

# The Use of Role Play in Enhancing Speaking Skill: The Perception of Polytechnic Students in The Communicative English Class

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## Abstract

This research was aimed at finding out whether role play conducted during Communicative English class at Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin has found a place in improving speaking skills by looking at the opinions of students. It is known that role play provides an opportunity for students to practise real-life conversations. Hence, role play is described as a real-world scene where students are assigned roles and become acquainted with the character's identity so they can choose a role that fits their character. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of the students towards role play methods and identify how role play affects students' communicative abilities. 60 students from the Communicative English 2 class made up the participants. They completed a set of questionnaires with 20 items, and the data was analysed using SPSS version 28. The study's findings revealed that most of the students agreed that role play has several positive effects on their speaking skills, such as making them feel more confident, expanding their vocabulary, and improving their pronunciation. In addition to using this technique, we believe that students engage more actively and enjoy themselves when performing role play while learning English. In conclusion, this study showed that role play offers many benefits for students in the Communicative English class.

**Keywords:** Role Play, Speaking, Polytechnic Students, English, Communicative Abilities

## Introduction

One of the main goals of teaching English as a foreign language in Malaysia is to make students able to communicate in the target language. Thus, the most crucial skill that students need to develop is speaking. Speaking happens in a variety of situations, including social encounters, public speaking occasions, and workplace settings. Hence, the key to success in many areas of life, especially in the workplace, is effective communication. Many organisations seek employees with strong communication skills in addition to those with strong subject-matter expertise. According to research by Razak et al (2014), graduates' unemployment rates and their ability to speak and understand English are significantly correlated. Therefore, to secure a job, language proficiency is crucial.

However, speaking is the most challenging of all English skills, and it is common for students to face challenges in practicing English speaking especially foreign language learners. Rabbani et al. (2016) stated that it is challenging for an English teacher to motivate students to practice their speaking in the classroom. They usually have a hard time mastering it. It is challenging for students whose mother tongue is not English due to the differences in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. They may have difficulty forming sentences correctly, choosing the right words, and pronouncing words accurately as well as having a lack of confidence to participate in speaking class. The second reason is that they lack the motivation to practice speaking their second language in daily conversations. They are too shy to engage in conversation with others. Therefore, it is difficult for them to express themselves effectively in English and to be understood by native speakers.

Nevertheless, with proper teaching techniques and strategies, it is possible to overcome these challenges and help students develop their English-speaking skills. The teacher must provide students with additional opportunities to work over their challenges if English learning is to be successful. Students must therefore be more realistic in their approach to real-world situations. People will be able to communicate with one another via speaking. Students must learn the speaking elements, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary to master speaking ability. According to Hughes (2002), several aspects that affect speaking skills are fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and content. The students also should be proficient in using a variety of words to express themselves.

As stated in the course learning outcome (CLO) of Communicative English 2, provided by the Department of Polytechnic and Community College Education, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, students must demonstrate effective communication and social skills by handling questions and complaints in class politely and professionally while using proper grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, to help the students achieve the CLO, incorporating role play activities in English class will help develop their vocabulary and grammar skills and, additionally, encourage them to feel more comfortable and confident in using English in real-life situations. According to Arham et al. (2016), it described the use of role play as an effective method for developing speaking skills. It provides students with a safe and comfortable environment to practice naturally using the language, by engaging in conversations that mimic real-life situations. Additionally, the main goal of this study is to find out how students at Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin perceive the use of role play to enhance their speaking skills.

### **Literature review**

There are various approaches available for students to enhance their English-speaking proficiency, and effective methods for creating a positive learning environment in the classrooms need to be used by teachers to address this issue, for example, using role play. Role play is a process by which students speak and act out roles through actions and verbal communication. The use of role play can be an effective way to enhance students' speaking skills, as it offers a lot of opportunities for practice. By role playing students can practise speaking in various social situations. Role play can also be an effective method or technique for students to practise their English because it is more enjoyable for them. In this part, a review of a few of them has been mentioned.

The experts in this field agree that role play can be used to teach and learn to speak. It is an excellent approach for teaching speaking since it allows students to practise speaking in a variety of social settings and roles. Daniastuti (2018) outlined that role play involves a wide range of communicative techniques that can enhance learners' language proficiency,

encourage classroom interaction, and boost motivation. Hence, many studies have been conducted to determine various components of role-play techniques used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Neupane (2019) claimed that the use of role play technique can result in an improvement in the learners' speaking skills. It is because using the role-playing strategy in EFL classes fosters students' creativity and confidence while also encourages participation in speaking activities. The study also revealed the significant pedagogical value of role play in EFL classrooms for enhancing students' communicative abilities in Nepali classrooms.

