

Improving high school students' speaking skill through role play strategy: A classroom action research

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ABSTRACT

This study utilized Classroom Action Research and was carried out during a teaching internship in a Junior High School in Batam, Indonesia involving 20 eighth-grade students. The objective of the study is to investigate the impact of implementing the Role Play Strategy on students' attitude, interest, and effort in practicing English speaking skills. The research was structured into distinct stages, including planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research instruments used were observation, pre-test, and post-test. The students were initially observed during their English lessons, after which the pre-test and post-test were administered to evaluate the improvement in their speaking skills. A rubric was devised to assess the students' speaking skills across various aspects. The post-test results revealed a significant improvement in the students' scores compared to the pre-test, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Role Play Strategy in enhancing their speaking abilities. The students' average score for the pre-test was 67.85 points, while their average score for the post-test was 73 points after the implementation of Role Play. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of Role Play Strategy in classroom instruction is an effective approach for promoting students' speaking skills. The result suggests that the teachers should use creative and modified teaching materials to improve students' curiosity in learning English.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research; Role Play; Speaking Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching speaking in a classroom always fosters communication among learners and between learners and lecturers, enabling personal relationships to develop. In many settings, speaking involves creating and exchanging meaning with words and non-words. Additionally, teaching speaking can help improve a learner's confidence and fluency in expressing their ideas and opinions. It can also enhance their ability to listen actively and respond appropriately to others. Through speaking activities, learners can practice different communication strategies, such as giving and receiving feedback, negotiating meaning, and expressing empathy. Moreover, teaching speaking can help learners develop critical thinking skills (Dewi, 2021; Ordem, 2017; Ramezani et al., 2016; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014) as they learn to analyze and evaluate information, articulate their thoughts clearly, and support their arguments with evidence. Finally, teaching speaking can be an enjoyable and engaging way to learn a language, as learners can explore different topics, express their creativity, and connect with others from different cultures and backgrounds.

As the first expression of language, speaking should be taught with the appropriate technique as the first manifestation of language. Educating speaking with the objective

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of increasing communication efficiency is an important objective. The achievement of the target requires cooperation between the teacher and the students, in which the teacher not only instructs the students on how to speak but also motivates them and makes them aware of the importance of the subject. Using appropriate teaching techniques for speaking determines the course's success, which should always be conditioned by the student's ability, fostering a sense of guidance and joy in the students and leading to greater confidence in expressing their opinions and ideas. Speaking issues like inhibitions, fear of making mistakes, keeping quiet, and other speaking problems can be avoided. A substantial portion of the overall competence of the teacher is considered when a teacher facilitates their students' communication competency when they speak English as a second language or as a foreign language (Listyani & Kristie, 2018; Razi et al., 2021; Wulandari, 2020). The Larsen-Freeman theory posits that language acquisition is a dynamic and cyclical process, and that the ultimate goal of language teaching should be to facilitate this process in the classroom by creating a communicative environment where students are motivated to use the language for meaningful communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2002).

Based on preliminary research conducted with eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Batam, it was found that most students rarely communicate in English, as speaking English is not emphasized as a necessary classroom activity. This lack of emphasis impacts their motivation to practice English speaking skills. To address this insufficiency, the teacher sought effective techniques to motivate the students to speak up more often. By choosing an effective communication method, students are placed in a more communicative environment, allowing them to interact with one another and build confidence when speaking. The Role Play Strategy is one such approach that can be effective in enhancing student motivation for speaking.

Role play can be an effective way to improve communication skills and build confidence in language learning (Tompkin, 2018; Banach et al., 2018; Brogt et al., 2017; Geneuss et al., 2020). To this extent, role-playing is a type of social interaction where individuals adopt different behaviors to fit a specific role. This type of learning exercise is often used to enhance speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. During role-play, students are tasked with memorizing and delivering lines, as they work to bring a particular scenario to life through their acting. The goal is to provide students with a fun and engaging environment to practice speaking in English, while also exploring new situations and building their confidence in using the language.

