

## **Improving Students' Speaking Skills through Role-Play Technique at SMKN 1 Tenggarong**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Speaking proficiency is essential for vocational school students because it supports effective communication in workplace contexts. However, students at SMKN 1 Tenggarong face difficulties in English speaking due to limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, low confidence, and classroom practices that emphasize repetition rather than interaction. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the role-play technique in improving students' speaking skills. A quasi-experimental design was applied involving two groups, each consisting of 36 students. The experimental group received instruction through role-play activities, while the control group was taught using conventional methods. Both groups completed pre-tests and post-tests to measure improvement in speaking performance. The treatment was conducted over six instructional meetings using job-related role-play scenarios. The data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test with the assistance of SPSS. The results showed a significant improvement in the experimental group, with a post-test mean score of 85.33, compared to 66.83 in the control group. The p-value of 0.000 indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups. These findings suggest that role-play effectively enhances students' speaking ability by increasing confidence, providing meaningful interaction, and supporting practical language use in vocational English contexts.

**Keywords:** Role-Play; Speaking Skills; Vocational Students; Communicative Learning; EFL.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Speaking ability plays an essential role in mastering English, especially for vocational school students who are prepared to enter professional environments that require effective daily communication. In workplace settings, graduates are expected to interact with colleagues, customers, and supervisors, deliver information clearly, and respond appropriately in real-time situations. However, many students experience difficulty achieving fluency despite years of formal

instruction. Fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, nervousness, and minimal opportunities to practice spontaneous speech often prevent learners from developing strong oral communication skills. Classroom practices frequently emphasize grammar exercises, written assignments, and repetition drills rather than interactive communication. As a result, students may understand English theoretically but struggle to apply it confidently in real-life contexts.

To respond to these challenges, educators have increasingly adopted active learning approaches that prioritize meaningful interaction. One instructional strategy that has gained attention is role-play. Role-play allows learners to simulate realistic situations by adopting specific roles and engaging in purposeful communication. Through this method, students practice language in contextualized scenarios such as customer service interactions, workplace discussions, or professional interviews. Septiawan (n.d.) explains that role-play supports authentic language use because learners communicate within meaningful social contexts rather than memorizing isolated expressions. When students assume different roles, they are encouraged to negotiate meaning, respond spontaneously, and adjust their language based on situational demands. This process helps reduce anxiety while increasing learners' confidence in speaking.

Research evidence supports the effectiveness of role-play in improving speaking performance. Tri Lestari et al. (2024) report that students who participated in structured role-play activities demonstrated noticeable improvement in fluency, pronunciation, and overall speaking confidence. Their findings indicate that repeated exposure to simulated interaction allows learners to internalize communicative patterns and practice pronunciation more naturally. Similarly, Perwitasari (2025) highlights that role-play increases student engagement and participation, particularly in classrooms that emphasize collaborative learning. Guided acting tasks encourage learners to speak more actively, share ideas with peers, and build confidence through supportive interaction. These studies confirm that role-play not only improves linguistic performance but also strengthens students' willingness to communicate.

Despite these advantages, the implementation of role-play in vocational school settings remains limited. Many vocational classrooms continue to apply teacher-centered instruction, where learners spend most of their time listening to explanations and completing written exercises. At SMKN 1 Tenggarong, similar conditions are evident. Students rarely receive structured opportunities to practice spoken English in meaningful situations. Classroom interaction tends to be dominated by the teacher, and student participation is often passive. Many learners hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes and low confidence. These limitations are particularly concerning because vocational education emphasizes practical skills that support employment readiness. Without sufficient speaking practice, students may graduate with inadequate communication skills, which can affect their ability to function effectively in professional environments.

Role-play offers a promising alternative that aligns well with the goals of vocational education. Instead of focusing on abstract language rules, role-play situates learning within real-life contexts. Students participate in simulated workplace activities such as handling customer requests, conducting interviews, resolving problems, and collaborating in teams. These scenarios give learners a clear purpose for speaking and encourage them to use English meaningfully. As students repeatedly engage in communicative tasks, fluency gradually improves and hesitation decreases. Role-play also fosters cooperation, social interaction, and confidence, which are essential competencies for workplace communication. Tri Lestari et al. (2024) emphasize that when learners actively engage in realistic dialogue, their pronunciation and speech flow become more natural. Likewise, Perwitasari (2025) demonstrates that students become more motivated and confident when learning activities involve performance-based interaction rather than passive drills.