Yuliana et al. (2014) stated that students who were taught through role play had a better outcome than those who received instruction through information gaps. It happens because of the technique used. Role play allows students to experiment with how they can be more involved in teaching and learning. In other words, the students' ability to speak is improved through role play. According to Krebt (2017), role play was found to enhance the performance of Iraqi EFL students in their speaking exam. As a result, the students who were in the experimental group appeared to be successful because they engaged in group work and peer work through role play techniques. The present study's findings further support the idea that role-playing activities create an environment that is both stimulating and fascinating for students to succeed in. This environment helps students focus greater attention while they are learning and encourages them to engage in role-playing exercises. The students establish a new identity and learn to communicate in a foreign language via role-playing strategies.

Mulyana (2020) stated in her research that she believes that teaching students to improve their speaking skills through role play can be enjoyable. Role play is believed to have several positive effects on their speaking ability such as making them feel more confident, expanding their vocabulary and improving their pronunciation. The students significantly increase their speaking skills through role play, and their pronunciation is also becoming fluent enough. They gain greater confidence to perform in situations that are created based on actual life. From the observation conducted by Seputra (2022), it was found that students showed to be more motivated to speak English, converse in English more frequently, able to provide feedback to other speakers, and use more vocabulary to make their speaking come alive when role playing. The analysis's findings also revealed that the students used role play to speak more confidently and fluently than before.

During an interview done by Asrifan (2022), he discovered that students felt role play was enjoyable, helped them speak confidently, and boosted their excitement. It was supported by Soendoro (2021) who stated that the role-play activity can enhance students' enthusiasm and experience, and provide a difficult

learning environment for speaking, whereby students have an opportunity to practise speaking in a variety of contexts and social roles through role play during speaking lessons. Hence, students in role plays are tasked with facing real-life situations or scenarios that can be distressing, unfamiliar, or complex and must consider their personal feelings towards others and their circumstances. According to Dorathy & Mahalakshmi (2011), role play is a strategy in which students are exposed to a case or situation in a real or made-up environment and are required to act it out in a role. The use of role play also fosters a conducive learning environment that encourages learners to engage in real-life discussions. Indirectly, it can boost students' confidence while improving their speaking abilities.

## Research Methodology

The main objectives of the study were to explore the perceptions of the students towards role play methods and to identify how role play affects students' communicative abilities. Hence, this research used quantitative descriptive research methods whereby this research involved the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of the study. Regarding the collection of data, the researchers provided a set of questionnaires that was adopted from experts who did similar research, Wulandari et al. (2021). There were 20 items in the questionnaire which were adapted to correspond with the studied area, respondents, and the objectives of the research. The reliability test was conducted using SPSS (version 22.0) to figure out the questionnaires' Cronbach Alpha values.

60 respondents who participated in this research were semester three engineering students of Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, Dungun, Terengganu. All these students are taking Communicative English Courses throughout their three years of study in this polytechnic.

The questionnaire was designed using Google Form, and the link to the questionnaire was given to the respondents for them to answer the questions. The information gathered from the online survey was compiled onto a data spreadsheet and examined. Descriptive statistics such as percentage of frequency, mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the results and the findings were presented using tables.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

There were 60 students used as participants in this research. The questionnaires consist of three parts, which are students' perception towards role play, students' confidence level in using role play, and level of students' speaking skills in using role play in the classroom. The questionnaire's results are presented in the following Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Table 1

*Students' Perception Towards Role Play*

No	Item	SD f%	D	A	SA	Mean M	Std. Dev
1.	I am interested in the use of role-play.	1.7	8.3	50	40	3.28	0.69
2.	Role-play gives extensive speaking practice to the students.	3.3	3.3	48.3	45	3.35	0.71
3.	Role-play allows students to speak naturally.	1.7	6.7	51.7	40	3.30	0.67
4.	Role-play develops students' creativity.	1.7	0	56.7	41.7	3.38	0.58
5.	I believe that I can get a better progress in learning by having role-play.	3.3	6.7	48.3	41.7	3.28	0.74
6.	I pay attention when my friends perform their play.	1.7	3.3	43.3	51.7	3.45	0.65
7.	I always prepare the play very well when I act as the player.	1.7	3.3	55	40	3.33	0.63

8.	Role-play helps me in understanding the speaking materials.	1.7	5	51.7	41.7	3.33	0.66
9.	I prefer to do role-play when learning speaking rather than just read dialogue with the friends.	1.7	8.3	50	40	3.28	0.69
10.	With the role-play, I feel that speaking lessons become more interesting and challenging	1.7	3.3	53.3	41.7	3.35	0.63
11.	Role-play gives me the opportunity to speak up in front of the class	1.7	8.3	45	45	3.33	0.71