Several previous studies were conducted by other researchers. Nuranda (2018) conducted action research studies that demonstrated the effectiveness of role play in promoting students' speaking skills and reducing their anxiety and lack of confidence in speaking. Additionally, both studies found that role play helps students to apply theoretical perspectives to real-life situations and encourages them to express their opinions creatively and critically. To this extent, Gusmuliana et al., (2021) conducted a study to investigate the impact of role play on students' motivation to speak English. They found that role play was an effective technique for promoting students' speaking motivation and encouraging them to express their ideas spontaneously and naturally .

However, the previous studies only focused on students' anxiety, motivation and confidence in speaking skills. Hence, researchers carried out the research focused on attitude, interest and effort in practicing English speaking skills. Researchers further conducted classroom action research which had limited and focused scope. This limited scope can make the researchers more focus to improve students' skills and repeat the cycle if the improvement was still low. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how the implementation of the Role Play Strategy impacts student attitude, interest, and effort in practicing English speaking skills.

METHOD

A Classroom Action Research (CAR) course is included in this study. As Bogdan (1992) explains, action research consists of systematically gathering information in order to affect social change. The material cycle is used in this study, which claims that the CAR has four stages (Altrichter et.al, 2002). Planning, Action, Observation, and Reflection were the four steps. A reason of using this methodology is because Classroom Action Research (CAR) is the most appropriate method for dealing with problems that arise in the classroom during the research process.

In this classroom action research study, the research sample consisted of intermediate-level English language students who are currently enrolled in the researcher's English language classroom. The sample size was determined based on the number of participants in the classroom, as the researchers aim to involve all students in the study. A private junior high school in Batam was the site of this study. The researchers chose this school because it had been in its current location for several months now and already observed that lack of motivation to speak is the problem of the class. This research was conducted on class VIIIA.2 students with a total of 20 students. The researchers chose class VIII to be used as research because currently class VIII requires increased motivation to speak English in the classroom environment.

Before applying the cycle directly to the classroom, the researchers conducted classroom observations in order to identify students' problems in learning English. Student skill assessment in speaking includes pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and tasks. Before implementing the Role play strategy, researchers asked students to do a pretest, so that the researchers can get the average score for the class. Upon receiving the pre-test results, the researchers conducted the post-test immediately, using the role play learning. By forming groups of three to four people, each representative chose the topic of the story to be told, each group member determined the story interaction and presented it in front of class. Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency will be studied by the researchers. Afterwards, Researchers then take the average value from the assessment table.

CAR took place in two cycles and the cycle was conducted in one meeting. To begin with, the teacher arranged the research tools and instruments in the planning step. Second is action step, which includes discovery learning. The third step is the implementation of observations when the implementation is carried out. In observation, more attention will be paid to the application of discovery learning and skills in writing experiment reports. The fourth stage is reflection, researchers collaborated with teacher to discuss or evaluate implementation in cycle 1. The reflection result served as a foundation for improving the next cycle.

Researchers collected data through observation, performance, and documentation. The first is observation contains the implementation of discovery learning. Second is student performance, which was reported in the assessment and third the documentation in question includes photos, student scores, and lesson plans.

In analyzing the data, pre-test and post-test were collected and scored. Researchers compared between the pre and post-test and analyze the students' improvement by implementing role play strategy. Researchers further observed the students' speaking skill. In observing the students, researchers carried out field notes and transcribe to support the data of the research. Additionally, the researchers shared the results with the colleagues and seek feedback on the changes that were implemented in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers observed students speaking during daily activities or in natural responses in the classroom. In the case of researchers asked the students some questions

or if they gave a presentation in class, or if they answered the teacher's question or gave feedback to friends who presented in class. Furthermore, the results of the observations obtained are, students were low in speaking skill.

In the pretest, the researchers asked students to look at the dialogue from the textbook, then the researchers divided each student into pairs according to the attendance list. Each pair was asked to choose one of the dialogues. After choosing the dialogues, the students were asked to memorize the dialogues in five minutes. After that, each pair was required to perform the dialogue in front of the class. The researchers gave an assessment according to the score rubric, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, task.

After conducting students in Pre-test, researchers proceed in to Post-test Cycle 1. Firstly, researchers form groups of 3-4 students, then give examples of comparisons with role plays, and each group is given several choices of topics according to their interests. Each group discusses the storyline according to the topic given, regarding the degree of comparison. Then, after choosing a story according to the topic, each group presented their story in front of the class. After that the researchers give the score according to the rubric. The following is [table 1](#) shows the results on the pre-test, pre-test and post-test cycle 1.

