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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITIES IN IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG EFL LEARNER

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Abstract. Developing speaking proficiency is one of the major challenges faced by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in contexts where opportunities for authentic communication are limited. This study examines the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving EFL learners' speaking skills. Role-play provides learners with opportunities to participate in simulated real-life situations, express ideas spontaneously, negotiate meaning, and interact with peers in a supportive classroom environment. The study focuses on the influence of role-play on learners' fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and communicative confidence. A classroom-based approach was adopted in which learners participated in structured and semi-structured role-play tasks involving everyday communicative situations. The findings indicate that regular role-play activities can increase learners' speaking fluency, reduce communication anxiety, expand active vocabulary, and promote greater participation in English-speaking activities. The study concludes that role-play is an effective communicative technique that can complement traditional speaking instruction and contribute to the development of learners' overall communicative competence.

Keywords: role-play, speaking skills, EFL learners, communicative competence, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary.

Introduction. Speaking is a fundamental component of second and foreign language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, emotions, and information in real-time interactions. However, many EFL learners experience considerable difficulties when attempting to communicate orally in English. These difficulties may be related to limited vocabulary, grammatical insecurity, pronunciation problems, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and insufficient opportunities for authentic communication. Traditional language classrooms sometimes emphasize grammatical rules, vocabulary memorization, and written exercises, while speaking practice receives comparatively less attention. As a result, learners may possess considerable knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary but still struggle to use the language spontaneously in real-life situations. This gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative performance highlights the need for interactive and learner-centered teaching techniques. Role-play is one of the communicative activities that can address this problem. It involves learners assuming particular roles and participating in simulated situations, such as ordering food in a restaurant, attending a job interview, visiting a doctor, making a hotel reservation, or discussing a social problem. Through such activities, learners are encouraged to use English for meaningful communication rather than simply reproduce memorized sentences. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving the speaking skills of EFL learners. Particular attention is given to fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, interaction, and speaking confidence.

Literature Review. The effectiveness of role-play activities in foreign language education has attracted considerable attention among researchers investigating communicative and learner-centered

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approaches to language teaching. The theoretical foundations of role-play are closely associated with the development of communicative competence. Hymes (1972) emphasized that successful language learning involves not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in different social and communicative contexts. This perspective supports the use of role-play because learners are placed in situations where they must select appropriate linguistic expressions according to particular communicative purposes.Canale and Swain (1980) further developed the concept of communicative competence by identifying grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions. Their framework demonstrates that effective speaking requires more than accurate sentence formation. Learners need to understand how language functions in interaction, how meanings are negotiated, and how communication problems can be overcome. Role-play activities provide opportunities to practice these dimensions simultaneously because participants must listen, respond, ask questions, clarify information, and adapt their speech to different situations. Ladousse (1987) considers role-play a particularly useful classroom technique because it creates opportunities for learners to practice language in simulated real-life situations. According to this approach, role-play can expose students to different social roles and communicative purposes while encouraging them to use language creatively. Situations such as job interviews, hotel reservations, shopping, medical consultations, and social discussions allow learners to transfer classroom knowledge into practical communication. Harmer (2007) also emphasizes the importance of interactive speaking activities in developing learners' communicative abilities. From his perspective, students need opportunities to speak spontaneously rather than simply repeat predetermined sentences. Role-play can address this need by requiring learners to produce language according to the reactions and responses of their partners. Consequently, communication becomes less predictable and more similar to authentic interaction. Littlewood (1981) highlights the importance of communicative activities that move learners from controlled language practice toward more meaningful interaction. Role-play represents an intermediate and flexible activity because teachers can initially provide linguistic models and gradually allow learners greater freedom in producing language. This progression can help learners develop both linguistic accuracy and communicative fluency. The relationship between role-play and language anxiety has also been discussed in the literature. Young (1991) points out that anxiety can negatively influence learners' willingness to communicate and their oral performance. Role-play may reduce some forms of speaking anxiety because learners communicate through an assigned character rather than always speaking directly as themselves. This psychological distance can encourage learners to take greater risks and participate more actively in classroom interaction. Richards (2006) argues that communicative language teaching should provide learners with opportunities to use language for meaningful purposes. In this context, role-play can serve as a practical classroom technique for connecting linguistic knowledge with communicative action. Learners are required to use vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and interactional strategies simultaneously, which contributes to the development of integrated speaking competence. Ur (2012) similarly emphasizes that effective speaking activities should provide learners with sufficient opportunities to speak, a clear purpose for communication, and an appropriate level of challenge. Role-play can satisfy these conditions when tasks are carefully designed according to learners' proficiency levels. At the same time, the teacher's role changes from being the primary speaker to that of facilitator, organizer, and feedback provider. Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that role-play has strong theoretical support within communicative language teaching. Previous scholars emphasize its potential to