Although previous studies have confirmed the benefits of role-play, there remains a gap in research focusing specifically on vocational school students in local contexts such as SMKN 1 Tenggarong. Many existing studies examine role-play in general secondary or higher education environments, while fewer explore how this technique impacts vocational learners whose communication needs are closely tied to workplace demands. Furthermore, limited classroom-based research compares role-play with traditional instruction using measurable speaking outcomes. This gap highlights the need for empirical investigation that examines whether role-play significantly improves vocational students' speaking skills and how its effectiveness compares with conventional teaching methods.

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the role-play technique in improving students' speaking skills at SMKN 1 Tenggarong. By comparing an experimental group receiving role-play instruction with a control group taught through conventional methods, this research seeks to provide objective evidence of learning improvement. The focus is placed on students' speaking performance, including fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary use. The findings are expected to clarify whether role-play contributes significantly to students' oral communication development within vocational learning settings.

The results of this study are expected to offer practical implications for English teachers in vocational schools. Teachers may use the findings to design more interactive classroom activities that encourage students to speak actively and confidently. For schools, the study may support curriculum planning that integrates experiential learning strategies aligned with workplace communication needs. For future researchers, this study contributes additional empirical evidence regarding the use of role-play in vocational English education. Ultimately, strengthening students' speaking ability is not only an academic objective but also a key factor in preparing learners for successful participation in professional environments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies show role-play helps students speak better in foreign language classes. When learners took part in planned role-playing, their speech flowed more easily; besides, they felt surer about talking. Instead of traditional methods, real-life situations gave them chances to practice useful phrases while joining in more fully. Tasks tied to job training did more than boost spoken skills they made conversations at work seem easier later on. Taking on different roles lowered nervousness too, which led students to try speaking even when unsure. Feri and Rahmawati (2024), too, noticed students became more involved during lessons once role-playing began. Because of such findings, it appears that taking on roles helps learners practice language in real contexts, reduces anxiety around speaking, while also supporting skill growth especially among those preparing for specific jobs.

Communication unfolds when people shape and share understanding while interacting moment by moment. Rather than just forming words, individuals must listen carefully at the same time they speak (Cardoso, 2022). For those studying English as a foreign language, verbal expression stands out as both creative and fluid a way to show thoughts accurately during exchanges. Research consistently highlights that strong spoken skills depend on linked elements like rhythm of speech, sound clarity, word choice, grammatical accuracy, and grasping what others say (Derakhshan, Khalili, & Beheshti, 2021). Faster rhythm in speaking ties into fluency, while clear sounds shape how well others understand a person. Structure matters too correct grammar keeps ideas organized. Words matter just as much; knowing more helps express thoughts precisely. Understanding what others say makes responses fit naturally within conversation. Together, these traits become markers when judging spoken work by learners.

Even though speaking matters a lot, plenty of learners keep struggling to build real skill in it. A narrow range of words, combined with shaky grammar, makes clear expression hard for many students (Sorohiti et al., 2024). Fear of errors, nervousness, along with low self-assurance, quietly push some away from joining conversations. On top of that, classrooms stuck in old routines tend to favor writing tasks instead of actual talk, leaving little room for useful spoken exchange. Starting from practical needs, educators have turned to role-play as a way to build communication skills. Because it mirrors everyday scenarios, students take on characters and act out interactions that give meaning to words they use (Hidayat, 2023). This method fits well within Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based approaches, where learning happens through doing and talking together (Nasihah & Moetia, 2024; Zulfa et al., 2024). When playing roles, learners try out phrases used in real tasks, test how language works, and grow more comfortable speaking without fear of judgment.

Starting off simply, role-play can follow set scripts offering clear lines for those just beginning (Irene et al., 2023). Moving beyond fixed dialogue, some versions include partial guidance where learners shape responses within a framework. At the

far end, there are open formats without any script at all, prompting natural exchanges on the spot (Wulandari et al., 2021). Taken together, these approaches build speaking ability step by step.

Beyond practicing language, taking on roles brings wider teaching benefits. Engagement grows when learners act out scenarios instead of just listening. Anxiety often drops because the setting feels less like testing, more like doing. Working together emerges naturally through shared tasks during performance. Skills in relating to others build steadily while speech improves at the same time (Indriani & Sakina, 2022). For job-focused programs, such methods carry extra weight. Realistic exchanges mimic office talk, shop floor moments, service encounters. Preparation meets what employers expect in daily communication (Efrizah et al., 2024). Supported by these ideas, acting out situations fits well as a way to strengthen how future workers speak.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Samples**

This study employed a quasi-experimental design involving two groups, namely an experimental group and a control group, both of which were given a pre-test and a post-test to measure changes in students' speaking performance. A quasi-experimental design was considered appropriate because the researcher worked with intact classroom groups that could not be randomly assigned, while still allowing comparison of learning outcomes between two instructional treatments. The experimental group was taught using role-play activities designed to simulate workplace communication, whereas the control group received conventional instruction based on textbooks and teacher explanations.

