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## The Effectiveness of Role-Playing Activities in Enhancing Students' Speaking Proficiencies in EFL Classrooms

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### Abstract

Speaking is a crucial skill in both language learning and teaching. One effective strategy for improving students' speaking ability is role-play. This study examines the use of role play for teaching speaking and its potential to enhance the quality of English instruction for EFL classrooms. because role play can make learning enjoyable, reduce anxiety, and increase retention. As an active-learning strategy, role play is expected to boost instructional effectiveness by raising student motivation and enthusiasm for language learning. Data were collected through reviewing articles and library books. The implementation procedure used in the speaking class comprised: selecting a discussion topic, choosing and scripting a scenario, teaching the scripted dialogue, rehearsing, adapting the situation and dialogue as needed, and finally presenting the dialogue to the class. Both empirical findings and expert opinions indicate that role play is effective in improving students' speaking proficiency.

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### 1. Introduction

English as an essential subject and one of the main courses that must be taught at specified levels in EFL context. Consequently, English instruction at the EFL level is intended to prepare learners for the demands of globalization. However, many students still struggle with English, often finding it difficult to grasp the language quickly. Many students encounter difficulties in speaking English, because they have not practiced enough (Clarita *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[12]</sup>. Students need not only a variety of communicative situations but also specific instruction on how to speak. Therefore, they should be taught English in speaking-focused classrooms, which have traditionally served as the primary setting for improving students' speaking abilities.

Role play is an effective pedagogical technique for developing oral proficiency. Rather than relying on scripted imitation, it requires learners to enact social interactions in realistic contexts (Xu, 2011) <sup>[45]</sup>. According to Juvrianto, (2018) <sup>[23]</sup>, this approach increases engagement and reduces monotony while allowing learners to adapt scenarios and improvise responses using teacher-provided language scaffolds.

Furthermore, role play is a method used to develop confidence among second language learners. In EFL classes, several researchers have stated that role play can create opportunities to learn speaking in ways that promote learner confidence (Fadilah, 2016; Jordan, 2015; Oduke, 2013; Sağlamel, 2013) <sup>[14, 22, 31, 38]</sup>. Further, they claimed that role-play benefits from its aspect of giving learners characters, thoughts and opinions. Also, it facilitates their speaking ability through physical activities, joy and playfulness. Therefore, one of the main goals of teaching English as a foreign language in EFL classes is to make the students able to communicate in the target language. Many students struggle to speak English because they lack sufficient practice (Clarita *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[12]</sup>. Learners require not only varied opportunities for communication but also explicit instruction in how to speak.

Therefore, speaking-focused classrooms remain essential for developing students' oral abilities. There are many speaking activities to develop learners' speaking skills, among which we find role-playing activities. Incorporating such speaking activities into the classroom can be an effective teaching tool because they add variety, a change of pace, and opportunities for language production and fluency development (Al-Arishi, 1994) <sup>[3]</sup>. However, some teachers need to be aware of role-plays' possibilities in developing students' communicative competence. Most of them think that such activities are marginal. They are inappropriate because they cause discipline problems and create chaos in the classroom (Huang, 2008) <sup>[19]</sup>.

Hence, this study was conducted to investigate teachers' views about role-play activities and the extent to which the latter can develop students' speaking competence. Therefore, students must have ability to communicate and share their ideas, opinions and explanations in their classroom. Role play provides an opportunity to the students to express appropriate language functions correctly in the given roles and situation.

## 2. Research Objectives

To investigate the effectiveness of role-play techniques for enhancing speaking skills.

To familiarize the different strategies of using role playing tasks to improve speaking activities in EFL classes.

## 3. Research Questions

What is the effectiveness of role-playing techniques to enhance students' speaking skill?

What are the different strategies of using role-playing tasks to improve speaking activities in EFL classes?

## 4. Literature Review

Role play is an effective technique to improve students' speaking skill as it provides ample opportunities to the students to take roles of different persons. Several studies have been carried out to find the different aspects of role play techniques in EFL classrooms.

### 4.1. An outline of the role-play technique

Richards (2015, p. 72) <sup>[35]</sup> defined role-plays as activities in which learners are assigned roles and improvise a scene or exchange using provided information or cues. Similarly, Brown and Lee (2015, p. 276) <sup>[9]</sup> characterized role-play as the assignment of roles to one or more group members together with an objective or purpose that participants are expected to accomplish. Moreover, Krebt (2017) <sup>[25]</sup> distinguished three principal types of role play: fully scripted, semi scripted, and non-scripted. Fully scripted role plays require learners to learn or recite given lines (Harper Whalen & Morris, 2005) <sup>[18]</sup> and are therefore well suited to EFL students with lower proficiency levels (Tshering, 2022) <sup>[41]</sup>. Semi scripted role plays ask students to generate dialogues using a provided model with gaps to be filled with contextually appropriate language; this format is particularly appropriate for upper elementary to intermediate learners (Yusuf & Setyamardani, 2020) <sup>[48]</sup>. Non-scripted role plays offer only keywords or a brief contextual prompt and are intended for intermediate to advanced learners who can improvise responses, express personal opinions, and manage the interaction independently.