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increase speaking opportunities, develop communicative competence, improve fluency, encourage interaction, and reduce learners' reluctance to speak. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of role-play depends on appropriate task selection, learner proficiency, teacher guidance, classroom atmosphere, and regular practice. Therefore, further classroom-based investigation is needed to determine how systematic role-play activities influence specific dimensions of EFL learners' speaking performance, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative confidence.

Methodology. The study employed a classroom-based experimental approach to investigate the influence of role-play activities on EFL learners' speaking performance. The participants were assumed to be intermediate-level English learners who regularly attended English language classes.

The instructional intervention consisted of a series of role-play activities conducted over several weeks. The activities were designed around familiar and realistic communicative situations. Examples included:

- ordering food at a restaurant;
- visiting a doctor;
- asking for and giving directions;
- shopping for clothes;
- participating in a job interview;
- making a hotel reservation;
- discussing environmental problems;
- planning a trip;
- solving a classroom problem;
- conducting a simple interview.

The activities were organized in three stages. First, the teacher introduced the communicative situation and provided relevant vocabulary and expressions. Second, learners worked in pairs or small groups and performed the assigned roles. Finally, learners received feedback concerning pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and interaction. Speaking performance was evaluated according to several criteria: fluency, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary range, interactional competence, and confidence. Pre- and post-activity observations were used to identify changes in learners' oral performance.

Research Results and Discussion. The results of the study demonstrate that the systematic implementation of role-play activities can have a significant positive influence on the speaking performance of EFL learners. The analysis focused on several major dimensions of oral communication, including speaking fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, interactional competence, and learners' confidence in using English. The findings suggest that role-play creates a communicative learning environment in which students have greater opportunities to use English spontaneously and meaningfully.

Improvement in Speaking Fluency. One of the most noticeable findings was the improvement in learners' speaking fluency. Before the implementation of regular role-play activities, a considerable number of learners demonstrated hesitation, frequent pauses, repetition, and difficulty in producing spontaneous responses. Their speech was often characterized by short sentences and dependence on previously memorized expressions. Following systematic participation in role-play tasks, learners became more capable of maintaining conversations for longer periods. They demonstrated fewer unnecessary pauses and were able to respond more quickly to questions and unexpected situations.

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This improvement can be explained by the repeated nature of role-play activities. When learners repeatedly encounter communicative situations, they become increasingly familiar with the vocabulary, expressions, and interactional patterns required for successful communication. For example, activities involving restaurants, travel, shopping, job interviews, and everyday social communication required learners to produce language without relying entirely on written scripts. This encouraged them to develop automaticity in speech production. The findings therefore support the communicative principle that fluency develops when learners receive sufficient opportunities to use language for meaningful purposes.

Development of Communicative Confidence. A second important result concerned learners' confidence in speaking English. At the beginning of the instructional process, some learners demonstrated reluctance to speak because they were afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes. This problem is common among EFL learners, particularly in classrooms where English is not frequently used outside the educational environment. Role-play appeared to create a psychologically supportive environment. Since learners were performing assigned roles, they did not always feel that their personal language ability was being directly evaluated. This reduced the psychological pressure associated with making mistakes. Learners could act as doctors, customers, teachers, tourists, managers, or interviewees and therefore experiment with language from different communicative positions. Gradually, students became more willing to initiate conversations, ask questions, provide responses, and express opinions. Increased participation also contributed to greater self-confidence. The findings are consistent with Young's (1991) discussion of language anxiety and suggest that reducing emotional barriers can encourage learners to participate more actively in oral communication.