The population of this study consisted of vocational high school students at SMKN 1 Tenggarong who study English as a compulsory subject. The sample was selected purposively to ensure that participants had comparable academic backgrounds and similar vocational communication needs. Two existing classes were selected: MPLB (Management Perkantoran dan Layanan Bisnis) and Marketing 2, each consisting of 36 students, resulting in a total of 72 participants. These classes were chosen because both programs require strong oral communication skills in professional contexts. Group equivalence was ensured by administering a pre-test to both groups and comparing their initial speaking performance before the treatment.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

The instrument used in this research was a speaking performance test administered twice as a pre-test and a post-test. The test was designed to assess four components of speaking: fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Each component was evaluated using a standardized scoring rubric with clear performance

descriptors to ensure consistent assessment. Students performed speaking tasks in pairs within a limited time allocation to encourage spontaneous and interactive communication. All student performances were recorded using an audio recorder to maintain scoring accuracy and allow careful evaluation. The recordings were independently assessed by two English teachers acting as raters. The final speaking score for each student was obtained by averaging the scores from both raters to minimize subjectivity. Inter-rater reliability was strengthened through prior agreement on the scoring criteria and discussion of sample recordings before formal scoring.

The research procedure was conducted in three stages. First, a pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups to determine students' initial speaking ability. Second, the experimental group received treatment through structured and guided role-play activities integrated into speaking lessons, while the control group continued learning through regular instructional methods. The role-play activities focused on workplace-related scenarios to reflect vocational communication needs. Third, a post-test using similar task types and assessment criteria was administered to measure students' speaking improvement after the treatment.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test with the assistance of SPSS. This non-parametric statistical test was used to determine whether there was a significant improvement in students' speaking performance before and after the treatment. The Wilcoxon test was selected because the normality test indicated that the data were not fully normally distributed, making parametric testing unsuitable. A significance level of 0.05 was applied to determine statistical significance. Instrument validity was ensured by aligning the speaking tasks with the four assessed components: fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Reliability was maintained through the use of a standardized scoring rubric and multiple raters, with averaged scores used to reduce scoring bias and increase consistency in assessment.

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents and discusses the results of the study on the effectiveness of role-play techniques in improving students' speaking skills at SMKN 1 Tenggarong. The findings are derived from the analysis of pre-test and post-test scores of both the control group and the experimental group. The discussion not only reports statistical results but also explains their contribution to English language teaching, particularly in vocational education contexts.

*Table 1. The Pair Sample Statistic of Experimental One Class*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Control Group (PM)	Pre-test	40.08	13.96	23	71
Control Group (PM)	Post-test	66.83	20.64	31	99
Experimental Group (MPLB)	Pre-test	57.75	17.40	22	86
Experimental Group (MPLB)	Post-test	85.33	14.06	39	100

(Data from SPSS Version 20, 2016)

The data reveal a rise in average scores for learners who followed standard teaching methods, moving from 40.08 to 66.83 a gain of 26.75 points across testing phases. Starting lower but ending higher, those exposed to new techniques advanced from 57.75 to 85.33, gaining 27.58 points overall. Higher outcomes emerged despite similar growth trends. Ultimately, the approach tied to innovation led to stronger results by the study's end.

To begin, a normality check preceded any hypothesis testing. Since the outcomes showed deviations from normal distribution across some datasets, the analysis shifted toward non-parametric methods. For assessing progress within individual groups, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test served as the main tool. Both the control and experimental groups returned a significance level of 0.000 well under the 0.05 threshold. Hence, student performance in speaking improved significantly between initial and final assessments in each group.

Looking at how each team did, performance was judged by comparing test outcomes after instruction. While one set followed regular lessons, the other tried a different approach involving acted scenarios. Results showed not only greater average achievement in the latter but also tighter clustering around stronger marks. Nearly everyone who practiced through acting met or passed the required level. In contrast, some within the traditional class fell short. It appears that stepping into roles helped learners gain speaking skills more fully than standard classroom routines.

The findings of this study indicate that students who learned speaking through role-play achieved higher post-test scores than those who received conventional instruction. This result confirms that active and interactive learning strategies provide stronger support for speaking development than teacher-centered approaches. When students were required to participate directly in simulated communication rather than only listening or completing written exercises, they demonstrated better fluency, clearer pronunciation, improved vocabulary use, and stronger confidence in expressing ideas. This outcome suggests that speaking

competence develops more effectively when learners actively use language in meaningful situations rather than memorizing isolated forms.