Table 1. The Average Score of Pre-Test

Criteria	Pre-test	Category
Pronunciation	67.75	Quite Good
Vocabulary	66.75	Quite Good
Grammar	67.76	Quite Good
Fluency	67.50	Quite Good
Task	69.50	Quite Good
Average	67.85	Quite Good

Table 2. The Average Improvement Score between Pre-Test and Post-Test (Cycle I)

Criteria	Pre-test	Post Test (Cycle I)	Improvement	Category
Pronunciation	67.75	73.25	5.5	Good
Vocabulary	66.75	75.50	8.75	Good
Grammar	67.76	76.50	8.75	Good
Fluency	67.50	73.50	6	Good
Task	69.50	77.00	7.5	Good
Average	67.85	75.15	7.3	Good

In [table 2](#), it shows the average Improvement Score between Pre-Test and Post-Test (Cycle I) shows that there is an improvement. The Classroom Action Research titled "Role Play Strategies to Improve Students' Speaking Skill of Junior High School in Batam" was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of using role play strategies to enhance the speaking skills of junior high school students in Batam. The study utilized pre-test and post-test cycles to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. The results of the study showed that the students' speaking skills significantly improved in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and task performance.

The first aspect of improvement was the students' pronunciation. The pre-test score of 67.75 improved to 73.25 in the post-test cycle 1, with a notable improvement of 5.5. The role play strategy provided opportunities for the students to practice pronunciation in a fun and engaging way. They were able to practice speaking in various scenarios, which helped them to improve their pronunciation.

The second aspect of improvement was the students' vocabulary. The pre-test score of 66.75 improved to 75.50 in the post-test cycle 1, with a remarkable improvement of 8.75. The role play strategy allowed the students to learn and use new words in a practical setting. They were able to develop their vocabulary by using new words in their role play scenarios.

The third aspect of improvement was the students' grammar. The pre-test score of 67.76 improved to 76.50 in the post-test cycle 1, with an improvement of 8.75. The role play strategy provided opportunities for the students to practice their grammar in a natural and interactive way. They were able to use correct grammar structures while playing different roles, which helped them to improve their grammar skills.

The fourth aspect of improvement was the students' fluency. The pre-test score of 67.50 improved to 73.50 in the post-test cycle 1, with an improvement of 6. The role play strategy allowed the students to practice speaking without fear of making mistakes. They were able to speak fluently and naturally while playing different roles, which helped them to improve their fluency.

The fifth aspect of improvement was the students' task performance. The pre-test score of 69.50 improved to 77.00 in the post-test cycle 1, with an impressive improvement of 7.5. The role play strategy provided opportunities for the students to work in groups and collaborate with their peers. They were able to complete tasks and achieve their goals while playing different roles, which helped them to improve their task performance.

To the most of all, the average score of Cycle 1's pre-test was 67.85, which improved to 75.15 in the post-test, with an average improvement of 7.3. This indicates that the use of role play strategies had a positive impact on the students' speaking skills. Therefore, the findings of the study showed that the role play strategy provided opportunities for the students to practice speaking in a fun and engaging way. They were able to practice speaking in various scenarios, which helped them to improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and task performance.

In conclusion, role play strategies significantly improved the speaking skills of junior high school students in Batam. The study demonstrated that the use of interactive and engaging teaching strategies, such as role play, is effective in enhancing students' speaking skills in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and task performance.

The researchers aimed to ensure the improvement of students' ability in speaking, hence the Posttest cycle 2 was conducted. From the results of the cycle 1 post-test, it was found that there was a need for improvement in the actors' pronunciation and fluency. The role-playing still felt stiff, and if one of the members forgot the dialogue other student did not have improvisation. So the researchers asked each group to practice again, especially to refine pronunciation by listening to the pronunciation of words on the browser, then repeat and imitate it. Then, memorize the scenario more, in order to increase speaking fluency in role play. In addition, the researchers felt in post-test cycle 1 there was still need additional time for students to be creative in role play, hence in cycle 2 students were given 7 minutes to improve their storyline. The following is a table of results on the Post-Test Cycle I and Post-Test Cycle II.

