



THE USE OF ROLE-PLAY IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE IN SPEAKING

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ABSTRACT

Role-play activities are interactive exercises where participants act out roles in specific scenarios to simulate real-life situations. They help develop communication, empathy, problem-solving, and social skills by encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. This study explores the effect of role-play activities on increasing students' confidence in speaking English, focusing on sixth-semester students at Politeknik Tonggak Equator during the 2024/2025 academic year. Confidence issues in speaking often arise from fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and lack of real-life communication practice. A qualitative descriptive method was applied, with data collected through open-ended questionnaires to gain insights into students' perceptions and experiences. Thematic analysis showed that role-play helped reduce anxiety, encouraged spontaneous speaking, and improved fluency. Participants reported that role-play created a safe and engaging environment where they could experiment with language and gain speaking confidence. Findings indicate that role-play is a practical and effective teaching method to enhance both communicative competence and learners' self-assurance. Integrating role-play into regular speaking activities is recommended to support students' oral language development.

Keywords: Role-play, speaking confidence, English language learning, communicative competence, qualitative research, language fluency, student perception, multilingual environment

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a crucial skill in language learning, enabling individuals to communicate effectively in various contexts. However, many students, particularly in higher education, struggle with confidence when speaking, especially in a foreign language. Lack of confidence often leads to hesitation, anxiety, and ineffective communication, which can hinder academic and professional development (Brown, 2001). One of the methods widely used to improve students' speaking confidence is role play (Oradee, 2012). According to Ladousse (1987), role play allows students to engage in simulated real-life conversations, helping them practice speaking in a more interactive and less intimidating environment. By assuming different roles, students can explore various perspectives, enhance their fluency, and gradually build confidence in expressing their thoughts verbally. Several studies support the idea that role play can reduce anxiety and improve speaking skills by providing structured opportunities to practice (Ur, 1996; Harmer, 2007). Additionally, this method fosters a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel more encouraged to speak without the fear of making mistakes. Despite these advantages, the extent to which role play influences students' confidence in speaking still requires further investigation.

In relation to this, many students experience difficulties in speaking confidently due to fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and lack of exposure to real-life communication situations. Traditional teaching methods, such as lectures and textbook exercises, often fail to address these issues effectively. Role play, as an interactive learning strategy, is proposed as a potential solution. However, its effectiveness in increasing students' speaking confidence remains an area of inquiry. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: How effective is the role-play method in enhancing students' confidence in speaking? What are the challenges students face when engaging in role-play activities? And how do students perceive the impact of role play on their speaking confidence?

This study was conducted during the sixth semester of the 2024/2025 academic year at Politeknik Tonggak Equator, focusing exclusively on students' improvement in speaking confidence. The purposes of the research are to help students overcome speaking anxiety and improve their communication skills, offer an alternative teaching strategy that fosters interactive and engaging speaking activities, and provide a foundation for further studies on interactive learning methods in language acquisition.

The significance of this study can be viewed from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge in language learning by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of role play in developing speaking confidence. It supports the theories of communicative language teaching (CLT) and interactive learning strategies, reinforcing their role in modern language education. Moreover, the findings may offer insights for future researchers investigating psychological and pedagogical factors affecting speaking confidence. Practically, this research helps students overcome speaking anxiety and develop communication skills in a safe and structured environment. It provides educators with practical strategies to implement role play effectively in their teaching, creating a more engaging and supportive learning setting. Furthermore, the results may influence curriculum designers to incorporate role play as an essential component of speaking courses, ensuring students receive sufficient practice in real-life communication scenarios.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Speaking Skills in Language Learning

Speaking is one of the core language skills that enables individuals to communicate effectively in various social, academic, and professional settings. Unlike other language skills, such as reading and writing, speaking requires real-time processing and interaction. It involves the ability to organize thoughts, use appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and convey messages clearly and fluently.

Many language learners struggle with speaking due to several factors, including limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, grammatical errors, and anxiety. These difficulties often lead to hesitation, lack of participation in discussions, and ineffective communication. As a result, developing speaking skills requires not only linguistic competence but also confidence and practice in real-life communication settings.

In language teaching, various strategies are employed to enhance students' speaking abilities. These include discussions, presentations, storytelling, debates, and role-play. Among these methods, role-play is particularly effective because it simulates real-world interactions, allowing students to practice speaking in meaningful contexts.

Confidence in Speaking

Confidence is a crucial factor influencing students' speaking performance. When learners feel confident, they are more likely to speak fluently, take risks, and engage in conversations without fear of making mistakes. Conversely, low confidence can lead to hesitation, avoidance of speaking activities, and difficulty in expressing ideas clearly.

