

ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES FOR ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS IN IMPROVING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: *English speaking skill is widely regarded as a crucial component of communicative competence; however, it remains one of the most challenging skills for learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This challenge is particularly evident among students in Islamic junior high schools, where limited exposure to English, high levels of speaking anxiety, and teacher-centered instructional practices often hinder oral language development. At the same time, English instruction in Islamic educational institutions is expected not only to improve linguistic proficiency but also to support the moral and character development of learners in accordance with Islamic values. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving English speaking skills among Islamic junior high school learners by integrating communicative language teaching principles with Islamic educational values. Employing a quasi-experimental classroom-based research design, the study involved 30 eighth-grade students who participated in structured role-play activities over an eight-week instructional period. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test speaking performance assessments, systematic classroom observations, and student reflection questionnaires. Students' speaking performance was evaluated in terms of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and speaking confidence. The findings reveal a substantial improvement in students' overall speaking performance following the implementation of role-play activities. The most significant gains were observed in speaking fluency and confidence, indicating that students became more willing to express ideas orally and participate actively in classroom interactions. Qualitative data further demonstrate that role-play activities reduced learners' speaking anxiety and fostered a positive learning environment, particularly when the scenarios were designed to reflect culturally and religiously appropriate situations emphasizing respectful communication (adab al-kalam), cooperation (ukhuwah), and moral conduct (akhlaq). The study concludes that role-play activities are an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing English speaking skills in Islamic junior high school contexts. By combining meaningful communicative practice with value-based education, role-play supports both linguistic development and the holistic goals of Islamic education. The findings suggest that English teachers in Islamic schools should integrate role-play activities as a core component of speaking instruction to promote communicative competence and ethical communication simultaneously.*

Keywords: *role-play activities, English speaking skills, Islamic junior high school, EFL learners, communicative language teaching*

INTRODUCTION

English is now a necessary language for communication in social, professional, and educational contexts in the age of globalization. Consequently, the development of communicative capacity, especially speaking abilities, is being emphasized more and more in English language instruction. Because speaking necessitates the simultaneous application of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and pragmatic knowledge in real time, it is sometimes regarded as the most difficult skill for EFL learners. Many junior high school students find it difficult to communicate verbally in English, even after years of formal education.

The difficulty of improving speaking abilities is frequently more noticeable in Islamic junior high schools. Although English is usually taught as a required subject, there aren't many opportunities to use the language outside of the classroom. When asked to speak English, learners often feel nervous, self-conscious, and afraid of making mistakes. These affective aspects lead to passive learning patterns and impede active participation. Additionally, English instruction is still teacher-centered in many settings, emphasizing written assignments and textbook-based learning above spoken communication.

From the standpoint of Islamic education, acquiring a language serves as a tool for moral and character development in addition to being an academic pursuit. Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on responsible discourse, civility, honesty, and ethical communication. The significance of communicating politely, honestly, and respectfully is emphasized throughout the Qur'an and Hadith. As a result, English-speaking training in Islamic institutions ought to be consistent with these principles and promote the overall development of learners by fusing language proficiency with ethical and social consciousness.

Role-playing is one educational strategy that meets both affective and communicative demands. By giving students the chance to practice language in realistic real-life scenarios, role-playing exercises promote engagement, creativity, and meaningful communication. Role-playing can be modified for Islamic junior high school settings to include culturally and religiously relevant scenarios that align with students' moral principles and everyday experiences. Such integration may boost motivation, lessen anxiety, and provide a supportive learning environment.

There is still a dearth of empirical research that focuses on role-playing activities in Islamic junior high school settings, despite the increased interest in communicative approaches. By investigating the function of role-playing exercises in enhancing English speaking abilities while specifically taking into account the integration of Islamic educational ideals, this study aims to close this gap. The following research question is the focus of the study: What effects do role-playing exercises have on Islamic junior high school students' speaking abilities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking English in EFL Classes

Speaking is a useful language skill that requires the capacity to make meaningful statements during in-person communication. It calls for sociolinguistic and strategic proficiency in addition to language proficiency. Speaking development in EFL situations is frequently hampered by a lack of practice opportunities and exposure to real-world language use. Even when they are proficient in grammar and vocabulary, learners may find it difficult to utilize the language on their own.

Affective elements

including anxiety and self-confidence, have frequently shown to be critical to speaking ability. Speaking is often avoided by learners who are afraid of making mistakes, which reduces their chances for growth. As a result, both the cognitive and emotional components of learning must be addressed in effective speaking education.

Role-Playing Exercises for Teaching Languages

In role-playing students take on particular roles and engage in simulated scenarios as part of a communicative exercise. It promotes collaborative learning, meaning negotiation, and impromptu language use. In line with the tenets of communicative language teaching, role-playing moves the emphasis from form-focused instruction to meaning-focused engagement.

