


English Speaking Fluency and Confidence for Global Competitive Work: The Highlight of Authentic Role-play Activity for University Students

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: English as Foreign Language (EFL), role-play activity, speaking fluency, Speaking confidence, university students.</p>	<p>English language is increasingly important for many people around the world to engage and communicate with one another as the globe quickly transitions to the new era of digitalization and limitless communication. The study explores the descriptive elaboration and deeper understanding on the use of role-playing activities to boost students' fluency and confidence in English speaking among university students. The study used a descriptive qualitative method which applied various methods to collect the data. The present study employed class observation on speaking indicators, analysis on students' reflective learning journal, and a semi-structured interview to some students. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes that emerged from the data. There were 50 students observed and 10 students in English for communication class at Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, were interviewed to confirm about the highlighted aspects journaling related to the specific aspect on role-play activities. The findings of this study highlight the impact of role-playing activities on improving students' fluency in English speaking, enhancing students' confidence through repeated practice, and reducing the speaking anxiety to be ready for the global competitive English skill.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

English speaking has become a critical need for university students to be ready for the competitive and the international job markets in today's globalized world. The English language is becoming more and more crucial in the university curriculum. The students do not only need the general English to remind them about the English linguistics aspects, but they also need the English practical class. Thus, most of the universities in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) countries facilitate two English subject in each department. For instance, in Communication Department, the university can provide Regular English Class in the initial semester and English for Communication class for the upcoming semester. As practical English class involves conversation activity, English speaking and listening in communication activity dominates other skills such as reading and writing. The practical conversation is essential to students' linguistic and social development. It was also supported by Perren et al

(2017) who confirmed that language and communication skills are the most crucial aspect of people's social life as people need to connect with various characters of people in a society.

However, many students in EFL countries are still struggle with fluency and speaking anxiety. That problem sometimes hinders their communicative competence. Lack of confidence and nervousness when speaking in foreign language hinder the process of learning and mastering English. The journey of mastering English communication skills is a bit complicated by the fact that most students prefer to speak in their original tongue in the class. Even in English class, the university students have limited chance to practice their English speaking in everyday situations (Ishak and Aziz, 2022). That situation makes the process of becoming proficient in English communication skills is quite challenging. Moreover, students limited English vocabularies and lack of exposure to the language learning setting, are some of the reasons which might contribute to the discomfort and challenges of speaking foreign language (Hashim and Isa, 2012). It is also supported by the research conducted by Zakaria et. al (2019) that students' self-esteem can also lead to less confidence in student's ability to communicate. Thus, classroom strategies that promote active engagement and stimulate active communicative experiences are essentially needed for addressing students' progress in communication. As the result, the lecturers play an important role in designing active class activity and assisting students to improve their communication skills.

Students' communicative needs are dealing with daily activities, expressing ideas, presenting information, and obtaining a deeper international understanding. The practices of students' communicative needs are wrapped up into targeted language acquisition. According to Vani et. al (2022), the acquisition of the targeted language is the ability of a speaker to use the foreign language productively and meaningfully in a truthful communication setting. In the process English language acquisition, role-playing activities can be more helpful to practice English language in fun and meaningful way. The students will get countless opportunities to do collaborative tasks and shared information. Togimin and Jaafar (2020) also stated that role-playing activities can simply improve students speaking abilities to practice real-life conversations in EFL Classroom.

Role-playing activity can be elaborated as a learner-centred activity that allows students to practice English speaking in real-life contexts. Moreover, role-play can also be said as a learning technique which has been identified as an effective method to enhance students' fluency and confidence (Harmer, 2022). The role-playing technique in the educational teaching brings out the indispensable and unique value technique within the current learning and teaching processes. Role-playing activities in the class stimulate students' fluency and confidence in real-life scenarios where students experienced various contexts with different characters and communicate in guided dialogues. Unlike the scripted speaking exercises, role-playing can emphasize on improvisation and contextual language which are critical for fluency development. According to Bygate (2021), fluency encompasses learners' ability to produce language accurately as well as responding appropriately to conversational inquires. The continuous interaction in speaking improvisation can help students to develop their English fluency skills while practicing the correct pronunciation. Additionally, the facial expressions and gestures are also practiced well in role-play activity