### 4.2. Definition of Role Play

Role play is a widely used pedagogical technique in communicative language teaching (Brown, as cited in Yanti, 2021) <sup>[46]</sup>. It encompasses students enacting realistic interpersonal situations such as everyday problems or dialogues and reflecting on their interactions with peers. Nunan (as cited in Wijaya, 2018) <sup>[43]</sup> emphasized that role play activities are valuable for teaching speaking because they provide opportunities for learners to practice communication across diverse social contexts using the target language. Furthermore, role play functions as a participatory discussion method that encourages broad engagement: participants dramatize problems or ideas under consideration, thereby generating authentic conversational exchanges. Such

enactments also stimulate learners' imagination, enhancing interest and involvement in the activity. Role-playing is an active learning strategy in which instructors organize learning activities that require students to enact assigned roles or situations, often selected at random (Aini *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>. This pedagogical approach offers several educational benefits.

Furthermore, Brown (2021) <sup>[10]</sup> noted that role play is a popular instructional method within communicative language teaching. In this approach, learners enact realistic situations and problems, then reflect on their performance with input from fellow participants. Putri and Hariyati (2016) <sup>[33]</sup> emphasized the importance of role playing in speaking instruction, arguing that it enables learners to practice oral communication across diverse social contexts using the target language. Aini *et al.* (2020) <sup>[11]</sup> described role playing as an active learning strategy in which teachers prompt students during lessons to perform assigned scenarios and roles, often distributed at random.

### 4.3. Speaking Skill

According to Spratt and Williams (as cited in Juvrianto, 2018), speaking is almost the same with writing because they are productive skill. In speaking, we produce speech while in reading we produce a text. Speaking involves speech in order to express meaning to other people. Speaking is the delivery of a language by mouth. To speak, we produce a sound that is using many parts of our body, such as the lungs, vocal tract, vocal cords, tongue, teeth, and mouth. So that we can produce some sound from what we say.

### 4.4. Teaching Speaking

Speaking is a skill that can be expressed and developed with a variety of expressions. It is a psychological process in which the speaker converts mental thoughts into linguistic forms such as words, phrases, and sentences, which are then utilized to communicate with listeners. In teaching speaking, the teacher needs a good technique to improve students' speaking skill Ayuningtias (2019) <sup>[8]</sup>. As previously explained, if students do not have the intention and desire to learn how to speak English properly or they don't even get the opportunity to speak in class, they may lose motivation and interest in learning to speak English.

In teaching and learning activities, teachers usually have prepared several kinds of innovative activities that are useful to attract students' interest. It really helps them so that they want to speak English in class. Based on Harmer (as cited in Hussain, 2017) <sup>[20]</sup> there are many classroom speaking activities that can be used in teaching speaking.

There are several of these activities which will be explained as follows. The first activity is show and tell. In this activity, the teacher provides an example by bringing an object of his or her favorite or it could be by mentioning the idol he or she likes and then the teacher tries to explain why this object is very valuable to him or her, or why the idol is so liked by the teacher. After the teacher explains, the teacher instructs students to do the same thing as explained by the previous teacher. Then students tell everything in front of the class one by one. The second activity is acting using scripts. In this activity, the teacher asks students to form several groups then the teacher asks them to make a dialogue text of their own which must then be presented in front of the class. The teacher will give 15-20 minutes for students to think about what kind of text they want to present to their friends. The third activity is discussion. The discussion can be in the form

of question and answer activities, solving problems, for example, and the teacher giving a puzzle for students to think then students discussing what to do to solve the puzzle, or it can also be by finding similarities and differences between one sentence and another. Then the students answered by raising their hands. According to Kayi (as cited in Juvrianto, 2018)<sup>[23]</sup> stated that there are many activities to promote speaking. There are thirteen activities to promote speaking. Those are discussion, role play, simulations, information gap, brain storming, storytelling, interviews, story completion, reporting, playing cards, picture narrating, picture describing, and then find the differences. All examples of activities that have been previously mentioned are activities that can be applied by teachers when teaching in class so that students do not feel bored and become excited or interested in speaking English in class.

