

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter I, several sub-sections will be discussed, including the following: background of study, research question/research objective, research limitation, research significance, dan definitions of the key.

A. Background of the Study

Speaking is one of the core skills in English language learning, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts like Indonesia. It plays a significant role in enabling students to communicate their ideas clearly, participate in classroom interactions, and function in real-life conversations beyond the classroom. For junior high school students, the ability to speak English confidently not only helps them perform better in school but also prepares them to engage in global opportunities that require effective communication skills. The ability to speak English fluently and accurately can significantly affect a student's confidence, future academic progress, and opportunities in international environments.

Despite the increasing emphasis on communicative competence in language curricula, the EF English Proficiency Index (2023) places Indonesia in the moderate proficiency category, with speaking performance notably weaker than reading and writing skills. This discrepancy reveals a substantial gap between receptive and productive language abilities among Indonesian learners. Moreover,

according to data from Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2022), the average performance of junior high school students in speaking English remains below national expectations, with a lack of speaking practice cited as a primary cause.

In line with 21st-century education goals, communication skills are recognized as one of the "Four Cs" along with critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). English language instruction is therefore not just about mastering grammatical rules or passing exams, but about enabling learners to engage meaningfully in real-world conversations. It is within this communicative framework that speaking instruction should be emphasized, particularly through interactive and student-centered methods.

However, numerous studies have highlighted challenges in teaching and learning speaking in the Indonesian EFL context. These include large class sizes, lack of exposure to authentic English, exam-oriented curricula, and students' psychological barriers such as speaking anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Many learners are reluctant to speak due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers. As a result, even students who have studied English for years often struggle to express themselves orally in real-life contexts.

Furthermore, during a preliminary observation at SMPN 5 Simpang Empat, the researcher noticed that many students showed a lack of confidence when participating in speaking activities. In particular, they were hesitant to speak English during class discussions or structured practices and often relied on reading

written texts instead of speaking spontaneously. These findings suggested that more interactive and student-centered methods were needed to help students feel more comfortable and engaged during speaking tasks, as supported by Harmer (2015), who emphasized that learner-centered techniques promote participation and reduce speaking anxiety, and by Brown and Lee (2015), who argued that meaningful interaction is essential for developing communicative competence in EFL learners. Based on this context, the researcher was motivated to explore role play as a potential strategy to address these challenges in a practical and supportive classroom setting.

To address this gap, educators have increasingly turned to role play as a strategy to create meaningful speaking opportunities. Role play allows learners to assume roles in simulated real-life scenarios, providing a safe and imaginative space to practice speaking. According to Ladousse (1987), role play helps learners overcome inhibitions, build fluency, and develop communicative competence. It aligns closely with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, which emphasize authentic communication and learner interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

The effectiveness of role play is also supported by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which states that learning occurs through social interaction within a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In a role play activity, students collaborate, negotiate meaning, and scaffold each other's performance—all essential conditions for language acquisition. Recent studies (e.g., Liu &

Jackson, 2008; Huang, 2008; Sari & Pratama, 2019) also show that role play reduces anxiety, increases motivation, and enhances both fluency and accuracy in EFL speaking.

Despite its advantages, the actual implementation of role play in Indonesian classrooms remains under-researched, particularly from a qualitative and descriptive perspective. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the implementation of role play by an English teacher at SMPN 5 Simpang Empat, as well as students' perceptions of its impact on their speaking development.

B. Research Questions

To guide the direction of this study, the following research questions were formulated. These questions are based on the issues raised in the background and are designed to explore both instructional practice and learner response in the classroom context:

1. How does the English teacher at SMPN 5 Simpang Empat implement role play activities in the classroom?
2. What are the students' perceptions of using role play to develop their speaking skills?

These questions aim to capture both the process and the perceived effectiveness of role play from the perspectives of teacher and students alike. Answering these questions is expected to contribute meaningful insights to the practice of speaking instruction using role play in similar EFL contexts.

C. Research Objectives

Based on the research questions, the objectives of this study are defined as follows. These objectives reflect the focus of the research on both teaching strategy and student experience:

1. To describe the implementation of role play by the English teacher at SMPN 5 Simpang Empat.
2. To explore the students' perceptions of role play as a technique to enhance their speaking competence.

These objectives are not only descriptive in nature but are also intended to offer pedagogical implications for the teaching of speaking through interactive techniques. The findings of this study are expected to inform language teachers, school administrators, and curriculum designers about the value of role play in speaking instruction.

D. Research Limitation

As with all research, this study is subject to certain limitations. First, the study focuses only on one English teacher and a group of eighth-grade students at SMPN 5 Simpang Empat. This limited scope restricts the generalizability of the findings. However, such a narrow focus allows for an in-depth, context-rich analysis of the phenomenon under study.

Second, the study adopts a qualitative design, which emphasizes understanding over measurement. While this enables a deeper exploration of perceptions and teaching practices, it does not provide statistical generalizations. Nevertheless, the insights generated are expected to be transferable to other EFL classrooms with similar characteristics.