Note: SD- Strongly Disagree, D- Disagree, A- Disagree, SA- Strongly Agree

Using role play as one of the assessment tools in a communicative classroom allows educators to diversify their teaching styles when it comes to teaching speaking in a foreign language class. Students may have different experiences in using role play in an English classroom. Students' perception towards the use of role play in the communicative classroom is very important as it can measure the quality of assessment to a certain level. Based on the results in Table 1, it is found that most of the students gave positive perceptions towards the use of role play in communicative English classrooms. Students expressed an interest in using role play as one of the speaking activities (*Item 10, M=3.28, SD=0.69*) since it gives them plenty of speaking practice (*Item 10, M=3.35, SD=0.71*). It provides them with the opportunity to apply their language knowledge in real-life situations in the play and improve their fluency and confidence level. They also believed that role play can develop their creativity (*Item 4, M=3.38, SD=0.58*) by allowing them to adopt different roles or characters and participate in scenarios or situations that require them to think imaginatively and creatively. Besides, the students also agreed that with role play, speaking classroom became more interesting and challenging (*Item 10, M=3.35, SD=0.63*) and it can be an effective technique for understanding and comprehending speaking materials (*Item 8, M=3.33, SD=0.66*). Role plays challenge students to think and express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions efficiently. They learn to communicate with clarity, use appropriate language and gestures and adapt their speech to different situations and characters. The findings show that role play helps the students learn English more effectively because they always prepare the play thoroughly when they take on a role or character (*Item 7, M=3.33, SD=0.63*). Additionally, the students believed that acting gives them a chance to speak in front of the class (*Item 11, M=3.33, SD=0.71*). By simulating real-life situations, the students can practice using the language authentically, and incorporate appropriate expressions, idioms, and phrases into their speech. This contextualized practice helps improve their accuracy in language production.

Table 2

*Students' Confidence Level in Using Role Play*

No	Item	SD f%	D	A	SA	Mean M	Std. Dev
1.	I feel confident in presenting role play.	1.7	18.3	51.7	28.3	3.07	0.73
2.	I get more experience through role play.	1.7	5	46.7	46.7	3.38	0.67
3.	Through role play, I can be more active to speak.	1.7	20	43.3	35	3.12	0.78
4.	I am more motivated to speak by using role play.	1.7	18.3	45	35	3.13	0.77
5.	I am more comfortable speaking in English through role play.	3.3	10	53.3	33.3	3.17	0.74

Note: SD- Strongly Disagree, D- Disagree, A- Disagree, SA- Strongly Agree

Self-confidence enables students to manage difficulties with ease. Resilient students can rise quickly when something might spark their interest in learning, rather than being paralyzed by frustration or failure. After analyzing Table 2, based on the students' confidence level in using role play, it is revealed that most students said that role play gives them more experience (*Item 2, M=3.38, SD=0.67*) and makes them feel more comfortable speaking English when they involved in this activity (*Item 5, M=3.17, SD=0.74*). By taking on a role or character, the students can temporarily detach themselves from their own identity and feel less self-conscious about making mistakes, allowing them to focus more on communication and fluency.

Apart from that, the students said that they are more motivated to speak through role play (*Item 4, M=3.13, SD=0.77*) since they have friends together with them in that play. Besides, through role play, the students believed that they are more active to speak (*Item 3, M=3.12, SD=0.78*). Role play offers students many opportunities to speak. As they take on different roles and interact with other students in the role play activity, the students are continuously prompted to communicate, express ideas, and engage in dialogue. The finding also indicates that most students feel confident when performing role play in class (*Item 1, M=3.07, SD=0.73*). This is maybe because they were performing the role play with their peers.



Table 3

*Level of Students' Speaking Ability in Using Role Play*

No	Item	SD f%	D	A	SA	Mean M	Std. Dev
1.	I learn some new expression used in my friends' play.	1.7	3.3	40	55	3.48	0.65
2.	My speaking fluency has improved through role-play.	1.7	10	56.7	31.7	3.18	0.68
3.	My speaking accuracy has improved through role-play.	1.7	10	53.3	35	3.22	0.69
4.	I can have pronunciation practice fluency through role-play.	1.7	3.3	56.7	38.3	3.32	0.62

Note: SD- Strongly Disagree, D- Disagree, A- Disagree, SA- Strongly Agree

Students' proficiency in learning the English language is enhanced when role plays are used as one of the speaking strategies. By creating various roles and imitating conversational interactions in real-life scenarios, students are encouraged to use the language naturally and spontaneously. Students feel more active and engaged when interacting because they can connect the language to actual events. Based on the analysis in Table 3, which measures the level of students' speaking abilities in using role play, the results show that the students learn new expressions from their classmates during the role play (*Item 1, M=3.48, SD=0.65*). During this activity, the students typically attempted to portray and express their characters accurately. Thus, they may unconsciously use language expressions, idioms, or slang that are common among native speakers or contexts. By viewing and participating in their peers' language use, the students may pick up new terms that go beyond the formal language taught in textbooks. Besides, the majority of the students agreed that role play can improve their fluency (*Item 2, M=3.18, SD=0.68*) since they practice speaking frequently when they performed role play in class. In addition, the students also stated that their speaking accuracy (*Item 3, M=3.22, SD=0.69*) and pronunciation (*Item 4, M=3.32, SD=0.62*) have improved through role play. They have lots of speaking practices and become more proficient at applying grammar rules, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and appropriately structuring their sentences. This greater practice results in enhanced accuracy and fluency in their spoken English.