Table 3. The Average Improvement Score between Post-Test Cycle I and Post-Test Cycle II

Criteria	Post Test (Cycle I)	Post Test (Cycle II)	Improvement	Category
Pronunciation	73.25	75.75	2.5	Good
Vocabulary	75.50	79.75	4.25	Good
Grammar	76.50	80.25	3.75	Good
Fluency	73.50	75.5	2	Good
Task	77.00	80	3	Good
Average	75.15	78.25	3.1	Good

Table 3 shows the improvement score in Post Test Cycle 1 and Post Test cycle 2. In the second cycle, The findings of the research indicate significant improvements in various aspects of students' speaking skills. The research involved two cycles of pre-test and post-test assessments of students' speaking skills, using different criteria such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and task performance. The results showed that there was a considerable improvement in all these aspects after the implementation of role-play strategies.

In terms of pronunciation, the pre-test score was 73.25, which increased to 75.75 in the post-test, indicating an improvement of 2.5. Similarly, the vocabulary scores increased from 75.50 to 79.75, showing a significant improvement of 4.25. The grammar scores also showed an improvement from 76.50 to 80.25, with an improvement of 3.75 points. The fluency scores also showed an improvement of 2 points, increasing from 73.50 to 75.5. Lastly, the task performance scores improved from 77.00 to 80.00, with a noticeable improvement of 3 points.

These results indicate that the role play strategies implemented during the research were successful in improving the speaking skills of junior high school students in Batam. The improvements in all five aspects of speaking skills, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and task performance, suggest that role play strategies can effectively enhance multiple dimensions of speaking proficiency.

The average score of Cycle 2's pre-test was 75.15, which improved to 78.25 in the post-test, with an average improvement of 3.1. Although the improvement was lower than in Cycle 1, it still indicates that the use of role play strategies had a positive impact on the students' speaking skills.

The study's outcomes indicate a noteworthy enhancement in the speaking skills of junior high school students in Batam after utilizing the role play strategy, encompassing aspects such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and task performance. These results emphasize the effectiveness of interactive and captivating teaching approaches, such as role play, in promoting students' speaking abilities.

The researcher conducted classroom observations to assess the speaking skills of the students during their daily activities, such as answering questions, presenting, and providing feedback to their peers. There are several factors that can affect students' speaking skills, including affective factors, performance conditions, listening ability, study habits at home, and fear of speaking (Cabaltica & Arcala, 2021). The observations revealed that the students had low proficiency in speaking, with most of them exhibiting signs of timidity and anxiety, as they would avoid making eye contact with the teacher for fear of being singled out or criticized. Additionally, some students would display disinterest in the class by yawning, which indicates a lack of motivation to learn. According to Barua et.al (2019) student engagement is a decisive prerequisite for effective teaching and learning. Several factors can influence student engagement, including students' learning and thinking abilities, behavior, attitude, personality, motivation, effort, and self-confidence. The literature suggests that engagement is the result of emotional processing, meaning construction, and educational endeavors. These behaviors suggest that the students were not fully engaged in the learning process, which could be attributed to a number of factors, such as the teaching approach or classroom environment. Therefore, it is important to identify and address the factors that affect student engagement to improve their motivation to learn.

In the pretest, the researchers asked students to look at the example of comparison dialog in the book, then the researchers divided each student into pairs according to the attendance list. Each pair was asked to choose one of the dialogues and memorize it, five minutes were given for students to memorize the dialogue. After that, each pair was required to perform the dialogue in front of the class. The researchers will give an assessment according to the score rubric, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, task.

The findings highlight the need for effective teaching strategies to enhance students'

speaking skills. Classroom observations are a valid and reliable method for assessing students' speaking abilities, as it allows for the collection of authentic data in a natural setting. The use of such observations in this study provided insights into the challenges facing the students in developing their speaking skills. Consequently, it is necessary to employ effective teaching strategies to improve students' speaking abilities. Some studies found that role play activities can be an effective strategy to promote speaking motivation among English language learners (Dewi et al., 2020; Gusmuliana et al., 2021; Gutiérrez-Huancayo, 2022; Nuraini, 2022). Moreover, Tompkin's (2018) study also emphasizes the effectiveness of using role play as a classroom teaching technique to encourage students to participate actively in the process of learning English.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to serve as a guide for future language teaching practices, aiding in the improvement of students' speaking proficiency. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating engaging and interactive learning techniques to help students overcome common challenges they encounter while developing their speaking skills. Therefore, the use of role play in language instruction can prove to be a valuable teaching method for enhancing students' speaking abilities.

