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Improving Speaking Skills through the Role-Playing Method in Indonesian Language Learning

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A B S T R A C T

Speaking skills are an essential competency in Indonesian language learning that often face obstacles, such as low student confidence and a lack of meaningful practice opportunities. This study aims to improve students' speaking skills through the implementation of the Role-Playing Method. This research uses a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. The research subjects were students of [State Class] at [School Name]. Data were collected through observation, speaking performance tests, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed descriptively both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results showed significant improvement in each cycle. The average score for speaking skills increased from the pre-cycle (62), to Cycle I (70), and reached 82 in Cycle II. Classical learning completeness also increased from 45% (pre-cycle), to 65% (Cycle I), and 90% (Cycle II). Qualitatively, students became more confident, active, and able to communicate in authentic simulation contexts. The conclusion of this research proves that the Role-Playing Method is effective in improving students' speaking skills, as it can create contextual learning situations, reduce anxiety, and train linguistic and pragmatic competencies in an integrated manner. Therefore, this method is recommended as an alternative innovative learning strategy for the Indonesian language subject.

Keyword: *Speaking Skills, Indonesian Language Learning, Role-Playing Method*

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of Indonesian language learning, speaking skills constitute a productive and essential aspect of language competency. This productive nature demands students to actively generate oral utterances, in contrast to receptive skills like listening and reading, which emphasize comprehension. Its essentiality lies in its role as a primary tool for social, academic, and professional interaction. This skill is not limited to mere word articulation but encompasses the entire process of effective oral communication. This process includes organizing ideas logically and coherently, selecting appropriate and polite diction, mastering acceptable sentence structures, and delivering them with adequate intonation, pronunciation, and self-confidence. Without good mastery of speaking, students will face difficulties in expressing thoughts, participating in discussions, presenting work results, or simply communicating effectively in daily life (Ur, 1996).

Therefore, the teaching of speaking skills should occupy a strategic portion in the Indonesian language curriculum. However, in practice, this aspect often still lacks adequate allocation and approach. Much of the learning remains confined to conventional methods such as teacher lectures, text memorization, or instructional and rigid speaking activities, like answering brief questions. This creates a paradox: on one hand, speaking is recognized as a crucial life skill, but on the other hand, the space to practice it contextually and courageously is precisely limited in the classroom. As a result, students' speaking abilities do not develop

optimally and remain only at a theoretical or artificial level. They may understand language rules but experience confusion and anxiety when required to apply them in real conversation. This condition subsequently demands a breakthrough in teaching methods—an approach capable of bridging the gap between linguistic knowledge and authentic oral communication performance, one of which is through the implementation of the role-playing method (Thornbury, 2005).

This skill encompasses not only the ability to pronounce words correctly but, more broadly, the ability to express ideas, feelings, and information orally with coherent structure, polite language, and full confidence. Mastery of speaking skills is crucial because it serves as a vital tool for communication, social interaction, and supports the academic and professional success of learners. However, the reality in many classrooms often shows that the development of this skill still faces various challenges, such as low student self-confidence, a lack of meaningful speaking practice opportunities, and learning methods that tend to be conventional and less engaging for students (Stern, 1993).

In response to these challenges, an innovative, interactive, and student-centered learning approach is required. The persistence of traditional, teacher-dominated methods has created a pedagogical gap where students possess theoretical knowledge of language but lack the confidence and practical skill to deploy it in real-time interaction. This disconnect calls for a fundamental shift in instructional design—a move away from passive reception toward active construction of knowledge. Such an approach must inherently value process over mere product, creating a classroom ecosystem where experimentation, dialogue, and even productive failure are not just permitted but are integral to the learning journey. It demands strategies that reposition the student from a silent recipient to an engaged co-creator of the learning experience (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

This requisite shift finds a potent answer in experiential and simulation-based methodologies. An approach that is truly student-centered does not simply add occasional group work to a conventional syllabus; it re-engineers the learning environment to mirror authentic communicative contexts. This means designing tasks that are inherently collaborative, where success is contingent upon interpersonal negotiation and the meaningful exchange of ideas. The innovation lies in structuring lessons around problems to be solved or scenarios to be navigated, thereby making language use a necessary tool rather than an abstract subject. Interactivity becomes the core mechanism of learning, as students engage in sustained discourse with peers, receiving immediate, contextual feedback that shapes and refines their linguistic output in a way that delayed correction from a teacher cannot. Therefore, the required approach is one that strategically blurs the line between learning and doing, effectively transforming the classroom into a dynamic workshop for communicative competence (Nunan, 2004).

