

The Use of Roleplay and Narrative Text to Teach Speaking Skill

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is a fundamental component of English language learning as it enables learners to communicate effectively in both academic and real-life contexts. Nevertheless, many EFL students continue to experience difficulties in developing speaking proficiency due to limited vocabulary, lack of self-confidence, grammatical inaccuracies, and speaking anxiety. Although role-play has been widely acknowledged as an effective instructional technique for improving speaking skills, research examining its integration with narrative texts remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study aims to describe the implementation of role-play through narrative texts in teaching speaking skills and to explore students' perceptions of its use in the classroom. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews involving eleventh-grade Hospitality students at SMKN 8 Surabaya. The findings indicate that narrative text-based role-play promoted students' confidence, active participation, speaking fluency, and comprehension of narrative texts. Although students encountered challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and speaking anxiety, continuous teacher guidance and feedback helped them address these difficulties. These findings suggest that integrating role-play with narrative texts is an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing EFL students' speaking skills while fostering greater engagement and confidence in classroom communication.

Keywords: *Roleplay, Speaking Skill, Narrative Text, EFL Student*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in English language learning as it enables learners to convey ideas, emotions and information in real-life interactions (Ding, 2021). For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is often considered the most difficult skill to master, particularly in environments where English is rarely used outside the classroom (Kehing & Yunus, 2021). Many students still struggle to convey ideas orally due to limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, grammatical errors, and low self-confidence (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Furthermore, anxiety and fear of making mistakes often make students reluctant to participate actively in speaking activities, causing them to remain passive during classroom interactions. Consequently, students may understand English theoretically but remain unable to communicate effectively in real-life situations (Alvarez et al., 2024). This situation indicates that speaking instruction requires learning activities that provide meaningful opportunities for students to practice communication naturally and with confidence (Astuti & Lammers, 2017).

The difficulties experienced by EFL learners are often linked to the way speaking skills are taught in the classroom (Namaziandost et al., 2019). In many cases, teaching still emphasizes rote learning, grammatical accuracy, and teacher-led explanations rather than communicative interaction, meaning that learners have limited opportunities to use English actively in real communicative situations (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2021). Consequently, learners have limited opportunities to use English actively with their peers (Khan et al., 2018).

Conversely, Communicative Language Teaching emphasizes that students must engage in meaningful interactions and use language for real communicative purposes (Littlewood & Yu, 2022). Therefore, speaking instruction should encourage students to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and participate actively in contextual communicative activities (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). To achieve these objectives, teachers need to apply student-centred teaching techniques that can create a supportive and interactive learning environment (Hadiyanto, 2024).

One learning technique that has been widely recognized as effective in improving speaking skills is role-play (Dwiyanti & Lolita, 2023). Role-play enables students to take on the role of a specific character or situation that resembles real-life communication contexts (Angelica & Wulandari, 2025). According to Rojas & Villafuerte (2018), role-play provides students with the opportunity to communicate naturally and meaningfully through interaction with peers in realistic situations. Through role-play activities, students are encouraged to improvise dialogue, express emotions, and collaborate whilst the communication task is underway (Wiraseno et al., 2026). Unlike conventional speaking exercises that rely heavily on memorization, role-play enables students to use language more spontaneously and creatively (Dwiyanti & Lolita, 2023). Previous research has also shown that role-play contributes to improvements in speaking fluency, self-confidence, interactional competence, and learning motivation, as students practice the language in a non-stressful classroom environment (Daulay et al., 2022).

In addition, role-play can be divided into scripted and unscripted role-play. In scripted role-play, students perform using prepared dialogues, whereas in unscripted role-play, they create spontaneous interactions based on a given situation. Unscripted role-play encourages learners to negotiate meaning, respond naturally, and develop greater fluency and communicative competence because it reflects authentic communication more closely (Livingstone, 1983). The effectiveness of role-play is closely linked to the learning materials used during classroom activities (Tomlinson, 2023). One type of material that strongly supports communicative speaking activities is narrative text (Pratiwi et al., 2022). Narrative texts provide meaningful contexts for speaking activities because they contain characters, settings, conflicts, and sequences of events that can be adapted into storytelling, role-play, and other interactive oral communication tasks (Ellis & Brewster, 2020). Through narrative-based activities, students are not only required to understand the story but are also encouraged to retell stories, recreate conversations, dramatise events, and explore the characters' emotions through oral performance (Fauziyah, 2022). In this context, narrative texts serve as a meaningful source of communication, not merely reading material (Ellis & Brewster, 2020). Furthermore, narrative texts introduce students to linguistic elements such as the past tense, action verbs, sequencing expressions, and dialogue structures that are essential for oral storytelling activities (Pratiwi et al., 2022). Narrative stories also contain moral values and social issues that can encourage discussion and interpretation, enabling students to express their opinions and interact more actively during speaking activities (Nurgiyantoro, 2021). Therefore, integrating role-play with narrative texts can create a more contextual, meaningful and engaging speaking learning experience for EFL learners (Tomlinson, 2023).