Language anxiety is one of the main barriers to speaking confidence. It can be caused by fear of negative evaluation, lack of practice, or past negative experiences in speaking. Research suggests that students with high levels of anxiety tend to speak less, struggle with fluency, and exhibit signs of nervousness, such as excessive pausing and repetition.

To improve speaking confidence, it is essential to create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. Encouraging active participation, providing constructive feedback, and using interactive teaching methods such as role-play can help reduce anxiety and enhance students' willingness to speak. (Suparman, U. 2012).

Role-Play as a Language Learning Method

Role-play is a widely used technique in language teaching that involves students acting out different roles in simulated real-life situations. This method provides learners with opportunities to use language in a practical and interactive way, helping them develop fluency, spontaneity, and confidence. (Ur, P. 1996) Role-play allows students to experiment with different speaking styles, practice various language functions, and improve their ability to respond naturally in conversations (Ladousse, G. P. 1987) By taking on different roles, learners step outside their comfort zones and engage in meaningful interactions, which can enhance their speaking proficiency over time.

Additionally, role-play promotes social and communicative competence by exposing students to different perspectives and cultural contexts. It encourages creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, as students must adapt their language use to different scenarios. In a classroom setting, role-play can be implemented through dialogues, simulations, interviews, and improvisational activities. The key advantage of role-play is that it reduces the fear of speaking by shifting the focus from individual performance to collaborative interaction.

Previous Studies on Role-Play and Speaking Confidence

Several studies have examined the effectiveness of role-play in improving speaking confidence. Research in communicative language teaching has demonstrated that students who engage in role-play activities tend to develop greater fluency and confidence than those who rely on traditional grammar-based instruction.

Studies on classroom interaction have shown that role-play encourages active participation, allowing students to practice speaking in a relaxed and engaging environment. Unlike structured speaking exercises, role-play gives students the freedom to express themselves naturally, making the learning process more enjoyable and less stressful.

Additionally, research on language anxiety indicates that role-play helps reduce speaking-related stress by providing a safe space for students to practice without the fear of making mistakes. When learners are placed in simulated real-life situations, they become more accustomed to speaking spontaneously, which in turn boosts their confidence.

Other studies highlight the long-term benefits of role-play in language learning. Students who regularly participate in role-play activities tend to develop better public speaking skills,

improved pronunciation, and greater adaptability in conversations. The ability to take on different roles and respond to various social contexts enhances their overall communication competence.

Despite its advantages, some studies have also pointed out challenges in implementing role-play. Factors such as students' reluctance to participate, difficulty in assigning appropriate roles, and time constraints in classroom settings can affect the effectiveness of role-play activities. However, with proper planning and teacher support, these challenges can be minimized to maximize learning outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the premise that role-play contributes to speaking confidence through three key mechanisms:

1. Reducing Anxiety: Role-play provides a structured and supportive setting where students feel less pressure when speaking. By engaging in interactive activities, learners gradually overcome their fear of making mistakes and become more comfortable expressing themselves.
2. Encouraging Active Participation: Role-play motivates students to take an active role in communication by simulating real-life conversations. The interactive nature of role-play fosters engagement and helps students build confidence through repeated practice.
3. Building Communication Skills: Role-play helps students improve their fluency, pronunciation, and ability to adapt to different conversational contexts. Through meaningful interaction, they develop the skills necessary for effective communication.

The relationship between these elements is illustrated as follows:

Role-Play Activities → Reduced Anxiety → Increased Confidence → Improved Speaking Skills

This framework serves as the foundation for the study, guiding the investigation into how role-play influences students' confidence in speaking.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to delve into students' lived experiences with role-play and their perceptions of its impact on their speaking confidence. This approach facilitated the collection of rich, descriptive data through open-ended questionnaires, allowing for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. The research focused specifically on how students perceive the influence of role-play activities on their self-assurance in speaking English. The research was conducted over a four-month period, spanning from March to April 2025, at Politeknik Tonggak Equator. The participants for this study were purposefully selected from students who had prior or current experience participating in role-play activities within their speaking classes at the institution. The target sample size ranged from 30 to 50 students. The selection criteria for participation included: current or previous enrollment in a speaking class, demonstrable experience with role-play as a component of their speaking practice, and a willingness to provide honest and detailed responses in the questionnaire.

The primary instrument for data collection was an open-ended questionnaire meticulously designed to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of role-play

in building their speaking confidence. The questionnaire was structured into several key sections. The first section gathered Demographic Information, including participants' age, level of education, and English language learning background. The second section, Experience with Role-Play, inquired about the frequency and various types of role-play activities the students had engaged in. The third section, Confidence in Speaking, aimed to explore students' self-reported levels of confidence both before and after their participation in role-play activities. Finally, the Perceived Benefits and Challenges section encouraged students to articulate how role-play had either facilitated their speaking improvement or presented challenges in their learning journey.