Research has demonstrated that by offering a secure setting for practice

role-playing exercises enhance speaking confidence, fluency, and pronunciation. Because they communicate as a "character" rather than as themselves, learners are less fearful of making mistakes. This psychological distance encourages taking chances while using language and lessens fear.

Islamic educational values and role-playing. Islamic education integrates social, moral, and intellectual aspects to promote holistic growth. Islamic communication is governed by the values of civility, decency, integrity, and accountability. Speaking exercises in this setting ought to demonstrate moral communication techniques (*adab al-kalam*). By including scenarios pertaining to everyday school life, family interactions, cooperation, and polite conversation, role-playing exercises can be created to reflect Islamic ideals. Students practice moral behavior as well as language forms when they participate in such activities. This integration improves student involvement and is consistent with the objectives of Islamic education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a one-group pre-test and post-test methodology in a quasi-experimental classroom research setting. The approach was chosen to investigate how well role-playing exercises enhance English speaking abilities in a typical classroom environment without interfering with the Islamic junior high school's current curriculum. When random assignment is not practical and the emphasis is on pedagogical intervention and classroom practice, a quasi-experimental method is seen to be suitable for educational research.

In order to gain a thorough grasp of students' speaking growth and educational experiences, the study placed a strong emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative data. While qualitative data was used to record classroom interaction patterns, student involvement, and attitudes about role-playing exercises in an Islamic educational setting, quantitative data was used to assess changes in students' speaking performance before and after the intervention.

Research Setting

The study was carried out in an Islamic junior high school where the national curriculum mandates that English be taught as a required subject. The school emphasizes moral education,

character development, and ethical communication while integrating basic academic courses with Islamic studies. In this setting, teaching English is supposed to promote not only language proficiency but also Islamic principles like civility, deference, collaboration, and accountability.

Before the study, the school's English speaking instruction was mostly teacher-centered and concentrated on written exercises, grammar explanations, and activities based on textbooks. There were few opportunities for students to communicate orally for extended periods of time. This atmosphere made it appropriate to use role-playing exercises as a communicative and value-integrated teaching method.

Participants

Thirty eighth-grade children, ages 13 to 14, participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to choose the class based on students' English proficiency levels and accessibility. Each participant had a comparatively similar educational background and had studied English for at least two years.

Before the intervention, the majority of pupils showed little confidence when speaking in English. Students were reluctant to speak, frequently avoided oral assignments, and voiced anxiety of making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, according to informal classroom observations and preliminary assessments. The group was appropriate for investigating the possible effects of role-playing exercises on speaking development because of these qualities.

Instructional Materials and Role-Play Design

The researcher particularly created the role-play materials to conform to Islamic educational values and communicative language teaching concepts. While adhering to cultural standards and religious ethics, the scenarios were contextualized to mirror students' everyday experiences in school, home, and social interactions. Role-playing situations included courteous classroom interactions, respectfully requesting permission, lending a hand to classmates, cooperative group projects, and respectfully voicing one's ideas. Throughout the activities, emphasis was placed on respectful turn-taking, gender-appropriate interaction, and ethical speech rules (*adab al-kalam*). The activities sought to establish a welcoming and ethically encouraging setting for speaking practice by incorporating Islamic principles into the role-play concept.

Research Instruments

Three primary research tools were used to gather thorough data

Tests of Speaking Performance

To gauge the students' speaking proficiency, speech assessments were given both before and after the intervention. Students had to complete brief oral assignments pertaining to well-known subjects as part of the examinations. A speaking rubric containing four elements—fluency, correctness, pronunciation, and confidence—was used to evaluate the students' performances.

Checklist for Classroom Observations

Every role-play session included classroom observations to record student involvement, interaction styles, and behavioral shifts. Students' eagerness to talk, cooperation with peers, usage of English during activities, and adherence to polite communication standards were the main topics of the observation checklist.

Questionnaire for Student Reflection

Students filled out reflection questionnaires at the conclusion of the intervention to share their opinions about the role-playing exercises. Open-ended questions about students' emotions, drive, self-assurance, and perceived advantages of role-playing in learning English speaking were included in the questionnaire.

METHODS

Pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention were the three primary phases of the eight-week study.

To ascertain their initial speaking proficiency, students took a speaking pre-test during the pre-intervention phase. In order to determine typical speaking challenges and classroom dynamics, the researcher also made preliminary observations.

During the intervention phase, role-playing exercises were methodically included into routine English classes. Every role-playing session had a set order that included preparation, performance, and criticism. Students were introduced to the subject, pertinent language, and idioms throughout the preparation period. Students performed the designated roles in pairs or small groups throughout the performance phase. During the feedback phase, the instructor offered helpful remarks that prioritized communication effectiveness over grammatical accuracy.