One important factor contributing to this improvement is the use of authentic communicative settings embedded in role-play activities. Students in the experimental group practiced workplace-related scenarios such as responding to clients, participating in team discussions, and offering office services. These tasks closely resembled real professional communication demands, allowing learners to apply vocabulary and grammatical structures in practical contexts. This experiential learning approach helped students understand how language functions in real interaction, making their practice more purposeful and transferable to real-life situations. In contrast, traditional instruction provided fewer opportunities for spontaneous communication, which limited students' exposure to meaningful speaking practice.

Another contributing factor lies in the emotional impact of role-play. The findings suggest that role-play reduced students' fear of making mistakes and increased their willingness to speak. By performing roles within small groups, learners felt less personally exposed and more comfortable experimenting with language. This reduction in anxiety encouraged more frequent participation, leading to increased speaking practice and gradual improvement in fluency. As students gained confidence through repeated interaction, their self-assurance and engagement also increased. These affective benefits support the view that emotional safety and motivation play a crucial role in language learning success.

Collaborative interaction also played a significant role in students' improvement. During role-play activities, students worked together to negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and provide feedback to peers. This interaction promoted shared learning and encouraged learners to reflect on their language use. Such collaborative practice supports the development of communicative competence because students learn not only from teacher input but also from peer interaction. This environment aligns with communicative learning principles that emphasize active participation and social interaction as essential components of language development.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research. Tri Lestari et al. (2024) reported that role-play significantly improved students' fluency and pronunciation while strengthening confidence in speaking. Similarly, Perwitasari (2025) found that guided role-play activities increased student engagement and encouraged more active classroom participation. Both studies emphasize that simulated interaction allows learners to practice language more naturally and meaningfully. In vocational education contexts, Wicaksana (2020) and Efrizah et al. (2024) also observed that role-play enhanced students' ability to handle workplace communication by providing realistic scenarios that mirror professional tasks. The present findings reinforce these conclusions and provide additional evidence from a vocational high school setting.

Although improvement was also observed in the control group, the progress was less consistent and lower in magnitude. This indicates that conventional teaching methods may contribute to gradual improvement in speaking ability but do not provide sufficient opportunities for sustained communicative practice. Traditional approaches often emphasize accuracy and repetition rather than interaction and fluency development. In contrast, role-play creates a dynamic learning environment where students actively use language, interact with peers, and respond to unpredictable communication demands. This difference explains why students exposed to role-play demonstrated stronger overall improvement.

The results highlight the effectiveness of role-play in enhancing speaking skills among vocational students. Integrating interactive tasks that simulate real workplace communication makes learning more relevant, engaging, and meaningful. This approach supports both linguistic development and affective growth, including confidence and motivation. When classroom activities reflect real professional contexts, students become better prepared to apply English beyond the classroom. Therefore, incorporating role-play into vocational English instruction may strengthen long-term speaking development and better align learning outcomes with workplace expectations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study clearly indicate that students' speaking performance improved significantly after the implementation of role-play activities. A noticeable difference emerged between the experimental group, which practiced speaking through simulated real-life situations, and the control group, which followed conventional instructional routines. Improvements were observed not only in overall speaking ability but also in specific components such as fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and comprehension. Learning through active participation provided students with greater opportunities to develop confidence and communicative competence. By placing learners in situations where communication became necessary and meaningful, role-play encouraged natural language use rather than memorized responses. In contrast, traditional instruction offered fewer opportunities for sustained interaction and authentic practice.

One important reason for the effectiveness of role-play lies in its ability to create realistic communication contexts. Instead of practicing isolated expressions, students interacted in scenarios that closely resembled workplace communication. This setting reduced anxiety and increased students' willingness to speak because interaction occurred collaboratively rather than individually. As peers responded naturally during role-play activities, conversations developed more dynamically than in controlled drills. When students assumed specific job-related roles, their language use became more focused and purposeful, reflecting practical communication needs. This approach connected classroom learning with real professional situations, allowing meaning to emerge through shared action rather than textbook exercises alone. The results highlight the value of experiential

learning in vocational English instruction. Integrating role-play into daily classroom activities enables students to practice speaking in relevant, engaging, and meaningful ways. Rather than treating speaking as a separate mechanical skill, teachers can embed communicative practice within realistic tasks that mirror workplace demands. This strategy not only strengthens students' spoken English but also supports confidence, motivation, and readiness for real-world communication.

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