocal confidence. On the other hand, before they can participate completely in roleplay, pupils who have weak language foundations or high levels of anxiety might need more scaffolding and assistance. This emphasizes the value of continuous formative evaluation and customized instruction in ensuring that all students may engage in meaningful roleplay-based learning.

CONCLUSION

Using roleplay to teach speaking to young learners is not only a good pedagogy but also a useful teaching strategy. It supports more meaningful and long-lasting language learning experiences by meeting the cognitive and emotional demands of young children and adhering to the principles of communicative language teaching.

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