The current study's findings align with those of a prior study conducted by Krisdiana et al., (2018), which concluded that the use of role-play integrated with word cards proved to be a successful intervention in enhancing students' speaking skills for communication. The earlier study also emphasized the significance of active learning methodologies, such as role-play and word cards, in enhancing students' communication abilities. Consequently, both studies indicate that integrating role-play and other active learning methodologies into language teaching practices can be an effective means of improving students' speaking skills.

The current study's finding that implementing role-play strategies significantly enhanced the speaking skills of junior high school students in Batam is in line with the assertion that role-play is an effective classroom teaching technique that encourages students to participate actively in the process of learning English (Berry & Kowal, 2022; Hamid, 2021; Kostania et al., 2015; Stevens, 2015). The use of role-play in language teaching provides a context similar to real-life situations, where students can practice the target language in a more natural and authentic way, removing stress and shyness. Tompkin's (2018) statement is relevant to the current finding as it highlights the use of role-play strategies in creating an engaging and interactive learning environment for students, which can lead to improvements in their speaking skills.

Inconsistencies have been identified regarding the applicability of Tompkin's (2018) study to different contexts. Tompkin's study highlights the effectiveness of role play as a classroom teaching technique in promoting active student participation and natural language practice, while reducing shyness and stress. However, the study's applicability may vary depending on several factors, including the students' level of English proficiency, cultural backgrounds, and language learning goals (Li et al., 2023). For instance, in a context where students have lower proficiency levels, role play activities may require simplification or adaptation to their language ability. Moreover, in contexts where students come from diverse cultural backgrounds, it may be necessary to consider cultural sensitivity when designing role play activities .

The present finding, which shows the effectiveness of role play strategies in enhancing the speaking skills of junior high school students in Batam, is supported by the findings of Gusmuliana et al., (2018) study. The previous study investigated the potential of role play as a motivational tool for English language learners and found that its use can enhance students' motivation for speaking. The experimental group, which received role-play instruction, demonstrated higher levels of motivation (70.20%) than the control group (60.10%) who did not receive role-play instruction. These findings are significant as they emphasize the potential of role play as a motivational tool in language learning, which can improve students' speaking abilities.

It is worth noting that while both studies highlight the effectiveness of role play in language learning, the specific contexts and methods of implementation may vary. For instance, the present study was conducted in a junior high school setting with a focus on

improving students' speaking skills. On the other hand, Gusmuliana's et al., (2018) study aimed to investigate the motivational potential of role play and did not specifically target speaking skills. As such, it is important to consider the specific goals and context of language learning programs when implementing role play strategies.

CONCLUSION

The research question of how the implementation of the Role Play Strategy impacts student attitude, interest, and effort in practicing English speaking skills was evaluated using the collected results. The analysis of findings indicates that the research hypothesis was supported. The researchers identified performance deficiencies among the students based on the research outcomes, including challenges in expressing their thoughts, frequent pauses during speech, and insufficient proficiency in vocabulary and grammar usage. Through the use of Classroom Action Research (CAR), it was demonstrated that the role play strategy was beneficial in enhancing students' speaking abilities. These results align with the findings of many studies which highlighted the positive impact of speaking practice with peers on students' speaking proficiency. In conclusion, the research findings suggest that the Role Play Strategy is an effective teaching approach for promoting students' interest, attitude, and effort in practicing their English speaking skills. The use of role play activities in language classrooms may also help students to overcome some of the challenges they face in developing their speaking abilities, such as difficulty expressing themselves fluently and mastering complex grammar structures.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Sayow, E.L.M.: Conceptualization (lead), methodology (lead), writing – original draft (lead), review (supporting), editing (supporting), securing funding. Marsevani, M.: Conceptualization (supporting), methodology (supporting), writing – original draft (lead), review (lead).

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