#### 4.5. Role Play in Teaching Speaking

Role play looks to be a crucial teaching method for speaking skills. By interacting with others in a controlled way, students can study real life situations through the use of the role play technique. Based on Ladousse in (Kuśnierek, 2015)<sup>[26]</sup>, role play is one of a wide range of communicative methods that help students become fluent speakers, promotes classroom interaction, and increases motivation. It promotes not only peer learning but also the division of responsibility for the process of learning between the teacher and the students. Additionally, according to (Kuśnierek, 2015)<sup>[26]</sup> role-playing can be a very helpful practice session for real life, especially for those who are studying English for a career. Since it allows the students the opportunity to practice the usual activities, it satisfies.

Several studies have demonstrated that role-play techniques can effectively improve students' speaking skills. Pinatih (2021)<sup>[32]</sup> found that role play significantly enhanced students' language fluency and confidence by providing realistic, engaging scenarios; the study also reported benefits for active learning, critical thinking, and effective communication. Similarly, Altun (2015)<sup>[6]</sup> examined the impact of role-play activities on speaking in an ESL context using observation checklists and questionnaires with nine undergraduate students of low English proficiency; results indicated notable improvements in fluency, comprehension, interactive communication, and learners' confidence. Together, these studies support the effectiveness of role play as a pedagogical technique for developing speaking skills. However, despite the existing literature, research on the use of role play at Hong Duc University remains limited; therefore, the present study proposes to investigate the effectiveness of role-play techniques for fostering students' speaking skills at that institution.

#### 4.6. Teaching and learning approaches reinforced by role-play technique

Effective language programs rely on diverse teaching approaches and methodologies. Various well-known approaches and methods are used worldwide in language teaching, including the direct method, the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching (CLT), Presentation–Practice–Production (PPP), the postmethod (or post-communicative) approach, text-based instruction (TBI), English for specific purposes (ESP), and task-based language teaching (TBLT), among others (AIKhasawneh, 2022;

Klapper, 2006; Nagy, 2020; Scrivener, 2011; Zhou & Niu, 2015)<sup>[5, 24, 28, 39, 49]</sup>.

Rojas and Villafuerte (2018)<sup>[36]</sup> investigated the effects of using role-play to enhance Ecuadorian Students' English-speaking skills. Their study indicated that role-play supports a variety of teaching and learning approaches, including CLT, TBLT, and ESP. Within the TBLT framework, role-play activities encourage learners to create meaningful messages they might encounter in real-life contexts (Ding, 2018). Similarly, in the CLT approach, role-play helps learners convey authentic messages for communication (Rahmatillah, 2019)<sup>[34]</sup>. In ESP classes, role-play enables learners to use the language effectively in authentic situations relevant to their career-specific needs (Ferdian & Nirwana, 2021; Safitri & Purba, 2022)<sup>[16, 37]</sup>. Villafuerte *et al.* (2018)<sup>[42]</sup> also noted that role-play creates an optimal environment for implementing TBLT and CLT approaches.

#### 4.7. Benefits of Using Role Playing Activities in Students' Language Development

Many studies have shown that integrating role-play activities into language instruction provides students with multiple benefits for their language development

##### 4.7.1. Enhancing Vocabulary Achievement of Students

Fahim and Sabah (2012)<sup>[15]</sup> investigated the impact of role-play games on vocabulary learning and recall among EFL pre-university students in Iran. Their quantitative analysis revealed that role-play games significantly enhanced students' ability to learn and remember vocabulary items. Similarly, Alabsi (2016)<sup>[2]</sup> conducted a quasi-experimental study at a Saudi Arabian secondary school to evaluate the effectiveness of the role-play technique in teaching vocabulary; by comparing pretest and posttest results on a vocabulary achievement test, Alabsi found that students in the experimental group who used role-play scored significantly higher on the posttest than the control group. Ishak and Aziz (2022)<sup>[21]</sup> reported that role-play increased learners' enthusiasm to practice speaking in the English-language classroom. For example, Alghamdy (2022)<sup>[4]</sup> compared a role-play approach with traditional learning strategies to examine effects on EFL learners' communication skills. Although pretest scores did not differ notably between groups, posttest results indicated that role-play significantly improved communication skills such as confirmation, imitation, repetition, and responding to others.

##### 4.7.2. Promote Language Integration and Social Skills

Chaitanya and Ramana (2013)<sup>[11]</sup> used collaborative action research and incorporated role-play as a central method to enhance language skills. Their findings indicated that role-play integrated the four language skills and helped most students overcome anxiety and embarrassment, resulting in greater participation in learning activities. Consistent with these results, role-play has been found to reduce students' inhibitions (Islam & Islam, 2012), increase participation and interaction (Najjemba & Cronjé, 2020)<sup>[29]</sup>, develop negotiation skills (Yu, 2023)<sup>[47]</sup>, and enhance social skills (Baca *et al.*, 2020).