to boost students' confidence. The development of speaking competence is mostly influenced by the students' confidence. But, most of the Indonesian students still experience fear of making mistakes and anxiety which negatively give impact to their tone, speed, and voice of speaking. That condition also affects the development of students' ability to communicate effectively (Krashen, 2020). Speaking practice with a group of students can decrease students' fear and anxiety which presenting a low-pressure learning atmosphere. It is also supported by the research conducted by Larsen - Freeman (2019) who highlighted the low-pressure learning environment as the key point of shaping the speaking confidence. Shortly, the role-playing allows students to express English in a supportive setting to release the performance anxiety. The social contextual personas used in role-play activities also enable students to detach from personal insecurities (Dörnyei, 2021). Thus, the present study is trying to explore the use of role-playing activities in practical English class for university students. Then, the narrative exploration is analysed to find out the improvement of English fluency and confidence in preparing students with global competitive work field in digitalization and world without boundaries era.

Literatur Riview

Communication Skills

Communication skills are acknowledged as one of the fundamental 21st-century learning abilities that help considerably to preparing persons for the needs of a worldwide workforce. According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), effective communication included using a variety of mediums and technology to transmit messages in a variety of cultural contexts, listening intently, and expressing ideas effectively. In the global competitive job market, effective communication skills are critical for collaboration, problem-solving, and innovation, which are increasingly valued by employers (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). As industries become more global, professionals must be adept at intercultural communication to work effectively with diverse characters of the team (Jackson, 2020).

The incorporation of communication skills into global frameworks of 21st-century competences highlights their significance even more. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) highlights communication as one of the "4Cs" alongside collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (P21, 2019). According to this approach, communication encompasses more than just speaking and writing; it also includes the capacity to effectively use digital technologies, convey ideas in multimodal formats, and modify messages for different audiences. Scholars like Dede (2020) argued that effective communication is essential for civic engagement, lifelong learning, and professional success. As a result, developing these abilities helps people grow in fast-paced workplaces and contribute significantly to society.

Incorporating communication skills into educational curriculum remains a priority for fostering global work competencies. Research showed that project-based learning and collaborative task-based significantly enhance students' communication capabilities (Bellanca & Brandt, 2019). For instance, students can practise giving, negotiating, and receiving feedback in interactive learning environments that incorporate digital tools, simulating real-world situations (Gleason, 2018). In order to prepare students for complicated

professional relationships, educators must implement new instructional practices that offer authentic communication experiences (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Education institutions must place a high priority on helping students develop strong communication skills as digital revolution reshapes businesses. This will help students stay competitive in a global workforce (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Role-play Technique

The role-play technique has emerged as a widely used instructional method to improve speaking competence in language learning, particularly in preparing students for global workplace demands. According to Ladousse (2020), By simulating real-life communication situations, role-playing gives students a dynamic setting in which to practise using language in a variety of professional contexts. Students gain fluency and confidence through situational dialogues and problem-solving exercises, which are essential elements of effective speaking (Richards & Rodgers, 2019). Thornbury (2021) also highlighted that fluency mostly improved by meaningful interaction rather than mechanical drills which is presented by role-play integration in the classroom activity.

Role-playing is one type of experiential learning strategies that promotes critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability skills, those skills are necessary for success in a cutthroat global labour market (Simpson, 2019). One of the significant benefits of role-play is its ability to develop multiple dimensions of speaking competence, including fluency, accuracy, and pragmatic competence. Goh and Burns (2019) noted that role-play encourages learners to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation while also considering the social and cultural context of communication. Furthermore, engaging in interactive exercises fosters the growth of turn-taking techniques, negotiation abilities, and persuasive argumentation, which are all crucial components of effective business communication (Zhang & Cheng, 2021). Role-play also improves students' adaptability to diverse roles and prepares them to communicate effectively with different audiences in various professional settings (Alonso & Graham, 2023).

Through active participation and group learning, role-playing has been shown to be useful in enhancing speaking proficiency. According to Ellis (2020), role-play integrates authentic language use with real-world relevance. It also helps students overcome anxiety and build self-confidence. Additionally, it facilitates opportunities for immediate feedback from peers and instructors, which is crucial for refining speaking skills (Derwing & Munro, 2021). Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2022) emphasised how role-playing encourages students to utilise language in flexible ways by practicing a variety of speech acts in dynamic situations, which helps them become pragmatically competent. Moreover, a study by Dörnyei (2021) emphasized the motivational boost that role-playing activities offer, enhancing students' willingness to communicate and their overall engagement in speaking tasks. Consequently, role-play is a transformative pedagogical strategy that prepares students to meet the demands of global communication and professional interaction.

