

IMPROVING ENGLISH SPEAKING COURAGE IN JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS THROUGH THE USE OF ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITIES.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji keberanian siswa sekolah menengah pertama dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris melalui penggunaan aktivitas Role-Play. Keberanian berbicara yang berkaitan dengan rasa percaya diri dan kemauan berkomunikasi masih menjadi permasalahan umum dalam kelas English as a Foreign Language (EFL), khususnya pada remaja yang sensitif terhadap penilaian teman sebaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain dominan kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman nyata, pandangan, serta respons emosional siswa terhadap Role-Play sebagai strategi pembelajaran. Subjek penelitian adalah siswa kelas VIII di salah satu SMP negeri di Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, kuesioner terbuka, dan refleksi tertulis siswa, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa aktivitas Role-Play meningkatkan keberanian berbicara melalui tiga proses utama, yaitu efek psikologis bersembunyi di balik karakter, berkurangnya beban kognitif melalui persiapan dan skrip sederhana, serta terciptanya interaksi teman sebaya yang suportif. Disimpulkan bahwa Role-Play tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai aktivitas komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai dukungan psikologis yang menurunkan hambatan emosional siswa. Implikasi penelitian ini memberikan rekomendasi bagi guru EFL untuk menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang berpusat pada siswa, rendah kecemasan, serta menyeimbangkan pengembangan kemampuan bahasa dan kepercayaan diri.

Kata kunci: Aktivitas Role-Play; Keberanian Berbicara; Kepercayaan Diri; Studi Kualitatif; Siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine junior high school students' courage to speak English through the use of Role-Play activities. Speaking courage, closely related to self-confidence and willingness to communicate, remains a common issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, particularly among adolescents who are sensitive to peer judgment. This research employed a qualitative-dominant design to explore students' real experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses toward Role-Play as a teaching strategy. The participants were eighth-grade students at a public junior high school in Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, open-ended questionnaires, and students' reflective responses, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Role-Play enhances speaking courage through three interconnected processes: the psychological effect of "hiding" behind a character, reduced cognitive load through preparation and simple scripts, and the development of supportive peer interaction. It is concluded that Role-Play functions not only as a communicative activity but also as psychological support that lowers emotional barriers in EFL speaking classrooms. The study implies that EFL teachers are encouraged to design low-anxiety, student-centered learning environments that foster both language proficiency and confidence building.

Keyword: Role-Play Activities; Speaking Courage; Self-Confidence; Qualitative Study; Junior High School Students

INTRODUCTION

English speaking ability is widely regarded as an essential skill for junior high school students because it supports academic development and prepares learners for global communication. However, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, speaking is often considered the most challenging skill to develop. Many students possess adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, yet they still hesitate to speak due to psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence (Makhsun & Prasetyarini, 2020). This condition indicates that speaking problems are not merely linguistic issues but are also strongly influenced by affective factors that shape students' classroom performance.

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by heightened self-awareness and sensitivity to peer evaluation. In classroom situations, this frequently appears as avoidance of speaking, prolonged silence, or minimal participation. Previous studies reveal that fear of negative judgment and embarrassment significantly affect students' speaking performance (Makhsun & Prasetyarini, 2020; Zulfikar, 2022). As a consequence, traditional teacher-centered speaking activities often fail to provide the emotional safety required for meaningful language use. This situation highlights a gap between students' linguistic competence and their courage to express ideas orally.

In response to these challenges, communicative and student-centered approaches have increasingly been adopted in EFL instruction. One instructional technique considered effective is Role-Play, a learning activity that allows students to simulate communicative situations by taking on specific roles or characters. Role-Play provides opportunities for expression with reduced personal pressure, as mistakes are perceived as part of the role rather than individual weaknesses (Dwiyanti & Lolita, 2023). Although numerous studies have discussed Role-Play in relation to speaking skill improvement, research that specifically emphasizes **speaking courage** as a primary psychological dimension remains limited. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on students' speaking courage as an affective aspect influenced by Role-Play activities. This study aims to explore how the implementation of

Role-Play can enhance junior high school students' courage to speak English in classroom learning.

Research Gap and Novelty

Although earlier studies have repeatedly shown the effectiveness of Role-Play in enhancing students' speaking ability and confidence (Aini, Anwar, & Asmara, 2020; Rakasiwi et al., 2024), most previous research has largely focused on quantitative results such as test scores, improvements in fluency, or levels of participation. Only little attention has been directed toward students' personal experiences, emotional changes, and meaning-making processes during Role-Play activities, especially among junior high school students in EFL settings.

