

Exploring EFL The Implementation and Students' Perceptions of Role-Play in English Speaking Activities

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills for EFL students because they often experience speaking anxiety and have limited opportunities to communicate meaningfully in English. Role-play was selected as the focus of this study because it provides authentic communicative situations that allow students to practise speaking in realistic contexts while encouraging interaction and reducing speaking anxiety. This study aimed to describe the implementation of role-play in English speaking activities and explore students' perceptions of its use in a Grade VIII classroom at a junior high school in Bogor, Indonesia. A qualitative case study design was employed involving one English teacher and six purposively selected Grade VIII students. Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings showed that role-play was implemented through several stages, including context building, instruction, vocabulary and expression introduction, modelling, guided practice, role assignment, performance, interaction, and feedback. Students generally expressed positive perceptions of the activity. Their cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses indicated that role-play was useful, enjoyable, confidence-building, and supportive of active participation in English speaking practice.

Keywords: *EFL Students, Role-Play, Speaking Skills, Students' Perceptions*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the essential skills in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and experiences through oral interaction. However, speaking remains challenging for many EFL learners, particularly in classroom contexts where students may feel anxious about speaking English. Indonesian junior high school students, for example, frequently experience speaking anxiety during classroom speaking activities (Hidayati et al., 2022). Similarly, Afidawati et al. (2024) found that speaking anxiety continues to hinder students' participation in English classrooms. These conditions indicate the need for speaking activities that can create a supportive classroom environment and provide meaningful opportunities for students to communicate in English.

One activity that can support communicative speaking practice is role-play. According to Richards, (2006), Communicative Language Teaching promotes activities that encourage interaction and communication, including role-play. Through role-play, students are encouraged to use English in situations that resemble real-life communication. Rather than simply memorizing vocabulary or practicing isolated sentences, students can interact with their classmates while expressing ideas and responding to different situations. Therefore, role-play can provide a meaningful context in which students can practice speaking more actively.

Thornbury, (2005) also states that speaking difficulties are often related to limited opportunities for interactive speaking practice. Students need sufficient opportunities to produce language, interact with others, and develop their confidence in using English orally. In this regard, role-play allows students to practice speaking through simulated situations and interpersonal interactions. Such activities may also reduce students' dependence on teacher-

centered instruction because learners are given opportunities to participate directly in the speaking process. Consequently, role-play can be considered an appropriate activity for developing students' speaking practice in EFL classrooms.

Previous studies have consistently reported positive effects of role-play on students' speaking performance, confidence, and classroom participation (Fauziah et al., 2025; Nasihah & Moetia, 2024; Salainti & Fansury, 2025). These findings suggest that role-play can encourage students to become more actively involved in speaking activities and provide opportunities to practice English in communicative situations. The activity may also help students become more confident because they perform a particular role rather than speaking entirely as themselves. Thus, role-play has considerable potential as a classroom activity for supporting students' speaking development.

However, most previous studies have focused primarily on learning outcomes or students' general attitudes toward role-play, particularly through quantitative approaches. Limited studies have qualitatively examined how role-play is implemented throughout the teaching and learning process and how students experience the activity during classroom practice. Understanding the implementation process is important because the effectiveness of role-play may depend on how teachers introduce the context, provide models, organize practice, and guide students during their performance. Therefore, examining the implementation of role-play can provide a more detailed understanding of how the activity functions in an actual classroom.

The implementation of role-play refers to how the activity is conducted during the teaching and learning process. Triastuti et al., (2021) explain that speaking instruction should provide preparation before students perform speaking tasks independently. These stages include context building, modelling, guided practice, and independent speaking performance. Applying these stages to role-play can help students understand the situation, language expressions, and roles they are expected to perform before engaging in independent speaking. Therefore, investigating the implementation of role-play is important for understanding how speaking activities are organized and conducted in the classroom.

In addition to implementation, students' perceptions of role-play are also important to investigate. Students' perceptions refer to learners' views, beliefs, feelings, and responses toward the use of role-play in English speaking activities. According to Dörnyei & Ryan, (2015), learners differ in cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics. Therefore, this study explores students' perceptions through three dimensions: cognitive beliefs, affective responses, and behavioral responses. Cognitive beliefs relate to students' judgments regarding the usefulness, relevance, effectiveness, and difficulty of role-play for speaking practice, while affective responses refer to emotional experiences such as enjoyment, confidence, nervousness, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes.