In addition to providing students with the opportunity to interact spontaneously, the use of narrative texts in role-play activities also holds significant pedagogical value in speaking instruction. Narrative texts are considered suitable for speaking activities as they encourage students to retell events, express emotions, act out dialogues, and gain a deeper understanding of the characters in the story. Such activities help students develop their oral communication skills through meaningful and interactive learning experiences. In EFL classrooms, narrative-based storytelling creates an engaging learning environment by actively involving students in story situations that stimulate their imagination, encourage interaction, and enhance oral performance (Silviyanti et al., 2022). Furthermore, speaking learning based on role-play and narrative texts can provide a more communicative learning experience for EFL students who have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Through these activities, students not only develop an understanding of language forms but also practise using English for meaningful communication. Narrative text-based role-play provides

opportunities for learners to participate actively in authentic communicative situations, thereby fostering speaking confidence and enhancing their communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Several studies have reported the positive impact of role-play on the development of students' speaking skills (Katemba & Grace, 2023). Rojas & Villafuerte (2018) explain that role-play enhances communication skills as students practise English collaboratively in situations that resemble real-life communication. The study also emphasises that role-play creates a suitable learning environment so that students can practise speaking more confidently and naturally (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018). Similarly, previous research has found that role-play has a positive impact on students' self-confidence, participation, and speaking performance (Daulay et al., 2022). However, previous studies have primarily investigated the effectiveness of role-play in improving students' speaking ability without specifically integrating narrative texts as the basis for speaking activities (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018). Meanwhile, narrative texts have more frequently been used to develop students' reading comprehension and understanding of story elements than to promote oral communication skills (Nurgiyantoro, 2021). Consequently, there remains a research gap regarding how role-play, particularly unscripted role-play, is implemented through narrative texts in speaking classes whilst also exploring students' perceptions of this learning process (Katemba & Grace, 2023).

In assessing learning outcomes, understanding students' perceptions of classroom activities is also crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Positive perceptions of learning activities can enhance students' motivation, self-confidence and participation in the classroom (Amerstorfer & Münster-Kistner, 2021). Furthermore, observing how teachers organise and facilitate role-play activities can provide a deeper understanding of the implementation of communicative speaking instruction Richards & Rodgers (2014). Students' experiences can also reveal the benefits and challenges they face during speaking activities, particularly when they are asked to communicate spontaneously (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022). Therefore, combining classroom observation with students' perceptions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the use of role-play in narrative-based speaking instruction (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to describe the application of role-play in teaching speaking skills through narrative texts in an EFL classroom context. This study focuses on how role-play activities are conducted during speaking lessons and how students perceive the use of this technique in the classroom. Furthermore, this study also examines the motivation, self-confidence, comfort, and challenges experienced by students during role-play activities. By exploring the learning process and students' responses simultaneously, this study is expected to make a practical contribution to communicative language learning, particularly in developing more engaging, contextual, and student-centred speaking instruction for EFL learners.

METHOD

This research design uses the descriptive qualitative approach. According to Creswell & Creswell (2023), qualitative methods are approaches that aim to explore social phenomena by collecting data directly from participants through interviews, observations, and documentation. This research is classified as descriptive qualitative research because it aims to deeply understand the process of applying role-play in speaking lessons as well as the experiences and responses of students during the learning process.

Respondents

The research subject are students in the 11th grade of the hospitality department at SMKN 8 Surabaya in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, along with their English teachers. The selection of these subjects is based on the consideration that 11th grade students are in the early stages of developing their speaking skills, so they need

communicative learning strategies, one of which is through narrative text-based roleplay techniques.

Instruments

The research tools used in this study were classroom teacher observation and semi structured interviews. The interviews questions consisted of five questions designed to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding the uses of roleplay in improving their speaking skills. According to Kallio et al. (2016), semi structured interviews are very effective in qualitative research because they can produce rich, in depth, and contextual data in accordance with the participants' experiences.

Procedures

Data was collected through observation and semi structured interviews conducted in the form of observation during learning activities and direct interviews with students to get in depth views and perceptions of their feelings while participating in learning using in this study were observation of teachers teaching in class and semi structured interviews

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data obtained from observations and interviews. The reduced data was then presented in the form of narrative descriptions, observation tables, and excerpts from student interviews. The final stage was drawing conclusions by interpreting the research findings in depth to obtain a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of using roleplay and narrative texts in improving students' speaking skills.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of observations conducted in the field show that many students enjoy role-play and narrative text learning, but quite a few of them also experience difficulty speaking English when using role-play and narrative text techniques.