### Discussion

Overall, the results of the present study showed a positive attitude toward role play. Most of the students pay attention when their friends perform their play. This shows that role play makes the students more intrigued by the class activity. They are more focused and engaged in the lesson where they want to see their friends' performance and indirectly learn something from the play. This finding supports the research by Lutfi et al. (2018) who have found that the role play activity improves the students' motivation level which it can even make low-motivated students more interested in the class activity and took part in the role play. Thus, it is apparent that role play brings about a supportive and attentive audience and stimulates a positive learning environment in the classroom.

From the findings, we can see that the majority of the students perceive that the use of role play allows the students to develop their creativity. Since the students are given different roles based on real-life situations to perform the role play, they need to be creative and

innovative in preparing and practicing the role play such as different roles or characters, vocabulary and sentence structure used in script writing, props, setting, and more. They may use their own background knowledge, experience, and imagination when preparing for the role play. Besides, they can go beyond the classroom boundaries and recognize the applicability in managing challenges in the real world (Bahriyeva, 2021). This supportive environment encourages the students to indulge in the lesson actively and use the English language which may help them improve their speaking skills.

In an ESL classroom, it is crucial for the students to use the target language, especially in speaking. Thus, this study proves that the role play activity can inspire the students to use the English language particularly when they perform the play. In this study, most of the students agreed that role play gives extensive speaking practice, and they feel that the speaking lessons become more interesting and challenging. Lestari & Sridatun (2020) claimed that the students will get more time to speak through role play. When the students receive frequent speaking practice in the target language, it can enhance the students' speaking ability. These findings are aligned with previous research by Endahati (2020) who discovered that students' speaking skills can be sharpened by utilizing the role play technique.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the students have a positive perception of the role play in enhancing their speaking ability. The role play stimulates the students to speak in front of an audience and this allows them to improve their speaking skills in a meaningful way.

In this study, it is found that most of the students stated that they can get more experience which is the result of becoming more comfortable and motivated in speaking in English through role play. The role play method encourages the students to use the target language in relevant scenarios set by the instructor. When the students take part in different roles which are created based on real-life problems, they will obtain experience in handling diverse situations and at the same time familiarize themselves with the use of new language forms and functions which help them to improve their confidence levels in speaking (Tipmontree & Tasanameelarp, 2020). Moreover, many studies such as those by Asrifan (2022), Wahyuni (2022), and Wicaksana & Fitirani (2020) also support this finding that the students' bravery can be boosted by using the role play method in speaking class. When the students use the English language during the role play practices and performances, the students can slowly get rid of their negative feeling towards the language (Lutfi et al., 2018). Hence, the students become more self-assured and enthusiastic when speaking in English.

Another noteworthy result from the current study is that most of the students believe that their speaking fluency and accuracy are improving when the role play technique is employed in speaking activity. Fluency and accuracy in speaking in the English language are essential to enable ESL learners to communicate effectively. A study by Togimin & Jaafar (2020) uncovered that students were able to deliver clear and organized content after performing several role play activities. They were able to speak and respond to different topics efficiently and present their ideas without struggling much compared to their performance before they partook in the role play activities. This is because, through role play, the students can polish their pronunciation and build up their vocabulary (Lestari & Sridatun, 2020). The majority of the students in this study agreed that they can learn new expressions used in role play. They will not only know the expressions but also the pronunciation and how to use them properly in a situation. In addition, Gómez-Poyato et al. (2020) found that, unlike the traditional method, the role

play method can facilitate the students' learning in achieving higher academic performance and reducing the perception of content complexity.



## Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the use of role play offers a captivating and exciting context for students to thrive in. This context promotes the students to participate in role play activities that can enhance their speaking skills. It is evident that fluency, comprehension, context, and engaging discourse can be benefited through role play. To conclude, this study found that students have a positive reaction towards the role play technique and reinforce the notion that many favourable impacts affect the students' speaking skills through role play. Some of the effects learned from the study are the increase of self-assurance, broad vocabulary, and better pronunciation. Utilizing role play in Communicative English class encourages the students to be involved actively in the class activity. They enjoy the lesson and enhance their language competence as well.

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