Meanwhile, behavioral responses concern students' participation, cooperation, preparation, interaction, and willingness to communicate in English during role-play activities. Examining these three dimensions simultaneously can provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiences with role-play rather than focusing only on their learning outcomes or general attitudes. Furthermore, studies investigating the implementation of role-play and students' multidimensional perceptions in Indonesian junior high school EFL classrooms remain limited. Therefore, this study addresses the research gap by qualitatively exploring how role-play is implemented in speaking activities and how students perceive the activity from cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspectives in an authentic classroom context.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the implementation of role-play in English speaking activities and students' perceptions of its use in an EFL classroom (Creswell, 2012). The study was conducted in a Grade VIII classroom at a junior high school in Bogor, Indonesia, involving one English teacher and six students selected

purposely. The participants were selected based on the teacher's recommendation to represent diverse levels of classroom participation and speaking ability. Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The observation protocol was developed by the researcher based on the Teaching-Learning Cycle proposed by (Feez, 1998) and further elaborated by (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). The checklist consisted of indicators covering context building, instruction, modelling, guided practice, role assignment, role-play performance, interaction, and teacher feedback. Meanwhile, the semi-structured interview guide was constructed based on Dörnyei & Ryan (2015) framework of cognitive beliefs, affective responses, and behavioral responses to explore students' perceptions of role-play.

Observation was conducted using a role-play implementation checklist covering context building, instruction, vocabulary and expressions, modelling, guided practice, role assignment, interaction, feedback, and overall implementation. Interviews explored students' perceptions based on cognitive beliefs, affective responses, and behavioral responses adapted from (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015), while documentation was used to support the findings. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure credibility, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Role-Play in English Speaking Activities

The implementation of role-play was examined through classroom observation using a role-play implementation checklist. The observation focused on several aspects of role-play implementation, including context building, activity instruction, vocabulary and expressions, modelling, guided practice, role assignment, interaction, feedback, and overall implementation. The observation results showed that all indicators were successfully implemented during the speaking activity. The observer marked "Yes" for all indicators, indicating that the role-play activity was conducted according to the planned teaching stages.

Table 1. Observation Results of Role-Play Implementation

Indicators	Result
Context Building	Yes
Activity Instruction	Yes
Vocabulary and Expressions	Yes
Modelling	Yes
Guided Practice	Yes
Role Assignment	Yes
Role-Play Performance	Yes
Interaction and Communication Practice	Yes
Feedback	Yes
Role-Play Performance	Yes

Observation notes provided evidence for each stage of implementation. During context building, the teacher introduced a school-related situation and explained the communicative purpose of the activity.

Preparation Stage

The preparation stage focused on building students' understanding before they performed the role-play. Based on the classroom observation, the teacher successfully introduced the learning context by presenting a school-related situation and explaining the communicative purpose of the activity. Students were then provided with relevant vocabulary and useful expressions related to asking and giving directions. To support students' speaking performance, the teacher presented a model dialogue and guided students through controlled

practice before they performed independently. The observation checklist indicated that all preparation-stage indicators, including context building, activity instruction, vocabulary and expressions, modelling, and guided practice, were successfully implemented. These preparatory activities helped students understand the task requirements and reduced uncertainty before participating in the speaking activity.

Performance Stage

During the performance stage, students were assigned roles and performed the role-play activity in pairs. Each pair practised asking for and giving directions based on situations related to their school environment. The observation showed that students actively interacted with their partners and used the target expressions during the speaking activity. The observer also noted that students were enthusiastic and actively participated throughout the lesson. All performance indicators, including role assignment, role-play performance, and interaction during communication practice, were successfully implemented, indicating that the activity followed the planned instructional procedures.

Feedback Stage

Following the role-play performance, the teacher provided feedback on students' pronunciation, language use, and overall speaking performance. Feedback was delivered after each performance to reinforce correct language use and help students improve their speaking ability. The observation checklist confirmed that the feedback stage was fully implemented as planned. Overall, the classroom observation demonstrated that role-play was conducted systematically through preparation, performance, and feedback stages, with all implementation indicators marked as successfully completed by the observer.

Students' Perceptions of Role-Play

Interview data indicated that students generally held positive perceptions toward the implementation of role-play in English speaking activities. Their responses were categorized into three dimensions based on Dörnyei and Ryan's (2015) framework: cognitive beliefs, affective responses, and behavioral responses.

Cognitive Beliefs

Students perceived role-play as an effective activity for improving their English speaking ability. Most participants believed that the activity allowed them to practise speaking directly with their classmates while learning new vocabulary and expressions in meaningful contexts. One student stated, "Role-play helps me practise speaking directly with my friend and learn new vocabulary." Another participant explained, "I can practise speaking in front of the class and become more confident when using English." Students also considered the activity relatively easy because the teacher provided clear explanations, model dialogues, and guided practice before the performance. In addition, they perceived the role-play situations as relevant to their daily school experiences, making the activity easier to understand and more meaningful for speaking practice.