One method considered potential is the Role-Playing Method. This method places students in simulated situations or real-life scenarios where they enact specific characters and interact using spoken language according to the given context. Through role-playing, students do not merely practice speaking but also directly experience language use in authentic communicative situations. This process is expected to reduce speaking anxiety, increase motivation, and train fluency, accuracy, and language politeness. Therefore, research or a study entitled "Improving Speaking Skills through the Role-Playing Method in Indonesian Language Learning" becomes relevant and important to conduct. This study aims to analyze and describe the extent to which the application of the Role-Playing Method can contribute significantly to improving the quality of students' speaking skills. It is hoped that the findings of this study can serve as theoretical and practical references for educators in creating more effective, enjoyable Indonesian language learning that equips students with superior oral communication competence.

METHOD

This research is designed using a qualitative approach with the type of Classroom Action Research (CAR). The selection of the qualitative approach is based on the research objective to understand the phenomenon of improving speaking skills in-depth, holistically, and in its natural context, namely within the classroom learning process. This approach allows the researcher to capture and analyse the complexity of social interactions, changes in attitudes, motivation, and student psychological dynamics that may not be numerically measurable but are crucial determinants of learning success. Meanwhile, Classroom Action Research (CAR) is chosen as the research type because it aligns with the main goal: not only to describe the problem but also to directly make improvements to teaching practices deemed suboptimal. CAR positions the teacher as a researcher in their own workspace, so the resulting improvements are contextual, reflective, and directly address the root of the problem in the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This CAR design is implemented through a series of reflective cycles spiralling toward improvement. Each cycle consists of four interrelated stages: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. In the planning stage, the researcher develops a role-playing-based learning scenario along with the necessary observation and assessment instruments. The implementation stage is the application of this plan in an actual teaching-learning process. During the action, systematic observation is conducted to collect data on the process and impact of the action. The collected data is then analysed in the reflection stage to evaluate the successes and weaknesses that occurred. The results of this reflection form the basis for planning the next cycle, where the weaknesses from the previous cycle are corrected and its strengths are maintained. This cyclical design ensures that the research is not a one-off activity but a dynamic process oriented towards continuous improvement until the predetermined success indicators are achieved. Thus, the integration of the qualitative approach and the CAR model is expected to yield comprehensive understanding as well as practical and tested solutions for improving the quality of speaking skills instruction (Burns, 2010).

This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objective of improving students' speaking skills within the real context of classroom learning while simultaneously solving problems identified in everyday teaching practice. This classroom action research was carried out through a repetitive cyclical process, with each cycle consisting of four main stages: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. This process continues until the established success indicators are met.

The location of this research is in class [state the class, e.g., VII A] of [Name of School] Junior High School/Islamic Junior High School/Senior High School in the odd semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. The research subjects are all students in that class, totalling [number] individuals, with a focus on the process and results of improving their speaking skills. This research involves the researcher acting as the teaching teacher and a collaborator serving as an observer.

The data collection technique used is triangulation to ensure data validity. Data was collected through participatory observation using observation sheets focusing on student and teacher activities during the implementation of the role-playing method. Subsequently, a speaking performance test was conducted, assessed with a speaking skills rubric covering aspects of fluency, vocabulary, sentence structure, pronunciation, and appropriateness to the role context. The data was also supplemented with in-depth interviews with several students selected purposively to explore their perceptions, difficulties, and motivations, as well as documentation studies in the form of field notes, student work (role-play scripts), and video recordings of the learning process.