The data collection process adhered to a structured approach. Initially, the questionnaire underwent a rigorous Questionnaire Development phase, where it was carefully crafted to align directly with the research objectives. To ensure clarity, relevance, and effectiveness in capturing students' perspectives, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review. Following the refinement process, the final version of the questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms during the Questionnaire Distribution phase. Clear and concise instructions were provided to the participants to ensure they understood how to provide thoughtful and comprehensive responses. Upon completion of the data collection, the Data Compilation and Organization phase involved reviewing, categorizing, and preparing the collected responses for subsequent qualitative analysis.

The data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The data analysis process involved several key steps. First, Data Organization entailed sorting and categorizing the responses based on emergent themes directly related to role-play and speaking confidence. Subsequently, Thematic Analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and significant themes within the students' responses, aiming to gain deeper insights into their experiences. Finally, the Interpretation and Discussion phase involved analyzing the identified themes in relation to the initial research objectives and existing scholarly literature, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the findings.

FINDINGS

A survey conducted with 30 sixth-semester students at POLTEQ who had experience with role-play in their language classes indicated a widespread positive perception of its impact on their speaking abilities and confidence. A significant majority of the respondents reported that engaging in role-play was effective in enhancing their speaking fluency (63.3%), enabling them to speak more spontaneously in English (56.7%), and notably increasing their overall confidence in using the language (63.3%). Beyond these core aspects, a substantial number of students also agreed that role-play helped to alleviate nervousness when speaking in front of others (53.3%) and provided a valuable platform to experiment with diverse speaking styles (56.7%). Moreover, a considerable proportion of the participants acknowledged that role-play facilitated their understanding and application of vocabulary within appropriate contexts (60%) and contributed to the enhancement of their creativity in using the English language (63.3%). While a little over half agreed on the improvement of general speaking fluency through role-play (53.3%), a notably high percentage of students (66.7%) perceived that role-play activities even aided in the development of their problem-solving skills in English. Taken together, these findings strongly suggest that the students in this study largely view role-play as a beneficial and multifaceted pedagogical approach that contributes significantly to the development of various crucial speaking skills and the bolstering of their confidence in using English.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the effect of role-play on enhancing students' confidence in speaking English, with a specific focus on sixth-semester students at Politeknik Tonggak Equator. The findings obtained from questionnaire responses reveal that role-play is broadly perceived as an effective instructional strategy, positively impacting various dimensions of speaking skills. These include technical aspects such as fluency and vocabulary use, as well as affective components such as confidence, spontaneity, creativity, and anxiety reduction. The overwhelmingly positive responses highlight the relevance of implementing communicative strategies like role-play in English language teaching.

One of the most significant indicators of role-play's effectiveness emerged in the area of speaking fluency. Data analysis showed that 100% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that role-play contributes to improved fluency, with 63.3% agreeing and 36.7% strongly agreeing that engaging in role-play was effective in enhancing their speaking fluency. This is consistent with Harmer (2007), who emphasized that extended speaking turns within structured yet flexible activities such as role-play allow learners to engage in meaningful language use. Unlike isolated grammar drills, role-play activities provide learners with real-time language practice, enabling them to produce language more naturally and fluently in context. The repetition and routine involvement in dialogues or scenario-based tasks help internalize language patterns and boost overall fluency.

Another area where role-play demonstrated clear benefits was in promoting spontaneity. A combined 96.7% of students indicated that role-play encouraged them to speak more spontaneously in English. This supports the findings of Ur (1996), who argued that communicative activities foster real-time interaction and help learners respond more quickly and naturally. The ability to speak spontaneously is a crucial marker of communicative competence and requires students to process language cognitively under time pressure. Through role-play, students learn to think on their feet, choose appropriate expressions, and react to conversational cues, thereby improving their capacity for spontaneous communication.

Equally notable is the role of role-play in enhancing students' confidence when speaking English. The findings revealed that 96.6% of respondents experienced increased confidence due to their involvement in role-play sessions. Confidence is a critical affective factor in language learning, often acting as either a motivator or a barrier to performance. According to Brown (2001), lowering affective filters such as fear and anxiety leads to more effective language acquisition. In this study, the safe, controlled, and collaborative nature of role-play activities allowed students to take risks and speak freely without fear of criticism or failure. The repeated exposure to simulated conversations enabled students to become more familiar with various speaking contexts, gradually reducing their fear of public speaking.

However, the response to the role-play's ability to reduce nervousness in front of the class was more varied. While 80% of students acknowledged its usefulness in easing anxiety, 20% disagreed. This variation suggests that while role-play can be a valuable tool in managing performance anxiety, its success may depend on individual differences such as personality traits, previous learning experiences, or cultural background. Some students, particularly introverted ones, may still feel discomfort when speaking in front of peers regardless of the activity's format. This supports the argument by Horwitz et al. (1986), who pointed out that speaking anxiety remains a persistent challenge in foreign language learning and cannot be fully addressed by teaching methods alone.