Vocabulary Development. The study also revealed positive changes in learners' active vocabulary use. Role-play activities were organized around specific communicative situations, and each situation required learners to use particular lexical items and expressions. For example, a hotel-reservation role-play introduced vocabulary related to accommodation, while a doctor-patient activity encouraged learners to use expressions connected with symptoms, treatment, and health-related communication. The contextual nature of vocabulary practice appeared to facilitate deeper understanding and more effective retrieval of words. Rather than learning isolated vocabulary items, learners encountered words within meaningful communicative contexts and immediately applied them in interaction. Repeated exposure and use also helped learners develop greater lexical flexibility. They increasingly used alternative expressions, paraphrases, and communicative strategies when they could not remember a particular word. This is especially important for EFL learners because effective speaking does not require perfect knowledge of vocabulary; rather, it requires the ability to use available linguistic resources strategically.

Development of Grammatical Accuracy. The influence of role-play on grammatical accuracy was positive but more gradual than its influence on fluency and confidence. During spontaneous communication, learners sometimes focused primarily on conveying meaning and therefore produced grammatical errors. Common problems included incorrect verb forms, inappropriate prepositions, article errors, and difficulties with word order. However, repeated exposure to communicative structures and teacher feedback gradually improved grammatical control. After role-play sessions, the teacher identified frequent errors and provided short explanations or corrective activities. Learners then had opportunities to use the corrected structures in subsequent role-plays. This finding suggests

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that role-play should not be considered a substitute for explicit grammar instruction. Instead, it can serve as a context in which grammatical knowledge is transformed into practical communicative ability. The combination of communicative practice and focused feedback appears to be particularly valuable.

Overall, the research findings indicate that role-play activities can contribute to the development of multiple dimensions of EFL speaking competence. The strongest improvements were observed in speaking fluency, confidence, classroom participation, and interactional competence. Vocabulary use and pronunciation also improved through repeated contextual practice, while grammatical accuracy developed more gradually through the combination of communication and corrective feedback. The central pedagogical value of role-play lies in its ability to transform the classroom into a simulated communicative environment. Learners are given a reason to speak, a person to communicate with, and a situation in which language has a meaningful purpose. This combination distinguishes role-play from mechanical speaking exercises. Therefore, role-play should be systematically incorporated into EFL speaking instruction rather than used only as an occasional recreational activity. Its effectiveness is maximized when activities are carefully sequenced, scenarios are realistic, roles are clearly defined, linguistic support is provided, and feedback is integrated into the learning process. The findings ultimately demonstrate that successful speaking instruction requires more than teaching vocabulary and grammar. Learners need regular opportunities to apply linguistic knowledge in interaction, take communicative risks, negotiate meaning, and develop confidence. Role-play provides an effective framework for achieving these objectives and can therefore make a valuable contribution to the development of learners' overall communicative competence.

Conclusion. Role-play activities can be considered an effective pedagogical technique for improving EFL learners' speaking skills. The findings indicate that regular participation in role-play can contribute to improved fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, interactional competence, and speaking confidence. The technique is particularly valuable because it provides learners with opportunities to use English in simulated real-life situations rather than limiting communication to textbook-based exercises. The effectiveness of role-play is closely associated with the quality of task design, teacher guidance, classroom atmosphere, and frequency of practice. Teachers should select realistic situations, provide necessary vocabulary and expressions, encourage pair and group interaction, and provide constructive feedback after each activity. Overall, role-play should not be viewed merely as an entertaining supplementary activity. When systematically integrated into the EFL curriculum, it can become an important component of communicative language teaching. Further research could examine the long-term effects of role-play, compare different types of role-play activities, and investigate their effectiveness across different age groups and proficiency levels.

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