This study responds to this gap by highlighting a qualitative view of speaking courage, which is understood as an emotional construct influenced by psychological comfort, cognitive preparedness, and social interaction. The originality of this research lies in its detailed examination of how Role-Play works as a psychological process—through role masking, reduced mental load, and peer support—rather than only as a communication activity. By prioritizing students' perspectives and real experiences, this study offers a deeper understanding of emotional development in EFL speaking classrooms and adds to ongoing discussions about confidence-focused teaching in adolescent language learning.

Literature Review

- Speaking Courage and Foreign Language Anxiety

Speaking courage is generally understood as the combination of self-confidence and willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second or foreign language. Among adolescent learners, speaking courage is often weakened by Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), which refers to a context-specific anxiety related to language learning situations (Piniel & Zólyomi, 2022). FLA is strongly linked to fear of negative judgment, communication nervousness, and test-related anxiety.

Subekti and Goram (2022) reported that Indonesian EFL students often experience a "silence phenomenon," in which learners

intentionally choose not to speak even though they have adequate language knowledge. This silence does not stem from a lack of ability, but instead serves as a protective response to maintain self-image. Anxiety uses up learners' mental resources, which lowers their ability to recall vocabulary and form sentences effectively.

- **Role-Play as a Communicative and Psychological Strategy**

Role-Play is based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and focuses on meaningful interaction in real-life-like situations. In this activity, students take on certain roles—such as shopkeepers, tourists, or customers—to achieve specific communication purposes. According to Sari and Hamzah (2023), Role-Play promotes authentic language use while also helping to lower students' emotional barriers.

One major strength of Role-Play is the “masking effect” (Aini, Anwar, & Asmara, 2020). When students speak through a character, any mistakes made are seen as part of the role, not a reflection of the learner personally. This separation helps protect students' self-confidence and encourages them to try using English without being afraid of making errors or being laughed at.

- **Empirical Evidence on Role-Play in EFL Contexts**

Recent studies consistently shows that Role-Play improves students' confidence, fluency, and participation in speaking activities. Moosa, Shareefa, and Hammad (2024) found that Role-Play significantly reduced speaking anxiety by creating a fun and supportive classroom environment. In addition, Harefa (2024) reported that students' anxiety levels decreased and their speaking confidence increased after Role-Play was applied through several Classroom Action Research cycles.

Beyond affective benefits, Role-Play also contributes to language development. Studies by Sari (2020) and Almanafi and Alghatani (2020) revealed improvements in students' fluency and vocabulary mastery due to the interactive and repeated practice involved in Role-Play. These findings indicate that Role-Play supports both affective and linguistic aspects of speaking skills.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative-dominant research design to examine students' experiences in developing speaking courage through Role-Play activities. Although a small portion of quantitative data was used to describe general tendencies, the primary emphasis remained on qualitative data in order to explore students' perceptions, emotions, and reflective responses in depth. This approach aligns with the perspective that affective variables such as confidence and courage are more effectively understood through participants' lived experiences rather than solely through numerical measurement (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). Therefore, the method was considered appropriate for revealing the psychological and social dimensions underlying students' willingness to speak English.

Participants and Setting

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Kuningan, Indonesia, involving 31 eighth-grade students from class 8B. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, as this group represented adolescent learners who are commonly vulnerable to speaking anxiety and peer evaluation. To maintain confidentiality and ethical considerations, students' identities were anonymized using attendance numbers rather than real names. The classroom setting was chosen because it provided a natural learning environment in which Role-Play activities could be observed authentically.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through three qualitative instruments designed to obtain comprehensive information from different perspectives. First, classroom observation was conducted to record students' participation, interaction patterns, and emotional reactions during the implementation of Role-Play activities. Second, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to allow students to express their perceived difficulties in speaking English and their personal experiences with Role-Play without restriction. Third, written student reflections were collected to gain deeper insights into how the activity influenced their confidence, motivation, and willingness to communicate. The combination of these instruments enabled data triangulation and increased the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Students' responses from observations, questionnaires, and reflections were coded systematically and then categorized into recurring themes related to anxiety reduction, confidence development, and peer support. This analytical procedure facilitated the identification of meaningful patterns that explained how and why Role-Play activities contributed to the improvement of students' speaking courage (Sari & Hamzah, 2023). Through this process, the study was able to present an objective and structured interpretation of the research problem and its resolution.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Role-Play activities exerted a significant influence on students' speaking courage in the EFL classroom. The analysis of classroom observations, open-ended questionnaires, and written reflections revealed three major interconnected themes, namely emotional safety through character masking, reduced cognitive load through preparation, and confidence building through peer collaboration. These findings answer the research question regarding how Role-Play contributes to the development of students' courage to speak English and why the technique becomes effective in reducing psychological barriers.