The collected data was then analysed interactively and continuously during and after the research process. Qualitative data analysis was performed by reducing the data, presenting the data in descriptive narrative form and matrices, and drawing verification conclusions. Quantitative data from the performance test results were analysed descriptively to see the improvement in the class average score and learning mastery. Reflection at the end of each

cycle served as the basis for evaluating weaknesses and designing improvements for the next cycle, making the entire research process dynamic and oriented towards continuous improvement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

This classroom action research to improve speaking skills through the role-playing method was carried out in two cycles. The implementation in two cycles is based on the essential principle of CAR, namely continuous improvement carried out gradually and responsively to real conditions in the field. The first cycle serves as an initial application and diagnosis of the effectiveness of the action design that has been planned. Although showing promising signs, the findings in the first cycle generally still left various unresolved obstacles and areas for improvement. Therefore, the presence of the second cycle becomes crucial as a form of refinement and validation. In the second cycle, all reflections and learnings from the first cycle are used as the basis for improving strategies, clarifying guidelines, and enhancing the quality of facilitation, so that the action can achieve more optimal results and meet the established success indicators.

Each cycle was designed carefully to ensure a systematic and measurable workflow. One complete cycle includes a mature planning stage, where the role-play scenario, observation sheets, and assessment rubric are developed according to the specific theme and learning objectives of that cycle. The implementation stage then operationalizes this plan in direct learning interactions within the classroom, where students are actively involved from preparation, practice, to the performance of the role-play. Simultaneously, the observation stage runs to document in detail the class dynamics, student responses, and emerging technical constraints using various instruments such as field notes, observation sheets, and audio-visual recordings. The end of each cycle is the critical reflection stage, where all data from the implementation and observation are analyzed in depth. This analysis does not only focus on numerical results but, more importantly, on the process and causes behind those results. It is this reflection that then yields conclusions about what worked, what failed, and what specific steps should be changed or improved in the next cycle. Thus, the two cycles do not stand alone but form an interconnected chain of learning, where the final success is an accumulation of the trial, error, and improvement processes that occurred throughout the research journey. Each cycle consisted of one meeting with a time allocation of 2 x 40 minutes.

Pre-Cycle (Initial Condition)

Initial observations indicated that students' speaking skills were still low. The majority of students showed symptoms: (1) shyness and lack of confidence when asked to speak in front of the class, (2) very short and unstructured answers given, (3) limited vocabulary, and (4) unclear pronunciation. The diagnostic speaking test results showed a class average of only 62, with a classical mastery rate of 45%. Students tended to be passive, and learning was still dominated by teacher lectures.

Cycle I

In the first cycle, the role-playing method was applied with the theme "Deliberating to Elect a Class President". Students were divided into several groups and given a simple scenario. Observation results showed an increase in student participation compared to the initial condition. Dividing them into small groups created a safer and less intimidating learning space compared to a situation where students had to perform alone in front of the whole class. In a group setting, social pressure and fear of being wrong decreased, so students who were usually quiet began to be encouraged to try contributing ideas or dialogue. Providing a simple scenario at this early stage was also a strategic step to not burden students with story complexity that could actually hinder their linguistic expression. A straightforward scenario with a theme close to everyday life, such as "Deliberating to Elect a Class President", allowed students to focus on developing conversation and embodying the role without being hindered by understanding a complicated plot.

This observed increase in participation became a positive initial indicator that the role-playing method had the potential to overcome students' reluctance to speak. Students appeared more enthusiastic and actively involved in group discussions to assign roles, outline dialogue, and practice together. Social interaction within the group triggered a natural need to communicate and negotiate with their peers. However, more in-depth observation revealed that participation at this stage was still mechanical and had not reached the expected quality of communication. Many students, although already brave enough to speak within the group, were still heavily reliant on the written script they had created. They tended to read the text rigidly with flat intonation and minimal facial expressions, so the interaction resembled a drama reading more than a simulation of a lively conversation. This dependence on the text limited space for improvisation and spontaneity, which is the heart of fluent and contextual speaking skills. Furthermore, the division of roles within the group was often uneven, where more confident students dominated roles with long dialogues, while quieter students only got minor roles with very limited lines. This condition showed that although participation increased quantitatively, the next challenge was to encourage qualitative participation, i.e., more natural, confident, and meaningful speaking, which then became the focus of improvement in the second cycle of this research.