Role-play improve Students' Speaking Confidence

Based on the interview data, many students initially experienced nervousness, anxiety, and fear when they were asked to speak English through roleplay activities. Student S stated, "I felt a little nervous, especially in front of everyone, like public speaking in class." Likewise, Student N admitted, "I was definitely nervous because we were talking to someone else and I was afraid of saying the wrong thing." These responses suggest that speaking anxiety was largely associated with concerns about making mistakes and receiving negative evaluations from classmates. A similar view was expressed by Student A, who said, "I felt nervous, afraid of making mistakes and afraid of being laughed at when speaking." Meanwhile, Student P indicated that a lack of prior speaking experience contributed to these feelings, stating, "I was definitely nervous, especially since I was learning and couldn't do it yet."

Interview responses further revealed that students' anxiety was strongly connected to their limited English ability. Student A remarked, "We are not very proficient in English, and we get nervous and anxious." In the same way, Student N commented, "At first, I was nervous because I don't speak English very well." Such comments illustrate how linguistic constraints influenced students' willingness to communicate in English.

Over time, participation in roleplay activities appeared to foster greater self-confidence. Student S mentioned, "Role-playing makes us feel like we are someone else, and that boosts confidence." Taking on a character seemed to lessen students' concerns about personal judgment. Student A also noted, "Role-playing helps me learn to be more confident and control my nervousness." In addition, Student P observed positive progress among classmates, saying, "Those who couldn't do it at first can now do it." These accounts

demonstrate that continuous engagement in roleplay encouraged confidence development and greater readiness to speak.

Another noteworthy aspect was the contribution of roleplay to public speaking practice. Student N explained, "It trains our public speaking skills in front of many people," whereas Student V remarked, "When I have a role in a play, I have to be confident and brave." This evidence suggests that roleplay not only strengthened confidence but also enhanced students' ability to perform orally before an audience.

Role-play Enhanced Students' Understanding of Narrative Texts

The interview data indicate that roleplay supported students' comprehension of narrative texts. Student S explained, "Yes, it makes it easier for me to understand the storyline and play the role." Likewise, Student A stated, "With roleplay, we can learn and understand better." Student N further highlighted the benefits of active involvement by saying, "When explaining, sometimes I don't get it, but when we do roleplay, I understand." These comments imply that direct participation helped students grasp the content of the story more effectively than traditional explanation-based instruction.

A further theme emerging from the interviews was students' understanding of characters and emotions. Student N reported, "We can understand the dialogue roles, so we can better understand what the actors are feeling." In a similar vein, Student A shared, "I had to take my role seriously and really immerse myself." Such experiences allowed learners to connect emotionally with the narrative and gain a deeper appreciation of the characters' motivations and feelings.

Participants also emphasized the importance of understanding the context of the story before performing. Student P stated, "By studying the roleplay more deeply, I had to understand it more deeply." Meanwhile, Student N pointed out that "Not fully understanding the surrounding situation can be difficult." These remarks indicate that successful performance required students to examine the setting, events, and circumstances presented in the narrative.

Several participants contrasted roleplay with conventional teaching approaches. Student N commented, "Roleplay is easier than just explaining." This perception suggests that students viewed dramatization as a more engaging and accessible way to learn narrative texts. Furthermore, acting out scenes enabled learners to visualize events more clearly. As Student S expressed, "It makes it easier for me to play the role." Consequently, narrative texts became more concrete and meaningful through experiential learning.

The findings support Pratiwi et al. (2022), who state that narrative texts provide meaningful contexts for communicative speaking activities. They also agree with Ellis & Brewster (2020), who explain that storytelling encourages learners to participate actively through interaction, imagination, and oral communication. Furthermore, Tomlinson (2023) emphasizes that effective learning materials should engage learners actively and provide authentic opportunities for language use. Therefore, integrating narrative texts into role-play activities creates meaningful learning experiences that simultaneously improve speaking skills and story comprehension.

Students' Difficulties During Role-Play Activities

Although students expressed positive perceptions toward role-play, several challenges emerged during the learning process. The interviews revealed that limited vocabulary, grammatical weaknesses, difficulty memorizing dialogues, and speaking anxiety remained major obstacles. Student S admitted that memorizing dialogues was difficult, while Student P experienced problems translating ideas into English. Student A explained that limited English proficiency reduced confidence during speaking activities, whereas Student V believed that grammatical errors remained a major challenge. Student N additionally pointed out that narrative texts often contain more formal language than students usually use in daily communication, making comprehension more difficult.

Emotional factors also continued to influence students' speaking performance. Student S stated that feelings of nervousness remained throughout the activities, while Student A and Student N admitted that fear of making mistakes frequently prevented them from speaking confidently. These findings indicate that although role-play creates communicative learning opportunities, students still require adequate linguistic support before participating in speaking activities. Vocabulary development, grammar instruction, pronunciation practice, and repeated speaking opportunities remain essential components of successful speaking instruction.