The Masking Effect and Emotional Safety

The first theme that emerged was the psychological masking effect, in which students felt safer when speaking as a character rather than as themselves. Several participants reported that pretending to be another person helped them reduce fear of negative evaluation and embarrassment. One student expressed that Role-Play made them "braver to speak and not afraid of being wrong because it is only a simulation." This phenomenon explains **what** happened—an increase in emotional comfort—**why** it occurred—because the role created psychological distance from personal identity—and **how** it influenced speaking behavior—by lowering anxiety and

hesitation. This result is consistent with previous research stating that Role-Play creates emotional detachment from mistakes, allowing learners to take risks in communication (Aini, Anwar, & Asmara, 2020). Compared with traditional speaking drills, Role-Play provides a safer communicative space that minimizes self-judgment and peer pressure.

Preparation and Reduced Cognitive Load

The second theme relates to the availability of preparation time and dialogue scripts, which significantly reduced students' cognitive burden. Many students stated that preparing their lines beforehand enabled them to organize vocabulary and sentence structures more effectively, thereby decreasing nervousness. This finding demonstrates **how** structured preparation supports performance by separating the processes of thinking and speaking. The phenomenon aligns with Subekti's (2022) argument that speaking anxiety often arises when learners must simultaneously generate ideas and articulate them in a foreign language. In this study, preparation functioned as a scaffold that allowed students to concentrate on pronunciation, intonation, and delivery rather than spontaneous language construction. When compared with impromptu speaking tasks reported in earlier studies, the presence of scripts in Role-Play appeared to create a smoother transition from passive knowledge to active oral production.

Peer Support and Collaborative Learning

The third theme emphasizes the role of peer interaction and collaborative learning in strengthening students' confidence. Participants highlighted that working in pairs or small groups fostered mutual encouragement and constructive feedback instead of criticism. This supportive atmosphere illustrates **why** students felt more willing to speak and **how** social dynamics contributed to courage building. The finding supports Moosa et al.'s (2024) assertion that speaking courage is socially constructed and highly dependent on classroom climate. In contrast to individual speaking performances that often trigger anxiety, collaborative Role-Play activities enabled shared responsibility and reduced the fear of public failure. The scientific phenomenon observed here indicates that social acceptance and collective participation act as reinforcing factors for affective development in language learning.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Role-Play functions not merely as a speaking exercise but as a holistic pedagogical strategy that integrates emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of learning. The comparison with prior studies confirms that the effectiveness of Role-Play lies in its ability to simultaneously address internal psychological barriers and external classroom dynamics. Consequently, Role-Play can be viewed as an instructional approach that meaningfully enhances students' speaking courage while supporting communicative competence in EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study concludes that Role-Play activities provide a meaningful contribution to the development of junior high school students' courage to speak English in EFL classrooms. The findings demonstrate that students' speaking courage increases when learning activities offer emotional safety through the masking effect of characters, reduce cognitive load through preparation and simple scripts, and foster supportive peer interaction. These elements collectively answer the research problem by showing that the main barrier to speaking is not solely linguistic limitation but also psychological and social factors that can be addressed through appropriate instructional strategies. Although aspects such as pronunciation accuracy and grammatical precision remain long-term challenges, the growth of confidence emerges as a crucial foundation that enables students to participate more actively in oral communication.

The implications of this study suggest that EFL teachers are encouraged to integrate Role-Play regularly as a core component of speaking instruction in order to create a low-anxiety, student-centered learning environment that balances language skill development with affective support. Furthermore, future research may expand this study by involving larger participant groups, different educational levels, or mixed-method designs to examine the long-term impact of Role-Play on both speaking proficiency and psychological readiness. Such development is expected to enrich pedagogical practices and provide broader insights into effective strategies for enhancing students' communicative courage in foreign language learning.

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