Students began to appear enthusiastic in forming groups and discussing roles. However, several obstacles still emerged: (1) some students were still stiff and did not embody their roles well, (2) much of the dialogue delivered was read from the script, making it less natural, (3) interaction within the role-play had not developed and tended to be static, and (4) the implementation time overran due to lengthy group preparation. The results of the speaking skills assessment in Cycle I showed improvement, with the class average becoming 70 and the classical mastery reaching 65%. Reflection on Cycle I concluded that students needed more concrete guidance and stronger motivation to truly "get into" their roles.

Cycle II

Based on the reflection from Cycle I, several improvements were made in Cycle II: (1) the role-play theme was made more contextual and engaging, namely "Solving a Problem in the School Canteen", (2) the teacher provided modeling or a brief simulation example before students practiced, (3) preparation time was extended and facilitated with worksheets guiding students to develop characters and conflict in the scenario, and (4) emphasis on expression and body language was added to the assessment rubric.

Observation results in Cycle II showed a significant change. Student activity and involvement increased drastically. Students dared to improvise beyond the script, showed expressions matching the emotions of their roles, and interaction among players was livelier and more natural. Students' confidence appeared better, and even previously shy students began to look enthusiastic. The final assessment results of Cycle II proved a satisfying improvement. The class average score for speaking skills reached 82, with a classical mastery rate of 90%. Interview data with students also revealed that they found this method enjoyable, reduced tension, and helped them express their thoughts more easily.

Discussion

The findings of this research consistently show that the role-playing method is effective in improving students' speaking skills in Indonesian language learning. The improvement that occurred from the pre-cycle, Cycle I, to Cycle II can be explained through several key mechanisms offered by this method.

First, role-playing creates an authentic and meaningful communication context. This authenticity arises because students do not merely practice language in a vacuum but do so in a simulation of a social situation that has a purpose, roles, and implicit rules, similar to interactions in the real world. For example, when playing the roles of buyer and seller at a market, students must master utterances for asking prices, bargaining, and agreeing on transactions. This meaningful context provides a strong "reason" for students to speak, thereby transforming the speaking activity from a forced academic task into a functional need to solve a "problem" or achieve a goal within the scenario. This significantly increases students'

intrinsic motivation because they can see the direct relevance between what they practice in class and its application in daily life (Ladousse, 1987).

Furthermore, this meaningful context also forces students to involve pragmatic aspects of language that are often neglected in conventional learning. In a traditional classroom exercise, correctness is frequently judged by grammatical accuracy and vocabulary range in isolation. However, real-world communication is governed by a far more complex set of rules—the unspoken, culturally-informed norms of pragmatics. A grammatically perfect sentence can still be a communicative failure if it is inappropriate for the relationship between speakers, the formality of the setting, or the intended social function. By embedding language use within a defined scenario, role-playing compels learners to move beyond *what* to say and grapple with the critical questions of *how*, *when*, to *whom*, and *why* to say it (Kemmis et al., 2014).

This immersion in pragmatic decision-making is where deep, transferable language competence is forged. Students are no longer passive vessels for linguistic rules but active strategists. They must consciously or intuitively choose registers, modulate tone, employ suitable politeness strategies, and interpret nonverbal cues to achieve their character's goals. For instance, the language used to persuade a friend will differ markedly from that used to negotiate with an authority figure, even if the core vocabulary remains similar. This constant, contextualized practice in making such distinctions trains sociolinguistic sensitivity—the ability to adapt one's speech to fit the social landscape. Consequently, the learning transcends the textbook, equipping students with the nuanced, adaptable communication skills necessary for effective interaction in diverse and authentic situations beyond the classroom walls (Harmer, 2007).

They not only think about "what to say" but also "to whom", "in what situation", and "for what purpose". A student playing a child asking permission from parents will automatically choose more polite and persuasive diction and sentence patterns compared to when playing a friend in an argument. This process of selecting language appropriate to the social context is what holistically trains students' communicative competence. Thus, role-playing successfully bridges the gap between formal linguistic knowledge in textbooks and its application in lively, nuanced conversations. The meaningfulness of this context is the main foundation for why the method is able to spark students' courage and involvement, because they feel that their utterances have power and consequences in the simulated world they build together.