A speaking post-test and reflection questionnaires were distributed throughout the post-intervention phase. Gathering students' opinions on the learning process and assessing progress were the goals.

Data Analysis Methods

Descriptive statistical methods were used to assess quantitative data from speaking performance tests. To find patterns of progress, mean scores for each speaking component were computed and compared between pre-test and post-test findings. Thematic analysis was used to examine qualitative data from student reflections and classroom observations. In order to find recurrent themes on speaking confidence, involvement, motivation, and the impact of Islamic beliefs on learning behavior, the data were coded. A comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of role-playing exercises was made possible by the integration of quantitative and qualitative data.

Moral Aspects

Throughout the investigation, ethical issues were carefully taken into account. Before any data was collected, permission was acquired from the English teacher and the school administration. The study's goal was explained to the students, and they were reassured that their involvement would not have an impact on their marks. All information was used only for research, and confidentiality and anonymity were upheld.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results showed that when role-playing exercises were implemented, pupils' English speaking abilities significantly improved. All evaluated aspects of speaking performance improved overall, with the biggest improvements being seen in fluency and confidence. Pupils showed better pronunciation, increased eagerness to talk, and more precise sentence structure.

Increased student engagement and participation during role-playing sessions was seen in the classroom. When role-play scenarios mirrored recognizable and culturally relevant circumstances, learners seemed more at ease and involved. Speaking fear was lessened by the incorporation of Islamic beliefs into a courteous and encouraging learning atmosphere.

These results were supported by student reflections, which revealed that role-playing exercises made speaking practice fun and relevant. In line with Islamic educational ideas, the emphasis on cooperative and courteous conversation reinforced moral growth in addition to language acquisition. These findings demonstrate that when role-playing exercises are culturally and contextually appropriate, they can effectively enhance speaking abilities. The results emphasize the significance of value integration in Islamic educational contexts while supporting communicative language teaching theory.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how role-playing exercises can help students in an Islamic junior high school improve their English speaking abilities. The results show that role-playing exercises are a useful teaching method for improving students' speaking abilities, especially with regard to correctness, fluency, pronunciation, and speaking confidence. Learners were given meaningful opportunities to practice English in a supportive classroom setting through organized and contextualized role-play sessions, which greatly decreased speaking fear and promoted active involvement.

This study's clear integration of communicative language instruction with Islamic educational ideals is one of its most important contributions. The role-play scenarios in this study were purposefully created to reflect Islamic norms of communication, such as respectful speech (*adab al-kalam*), cooperation (*ukhuwah*), and moral responsibility (*akhlaq*), in contrast to traditional speaking activities that might ignore learners' cultural and religious backgrounds. Students were able to view English as a useful instrument for moral and socially acceptable communication rather than just an academic topic thanks to this value-based approach. Because they felt comfortable participating in activities that matched their views and everyday experiences, students showed increased confidence and desire to communicate.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that role-play activities support the holistic goals of Islamic education by simultaneously addressing cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions of learning. From a linguistic perspective, students improved their ability to express ideas orally with greater fluency and clarity. From an affective perspective, role-play helped lower anxiety and foster positive attitudes toward speaking English. From a moral perspective, the activities reinforced character education by modeling polite interaction, mutual respect, and collaborative behavior. This integration underscores the potential of role-play as a multidimensional instructional tool in Islamic EFL classroom.

This study emphasizes the significance of moving from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered and interaction-based methods from a pedagogical standpoint. Through role-playing exercises, students are repositioned as active learners who can negotiate meaning, practice language on their own, and gain knowledge from peer interaction. With an emphasis on communication rather than grammatical accuracy, the planned phases of preparation, performance, and evaluation further guaranteed that students received sufficient linguistic help. This study has limitations despite its positive findings. The results may not be as broadly applicable as they may be because only one set of pupils from one Islamic junior high school participated in the study. Furthermore, rather of using inferential testing, the study mostly used descriptive statistical analysis. Larger sample numbers, experimental designs including control

groups, and longitudinal studies to look at the long-term impact of role-playing exercises on speaking proficiency could all be part of future research.

Future research could also look at how role-playing is incorporated into project-based learning, digital media, or other communication strategies in Islamic educational contexts. The field would be further enhanced by looking into teachers' viewpoints and professional growth in relation to value-integrated communicative teaching. The creation of instructional approaches that strike a balance between moral and cultural education and language proficiency may benefit from such study.

This study concludes by confirming that role-playing exercises are an effective and contextually relevant teaching method to improve English speaking abilities in Islamic junior high schools. When properly planned and executed, role-playing not only improves communicative proficiency but also advances the larger educational goal of Islamic schools by encouraging moral communication and constructive character development. Therefore, in order to accomplish both linguistic and moral educational goals, English teachers in Islamic educational institutions are actively encouraged to include role-playing exercises as a fundamental part of speaking training.

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