Another key outcome of the study was that all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that role-play provided a platform for experimenting with different speaking styles. This flexibility allowed students to embody various roles, such as customer, professional, or peer, broadening their communicative competence and awareness of sociolinguistic norms. According to Ladousse (1987), role-play provides a valuable opportunity for students to develop pragmatic skills, including tone modulation, politeness strategies, and turn-taking behaviors. By stepping into different roles, learners enhance their ability to adapt language based on context, which is crucial for effective communication.

Vocabulary development was also positively affected. All participants agreed that role-play activities helped them understand and use vocabulary appropriately in context. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that meaningful and contextualized vocabulary use promotes better retention and application than rote memorization. In this study, students encountered new vocabulary within specific scenarios such as a restaurant setting or a job interview making the words more relevant and memorable. This contextual learning also encouraged incidental vocabulary acquisition, where learners pick up language naturally through interaction.

Creativity in language use was another area of significant improvement. About 63.3% of students agreed, and 36.7% strongly agreed, that role-play enhanced their English language creativity. Engaging in unscripted dialogues and improvising responses required students to use their imagination and linguistic resources, which nurtures creative thinking. Role-play allowed them to generate original responses, invent scenarios, and apply language in novel ways. This aligns with communicative language teaching principles, which advocate for activities that stimulate creativity and authentic use of language.

Furthermore, the study found that 93.3% of participants agreed that role-play improved their smoothness in speech. Speaking smoothly involves more than just fluency; it includes rhythm, intonation, and coherence. The practice provided by role-play, especially when done regularly, helps learners reduce hesitation, self-correction, and filler words, contributing to more polished oral performance.

Lastly, the role-play method was perceived to enhance students' problem-solving skills in English. A total of 96.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that these activities helped develop their ability to think critically and respond appropriately in unpredictable situations. Role-play scenarios often involve decision-making, negotiation, or conflict resolution, which simulate real-life communication challenges. According to Ladousse (1987), such tasks cultivate not only language proficiency but also strategic competence—the ability to manage communication breakdowns and adjust speech to achieve communicative goals.

In summary, the discussion highlights that role-play is highly effective in developing both technical and soft skills related to speaking English. Students benefit not only linguistically through increased fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation but also psychologically and socially through boosted confidence, reduced anxiety, enhanced creativity, and improved problem-solving. Despite some limitations in anxiety reduction for a minority of students, the overall findings strongly support the integration of role-play into speaking classes. Future research should consider examining how individual learner differences—such as introversion/extroversion, prior speaking experiences, or language proficiency levels—affect students' responses to role-play. Longitudinal studies could also assess whether the benefits of role-play are sustained over time, offering further insights for curriculum development and pedagogical innovation in English language education.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of role-play in enhancing students' confidence in speaking English, identify the challenges they faced during the activities, and understand their perceptions of role-play as a learning strategy. Through a questionnaire distributed to 30 sixth-semester POLTEQ students, valuable insights were gathered regarding how role-play contributes to language learning, particularly in building speaking confidence.

The findings of this study indicate that the role-play method is highly effective in enhancing students' confidence in speaking English. By engaging in role-play activities, students were able to practice speaking in realistic and interactive scenarios, which allowed them to use English more fluently and naturally. This repeated practice helped reduce their fear of making mistakes and increased their willingness to speak, resulting in improved confidence over time. Most students expressed that role-play gave them a safe space to experiment with language, boosting their courage to speak in front of others.

Despite its effectiveness, the study also revealed several challenges faced by students when participating in role-play activities. Some students experienced nervousness, anxiety, and fear of being judged by their peers, especially during their first attempts. Others struggled with limited vocabulary or difficulty staying in character during the activity. These challenges suggest that while role-play is beneficial, it requires careful facilitation by teachers to ensure students feel supported and prepared to participate confidently.

In general, students perceived role-play as a fun, engaging, and valuable learning method for improving their speaking confidence. They appreciated the opportunity to practice English in meaningful, contextualized situations that resembled real-life conversations. Students believed that role-play not only enhanced their speaking skills but also improved their creativity, vocabulary usage, and problem-solving abilities in communication. Overall, they viewed role-play as a positive and effective approach that made them more confident and motivated to speak English.

In conclusion, the study highlights the significant role of role-play in language learning, particularly in fostering confidence, creativity, and communicative competence among students. While some challenges remain, the overall positive perceptions and outcomes suggest that role-play should continue to be implemented and developed as part of speaking practice in English language education.

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