Unlike conventional speaking tasks (such as storytelling or answering questions), role-play scenarios like "deliberation" or "solving problems" provide students with a clear purpose and audience. In conventional tasks, the focus of evaluation often lies solely on linguistic accuracy or fluency of delivery, while broader communicative goals tend to be vague. Students might tell a story without truly understanding their imagined listeners or answer a teacher's question merely to fulfill an obligation, not to influence or inform. Conversely, in a role-play scenario, every utterance produced has a strategic function directly tied to the goal of that role. For example, in a "deliberation" scenario, the goal of a student playing the moderator is to lead the discussion fairly and reach an agreement, so their utterances must be directive, summarizing, and facilitative. Meanwhile, a student playing a deliberation participant has the goal of conveying opinions, supporting, or refuting other proposals with convincing arguments. This clarity of purpose transforms the speaking activity from an abstract exercise into a concrete and measurably successful mission (Brown, 2007).

The presence of a clear and reactive audience in role-play—namely the other players in the scenario—adds another layer of authenticity. Students do not speak into an empty space or only to the teacher as the sole assessor, but to "peers" who, within the role context, provide immediate responses, whether rebuttals, questions, or agreement. This dynamic interaction creates feedback that is immediate and contextual. A student will immediately realize if their utterance is not understood, unconvincing, or considered impolite by their "interlocutor" in the role, and that forces them to immediately revise or clarify their speech. This process of spontaneous adaptation and negotiation of meaning is the heart of true communicative

competence. Thus, a clear purpose and an active audience transform the monologues common in conventional speaking tasks into a living dialogue, where language is used as a functional tool to interact, influence, and collaboratively build meaning in a simulated social situation.

They do not merely speak but communicate to achieve a purpose within a specific role. It is this context that triggers a natural language demand, encouraging students to choose vocabulary, structure sentences, and regulate speaking strategies appropriate to the situation.

Second, this method successfully reduces speaking anxiety. Speaking in front of the class in the "status" of oneself is often perceived as a threat that evokes fear of judgment. Role-playing provides a "mask" or role that creates a psychological distance for the student. When playing the role of a "group leader chairing a deliberation", the student feels that the performance of the role is being assessed, not their personal self. This is evidenced by the increased courage of usually shy students to participate actively in Cycle II.

Third, role-playing is student-cantered and simulative learning. In the process, students actively compose scripts, practice, and improvise. This activity trains speaking skills comprehensively, from planning and execution to evaluation with the group. This simulative experience, in line with Bandura's social learning theory, allows students to learn through observation (when watching other groups or the teacher's modelling) and direct practice.

The significant improvement from Cycle I to Cycle II underscores the importance of mature design and facilitation in implementing this method. This improvement was not an automatic or instant result from merely labelling an activity "role-play", but rather the fruit of critical reflection and systematic improvement of the learning design. In Cycle I, the implementation of the method was still experimental with a loose structure, where students were tasked with developing the scenario and embodying roles independently with minimal guidance. As a result, although participation increased, the quality of communication was still hampered by dependence on the script and shallow embodiment. This condition revealed that the effectiveness of role-playing does not lie solely in the role-playing activity itself, but in the scaffolding built by the teacher before, during, and after the activity takes place.

Therefore, the success of Cycle II greatly depended on more mature redesign. Steps such as selecting a more contextual and relevant theme for the students' world ("Solving a Problem in the School Canteen" compared to a more general theme), providing modelling or direct examples by the teacher, and supplying worksheets to guide character and conflict preparation, acted as crucial scaffolding. This scaffolding functions to reduce students' cognitive load, so their energy and attention can be redirected from merely memorizing plots and dialogues to more substantial aspects, namely embodying emotions, language improvisation, and managing interaction. Active facilitation from the teacher during the preparation process, such as circulating among groups to give input and encouragement, also became a determining factor in creating a supportive environment for student exploration and courage. Thus, the quality leap in Cycle II proves that successful role-playing is a carefully planned pedagogical construct. This method requires a teacher who does not only act as a spectator or supervisor, but as an architect of learning who designs the experience, a facilitator who guides the process, and a reflector who processes each experience into meaningful learning for the continuous improvement of student competence.