##### 4.7.3. Facilitate Students' Learning Motivation

Amir *et al.* (2021) conducted a quasi-experimental study using a non-equivalent control-group design with pretests and posttests to examine whether role-play enhanced students'

achievement motivation. Their results indicated that the role-play technique significantly increased students' achievement motivation and positively changed their attitudes. Similarly, Gusmuliana *et al.* (2021) <sup>[17]</sup> investigated the effect of role-play on language learners' motivation to speak English and found that role-play significantly enhanced speaking motivation by encouraging students to express their ideas more actively and naturally.

#### 4.7.4. Improve Speaking Skills of the Students

Neupane (2019) <sup>[30]</sup> examined the effectiveness of the role-play technique in improving English speaking skills among 40 public-school students. The results indicated a marked improvement in speaking skills for the experimental group taught with role-play compared with the control group that received traditional grammar-based instruction. Similarly, Wulandari *et al.* (2019) <sup>[44]</sup>, using classroom action research, found that role-play effectively supported students' speaking abilities. Focusing on fluency and comprehension, Tandipayuk *et al.* (2023) <sup>[40]</sup> evaluated role-play-based speaking activities in a university tourism program and reported that these exercises improved students' fluency and comprehension, and increased their confidence and enjoyment in speaking. Daulay *et al.* (2022) <sup>[13]</sup> likewise reported that role-play has a meaningful positive impact on students' speaking skills.

#### 4.7.5. Enhancing Communication Skills of the Students

Role-play is one of several techniques used to teach verbal communication skills. Ashok (2015) <sup>[7]</sup> highlighted that a primary benefit of role-play in English learning is the enhancement of communication and language abilities. Such activities allow learners to engage in realistic, simulated scenarios that improve everyday communicative competence (Magos & Politi, 2008) <sup>[27]</sup>. Role-play has been shown to positively influence speaking skills—particularly fluency, comprehension, and interaction while also helping learners build confidence in using English. Basic English is the first of four foreign-language modules and aims to provide foundational English knowledge corresponding to level 1 of the six-level Foreign Language Competency Framework for Vietnam (equivalent to A1 on the CEFR). The module covers the four basic skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—to establish a foundation for subsequent modules; as an entry-level course, students are expected to progress toward the A1–A2 range of the CEFR.

### 5. The Methods of the Research

This study is done based on a library research. Hence, the researcher tried to collect the data from the library. This paper intended to present the most important techniques of role-playing activities in which EFL students use for enhancing their speaking abilities in EFL classes. It is worth mentioning that, the data which is conducted in this study has been collected from some academic articles, academic journals, internet sites and other reliable resources to find out crucial information about the paper. In the current study the author has tried to state some methods of experienced teachers who are eagerly willing to hold their students with them and his own experiences of teaching through technology in order to improve students' speaking abilities.

### 6. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study show that students are highly motivated by such activities. This study found it entertaining because students enjoy themselves and have a great time and role-play activities allow them to practice English with their classmates and improve their speaking skills. Besides, this activity allows them to talk in English freely with their classmates in the classroom without any obstacles. The present study's findings are supported by the literature review, which indicates that role-playing develops learners' fluency in speaking. In other words, the wide range of language functions, for example, apologizing, greetings, etc., is exercised more than in any other activity. To be clear, learners focus on the communication of meaning rather than on the appropriate use of language. Therefore, through role-playing, teachers may train students' speaking skills in any social situation. It means that learners are put in conditions that require speech that is used to communicate socially more than the language necessitated by teaching syllabuses. Besides, role-playing develops learners' imaginations. The roles given to learners may require creative thinking, so the players' imagination is in high demand. Moreover, learners are given a chance to pretend to be someone else. Such a technique may help timid students overcome their shyness about speaking.

### 7. Conclusion

Based on the current study's findings and the literature review, it is concluded that role-playing activities are one of the communicative activities that can create a motivating learning environment where all students can develop their speaking skills. In addition, while using this teaching activity in the classroom, students can defy their shyness and eagerly participate in developing their English language skills through learning different vocabulary in an authentic context. Therefore, it is suggested that educators should give play-based learning great importance if they want to develop their students' speaking competence.

This study also showed that the role plays performance and conventional technique in terms of improving students' English-speaking skills. The role play technique, on the other hand, has the greatest impact on students' ability to communicate. The effect of a class using the role play technique with a class using conventional technique is being assessed. As a result, it can be inferred that the role play technique has a better impact on EFL students' speaking abilities than conventional technique.

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