Third, the study does not measure students' speaking proficiency quantitatively but relies on observations, interviews, and document analysis. This may limit the extent to which improvements in speaking can be demonstrated objectively. However, the use of multiple data sources and triangulation enhances the credibility of the results.

E. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to make significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it adds to the growing body of literature on communicative approaches in language teaching, particularly the use of role play to promote speaking in EFL contexts. It provides empirical support for applying sociocultural and communicative theories in real classroom situations.

Practically, the study offers valuable insights for English teachers seeking to implement engaging and effective speaking activities. It describes how role play can be planned, executed, and adapted in the classroom, thereby serving as a model or inspiration for other educators. The study may also inform

professional development programs or pre-service teacher training on innovative speaking instruction techniques.

For students, the study highlights the importance of active participation in learning and demonstrates how role play can create a more enjoyable and confidence-building environment. Encouraging learners to speak through role play may help them overcome anxiety, develop interpersonal skills, and improve overall speaking competence.

F. Definition of Key Terms

In this study, several key terms are used frequently and are central to understanding the scope and focus of the research. Below are the definitions of those terms specifically as they apply to this study:

1. **Role Play:** In the context of this research, role play refers to a classroom activity in which students take on assigned characters or roles in pre-designed or improvised scenarios to simulate real-life communication. It is used as a technique to improve students' speaking competence, engagement, and confidence in using English within an interactive setting.
2. **Speaking Skills:** Speaking skills in this research encompass students' ability to express themselves orally in English with a focus on fluency, accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and interactive strategies. These skills are assessed through students' participation in role play activities and their ability to communicate effectively during such interactions.

3. **Implementation:** Implementation in this study refers to the process by which the English teacher introduces, plans, and conducts role play activities in the classroom. It includes the teacher's strategies, classroom procedures, and methods used to facilitate and evaluate the role play sessions.
4. **Perception:** Perception in this research refers to the subjective views, attitudes, feelings, and evaluations expressed by students and the teacher regarding the use of role play in speaking instruction. This includes how students perceive its usefulness, enjoyability, challenges, and influence on their speaking confidence.
5. **Qualitative Case Study:** This term refers to the chosen research design, where the researcher explores a specific classroom context (SMPN 5 Simpang Empat) to investigate the implementation and effects of role play in depth, using non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, and documentation.
6. **EFL Classroom:** In this study, an EFL classroom refers to an English language learning environment in Indonesia where English is taught as a foreign language, and learners have limited exposure to English outside the school setting.

These definitions ensure clarity and consistency throughout the study and guide the interpretation of data and findings in the following chapters.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Following the classroom observations and interviews conducted with an English teacher and a student at SMPN 5 Simpang Empat during the implementation of role play activities, the researcher arrived at several conclusions and formulated suggestions, which are presented in this final chapter.

A. Conclusion

This research explored the implementation of role play in teaching speaking and students' perceptions toward its use in an EFL classroom at SMPN 5 Simpang Empat. The findings were based on four classroom observations and two interviews involving an English teacher and a student.

The results revealed that although the teacher had only occasionally implemented role play in her previous lessons, she was able to apply the method meaningfully during the observed sessions by preparing vocabulary, modeling dialogues, assigning roles, and giving constructive feedback. This success was supported by consistent planning and structured classroom activities. However, there were still some aspects, such as time management and deeper student scaffolding, that could be improved to further maximize the effectiveness of the role play sessions. This approach helped create a dynamic and engaging classroom environment that encouraged students to use English in context. Over time, students demonstrated increased confidence, fluency, and creativity in speaking.

The student's perception also confirmed that role play was enjoyable and reduced speaking anxiety. The activity allowed learners to express themselves in a natural and interactive way, which supported the development of speaking competence. Despite some challenges, such as vocabulary limitations and time constraints, both teacher and student viewed role play as a beneficial method.

In summary, role play proved to be a valuable strategy for enhancing students' speaking skills and building a more communicative learning environment in the EFL classroom.

B. Suggestions

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following suggestions are proposed for teachers, students, and future researchers:

1. For English Teachers:

- a. Consider integrating role play regularly into speaking lessons to promote student participation and real-life communication.
- b. Prepare students adequately with vocabulary and expressions before the role play.
- c. Use scaffolding techniques and reflective questions to maximize learning outcomes.

2. For Students:

- a. Take advantage of role play as an opportunity to practice speaking in a low-anxiety setting.
- b. Collaborate actively with peers and be willing to take risks in using new language.
- c. Reflect on performance and seek feedback to improve communication skills.

3. For Future Researchers:

- a. Conduct further studies with more diverse participants or different role play themes to enrich understanding.
- b. Explore the long-term impact of regular role play on students' speaking proficiency.
- c. Investigate the use of role play in online or blended learning environments.

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