The success of Cycle II was inseparable from technical improvements such as selecting a theme closer to the students' world, providing examples (modelling), and structured preparation guides. This shows that role-playing is not merely "playing around" but a serious method that requires scaffolding or learning support from the teacher to maximize its potential.

Thus, the results of this research strengthen previous study findings regarding the effectiveness of role-playing. This alignment with existing literature underscores that the observed improvements are not an isolated phenomenon but rather a consistent outcome that can be replicated across diverse educational settings. The body of prior work establishes role-playing as more than just an anecdotal success; it positions the method as a pedagogically sound intervention with a growing empirical foundation. By corroborating these earlier conclusions, the present study adds further weight and validity to the argument for integrating simulation-based strategies into language curricula. It moves the discourse from

questioning *if* role-playing works to a more nuanced understanding of *how* and *under what conditions* it works most effectively (Burns, 2010).

The contribution of this study, therefore, lies in its detailed, action-oriented documentation of the implementation process. This focus moves beyond merely asserting the method's effectiveness to providing a tangible, replicable roadmap for other practitioners. While many studies highlight the positive outcomes of pedagogical innovations, they often leave a critical gap: the "how." Educators are left wondering about the specific steps, potential pitfalls, and necessary adaptations to make a theoretical concept work in their unique classroom contexts. This research directly addresses that gap by chronicling the iterative journey of application—from the initial design and early struggles with student reticence and script-dependence, through the reflective analysis that diagnosed these issues, to the targeted interventions like modelling and structured worksheets that catalysed improvement (Nunan, 2004).

By meticulously detailing this cycle of action, observation, and refinement, the study demystifies the transition from theory to practice. It transforms role-playing from a broad recommendation into a series of manageable, evidence-based instructional decisions. This documentation serves as both a guide and a form of professional validation for teachers; it shows that challenges like uneven participation are a normal part of the process and, more importantly, provides tested strategies to overcome them. Therefore, the primary value of this work is not just in its conclusion that role-playing works, but in its explicit, procedural account of *making it work*, thereby empowering other educators to implement the method with greater confidence, foresight, and likelihood of success (Bandura, 1977).

While previous research may have established a correlation between role-playing and improved outcomes, this classroom action research provides a granular, cyclical view of the cause-and-effect relationship. It maps the specific challenges encountered during initial implementation, such as script-dependency and uneven participation, and demonstrates how reflective practice and strategic scaffolding can directly mitigate these issues to amplify the method's impact. In doing so, it offers a practical blueprint for educators, transforming theoretical effectiveness into actionable steps for classroom practice. Consequently, these findings do not merely echo past research but build upon it by offering a validated model for execution, thereby strengthening the practical argument for adopting role-playing as a deliberate and well-supported pedagogical choice rather than an occasional classroom activity.

The improvement in speaking skills is not only seen in the average score figures but, more importantly, in the change in students' behaviour and attitudes towards speaking learning. They became more confident, creative, and skilled in managing conversations. Therefore, the role-playing method can be recommended as a powerful alternative learning strategy to overcome the problem of low speaking skills among students in the Indonesian language subject.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results and discussion that have been presented, it can be concluded that the application of the Role-Playing Method is proven effective in improving students' speaking skills in Indonesian language learning. This improvement is evident quantitatively through the increase in average scores and learning mastery percentages, and qualitatively through changes in students' attitudes and behaviour in the classroom.

Specifically, this classroom action research shows that role-playing successfully creates a contextual and meaningful learning environment, thereby encouraging students to communicate actively and spontaneously. This method significantly reduces students' anxiety when speaking in front of others, as they feel more protected by the role they play. Furthermore, the simulative and student-cantered nature of role-playing trains students not only in linguistic aspects but also in sociodramas competencies, such as using language appropriate to the situation, interlocutor, and communication purpose.

The optimal success of this method heavily depends on the teacher's thorough planning and facilitation, including the selection of relevant themes, the provision of examples (modelling), and structured preparation guidance. Thus, the Role-Playing Method is not only an enjoyable strategy but also a strategic and effective learning approach for developing students' oral communication competencies. Therefore, this method is worthy of being an alternative in the implementation of Indonesian language learning, particularly for achieving the goal of better mastery of speaking skills.

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