This finding is consistent with Leong & Ahmadi (2017), who explain that limited vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, pronunciation, and speaking anxiety are common factors affecting EFL learners' oral performance. The findings also reinforce the view that communicative activities should be accompanied by systematic language support to maximize students' speaking development.

The Teacher's Role in Facilitating Role-Play Activities

The observation and interview data further demonstrated that teacher support played a significant role in the successful implementation of role-play. Students consistently reported that teacher demonstrations, explanations, examples, encouragement, and feedback helped them understand learning tasks more clearly and participate more confidently.

Student S stated that the teacher demonstrated how role-play should be performed, while Student N explained that detailed explanations helped students understand the activity. Student P believed that clear examples made the tasks easier to complete, and Student V appreciated the teacher's continuous guidance throughout the learning process. Classroom observations also confirmed that the teacher acted as a facilitator rather than the sole source of knowledge. The teacher provided examples of dialogues, guided students in preparing role-play performances, monitored classroom interaction, and delivered corrective feedback regarding pronunciation, fluency, and intonation. Such guidance encouraged students to become more active and gradually reduced their speaking anxiety.

These findings suggest that teacher facilitation is essential for creating a supportive communicative classroom where students feel comfortable using English. Effective teacher guidance enables learners to overcome linguistic and psychological barriers while encouraging active participation during speaking activities. This finding supports Hadiyanto (2024), who emphasizes that student-centered learning requires teachers to function as facilitators who create interactive learning environments. It is also consistent with Richards & Rodgers (2014), who argue that Communicative Language Teaching positions teachers as facilitators who encourage meaningful interaction and maximize students' opportunities to use language for authentic communication.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that integrating role-play with narrative texts provides meaningful opportunities for EFL learners to develop speaking skills, improve confidence, understand narrative texts more deeply, and participate actively in communicative classroom interaction. Although students continue to experience linguistic and psychological challenges, appropriate teacher guidance and meaningful communicative activities can effectively support the development of their oral communication skills. Therefore, role-play through narrative texts can be recommended as an effective student-centred strategy for teaching speaking in EFL classrooms.

The Use of Roleplay and Narrative Text to Teach Speaking Skill
Classroom Setting and Learning Context



Figure 1 Classroom Atmosphere When Teachers Give Roleplay Scenario Instructions



Figure 2 Application of Narrative Techniques in Oral presentations in Front of the class

The observation was conducted at SMKN 8 Surabaya, in the 11th grade hospitality class, which consisted of twenty-seven students. This class was chosen because the students' speaking skills were still moderate and needed improvement in terms of confidence, pronunciation, and fluency in English. The lesson was conducted in English class with a focus on speaking skills. The material taught during the observation was narrative text. The teacher explained the structure of narrative text, which includes orientation, complication, and resolution. After giving a brief explanation of the structure, the teacher then applied the role-play method. Students were asked to come forward one by one to act out the narrative story they had learned.

During the learning process, the teacher used communicative and interactive methods. The teacher began the lesson with an introduction and provided simple dialogue examples based on the selected story. Next, the teacher guided the students in composing dialogues based on the storyline. The teacher also provided motivation and support to students who appeared to lack confidence when speaking in front of the class. During the roleplay activity, the teacher acted as a facilitator and observer who provided feedback on the students' pronunciation, fluency, and intonation. Based on the results of the observation, most students showed high enthusiasm when participating in role-play activities. Although initially some students appeared shy and lacked confidence, they gradually became more effective and courageous in speaking.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the use of role-play through narrative texts contributes positively to the development of students' speaking skills in the EFL classroom. Role-play activities provide students with opportunities to use English in a more communicative, contextual, and meaningful way through the enactment of characters and situations presented in the stories. Through active participation in these activities, students not only improve their understanding of the story content but also develop their ability to express ideas, emotions, and dialogues orally. The findings revealed that most students initially experienced nervousness, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes when speaking English. However, continuous participation in role-play activities gradually increased their confidence and willingness to speak in front of the class. In addition, the use of narrative texts helped students gain a deeper understanding of storylines, characters, emotions, and the context of the stories because they were directly involved in the role-playing process. Despite these benefits, the study also identified several challenges faced by students, including limited vocabulary, difficulties in memorizing dialogues, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and speaking anxiety. Therefore, the role of the teacher as a facilitator is crucial in

providing guidance, demonstrations, motivation, and feedback to help students overcome these difficulties during role-play activities. Overall, the integration of role-play and narrative texts can be considered an effective teaching strategy for improving EFL students' speaking skills. It creates a more interactive, enjoyable, communicative, and student-centered learning environment. Therefore, this technique is recommended for speaking instruction to support the development of students' oral communication skills more effectively.

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