Affective Responses

Students demonstrated both positive and negative emotional responses during the role-play activity. Several participants admitted that they initially felt nervous, shy, and afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of the class. However, these feelings gradually changed after they began interacting with their partners. One participant commented, "I enjoyed the activity because it was fun and helped me feel more confident." Overall, students described role-play as a more enjoyable and engaging learning activity than conventional classroom instruction because it involved interaction, collaboration, and opportunities to communicate actively in English.

Interview findings also revealed positive behavioral responses throughout the role-play activity. Students actively prepared their dialogues, cooperated with their partners, and participated in classroom interaction. One participant explained, "My partner and I practised together and helped each other remember the dialogue." Another student stated, "After the activity, I wanted to speak English more often in class." These findings indicate that role-play encouraged students to participate actively, communicate with their peers, and develop greater willingness to use English during classroom activities.

Discussion

The findings indicate that role-play was implemented systematically through preparation and performance stages, including context building, activity instruction, vocabulary and expressions, modelling, guided practice, role assignment, interaction, and feedback. This finding supports [Triastuti et al., \(2021\)](#), who emphasize the importance of providing preparation and language support before students engage in spoken interaction. The observation showed that all implementation indicators were carried out during the lesson, indicating that the planned stages of role-play were implemented in the observed classroom. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on speaking achievement or general learner motivation, the present study highlights the importance of the preparation stage in shaping students' learning experiences. Students' positive responses were not only related to the performance stage but also to the teacher's support through context building, vocabulary introduction, modelling, and guided practice. Based on the observation and interview data, students reported feeling more prepared to participate after receiving context building, modelling, and guided practice. The findings also showed that role-play provided opportunities for meaningful communication and interaction. Students performed assigned roles, interacted with partners, and responded in simulated communicative situations. This finding is consistent with [\(Thornbury, 2005\)](#), who argues that speaking development requires opportunities for interactive speaking practice, and [\(Brown, 2001\)](#) who highlights meaningful communication as a key element of language learning.

Students' perceptions refer to learners' interpretations and responses toward their learning experiences [Matara, \(2013\)](#). In this study, perceptions were explored through cognitive beliefs, affective responses, and behavioral responses [\(Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015\)](#). The findings revealed generally positive perceptions of role-play. Cognitively, students considered role-play useful and relevant for speaking practice because it enabled them to use English directly and engage in realistic communication, supporting the findings of [\(Nasihah & Moetia, 2024; Salainti & Fansury, 2025\)](#). The findings also suggest that positive perceptions were closely connected to students' opportunities to interact in meaningful situations. Rather than viewing role-play merely as a speaking exercise, students perceived it as a practical activity that allowed them to use English for communication. This indicates that the communicative nature of role-play may contribute to students' engagement and willingness to participate in speaking activities. Affectively, students experienced both positive and negative emotions; although some felt nervous and afraid of making mistakes, most reported enjoyment, interest, and increased confidence, which is consistent with [\(Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015\)](#) view that language learning often involves both anxiety and enjoyment. Behaviorally, students demonstrated active participation through cooperation, preparation, and willingness to communicate, supporting [\(Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015\)](#) concept of active learning behavior and [\(Thornbury, 2005\)](#) argument that speaking proficiency develops through meaningful interaction.

Unlike previous studies that mainly emphasized improvements in speaking achievement, the present study demonstrates that students' positive perceptions were closely associated with the structured implementation of role-play. The preparation stage, particularly context building, modelling, vocabulary support, and guided practice, appeared to reduce students' uncertainty before speaking and encouraged greater confidence during role-play performance. These findings illustrate how instructional scaffolding was incorporated into the implementation of role-play and was reflected in students' reported

learning experiences. Overall, the findings suggest that role-play serves as an interactive learning experience that supports students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement in English speaking practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that role-play was implemented systematically through the stages of preparation, performance, and feedback in English speaking activities. The implementation allowed students to participate in communicative speaking activities throughout the observed lessons. Students perceived role-play as useful for practising speaking, engaging in classroom interaction, and increasing their confidence to communicate in English, although some initially experienced nervousness and fear of making mistakes. These findings provide insights into how role-play was implemented in one Indonesian junior high school classroom and how students perceived their learning experiences during the activity. The findings indicate that preparation, including context building, modelling, guided practice, and teacher feedback, formed important parts of the role-play implementation observed in this classroom. Future research may explore the implementation of role-play in different educational settings or examine students' perceptions over a longer period to gain a broader understanding of role-play in English language learning.

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