Speaking competence

Speaking competence is an essential part of communication abilities, which are crucial for competitiveness in the global workplace. According to Burns and Siegel (2018), speaking

competence involves the ability to articulate ideas fluently, accurately, and appropriately across various social and professional contexts. Effective speaking abilities are crucial for client engagements, teamwork, and negotiating in today's globalised workforce. Employees can effectively resolve conflicts and articulate difficult concepts by improving these abilities (Richards and Rodgers, 2019). English-speaking competence has become increasingly important due to the increasing demand for international collaboration, and it is now a requirement for success in multinational corporations (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2022).

The indicators of speaking competence are categorized into fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness. Fluency refers to the speaker's ability to produce speech with least hesitation. Meanwhile, accuracy concerns on correct usage of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Thornbury, 2021). Moreover, appropriateness relates to selecting language that fits the context, audience, and purpose of communication. Further, the ability to engage in spontaneous conversations and handle complex discussions is progressively regarded as a key performance indicator in professional speaking (Goh & Burns, 2019). According to Zhang and Cheng (2021), in order to assess speaking proficiency in international settings, evaluation frameworks place a strong emphasis on interactional proficiency, intelligibility, and the tactical application of discourse markers. In a broader context, companies and educators are concentrating on developing immersive learning and professional environments in order to foster speaking competency. It has been demonstrated that interactive learning strategies, like task-based language instruction and problem-solving exercises, improve speaking abilities by mimicking authentic communication situations (Ellis, 2020). Additionally, by offering opportunities for self-reflection and feedback, digital technologies that support oral presentations and virtual debates help people improve their speaking abilities (Derwing & Munro, 2021). Gaining proficiency in speaking is essential for people hoping to succeed in international employment since it improves their capacity to adjust to various linguistic and cultural environments (Alonso & Graham, 2023).

Results and Discussion

Data requirements

The findings of this study reveal essential insights on the application of authentic role-play activities in fostering university students' fluency and confidence in English speaking. By using thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected through classroom observation, students' reflective journal analysis, and semi-structured interview, there are four significant themes highlighted to elaborate the use of authentic role-play activities as a pedagogical approach on university students' fluency and confidence in English speaking. Those key themes are detailed as follows.

Improved Students' Fluency through Authentic Contexts

One of the most noticeable findings is the improvement of students' fluency in English-speaking. The students reported that role-playing activities during English for Communication class admitted them to practice English in authentic contexts that bring real-life situations and foster a natural flow of speech. In the first role-play activity, the students were guided by a small note. But, by the frequent and scheduled role-play activities, the students started to

enjoy the speaking practice. That statement was supported by the classroom observations which showing that the students could engage in longer and more coherent dialogues as the role-play sessions progressed. Students also confirmed that doing different roles in the role-play scenarios allowed them to practice conversational strategies, including turn-taking, asking for confirmation, and managing communication bridging. This finding aligns with previous studies that underline the importance of contextualized practice in language learning. It was also supported by Littlewood (2018) who emphasizes that authentic conversations practice improves learners' communication competence.

"I felt more engaged to the English-speaking learning when I do the role-play to be someone else in the real-life contexts cause sometimes, I didn't need to be worried about making mistakes." – Student 3

Furthermore, contextual learning assists students to bound classroom activities to the real-world experience and enhance their willingness to communicate with their people in surroundings (Brown and Lee, 2021). The students also reported that in the process of preparing the speaking scenarios, it was not only about the communication and collaboration, but also employ critical thinking and creativity skills to find the best speaking scenario and involve problem-solving skill to decide the best group solution. That is why the role-playing activities accelerated experiential learning as students could stimulate problem-solving scenarios in an encouraging environment. This experiential learning highlighted as the perceptible learning approach which can encourage students to face the global competitive work fields, as the 4C's (Communication, Critical thinking, Creativity, and Collaboration) plus the problem-solving skills in the 21st century learning skills is explored in this learning approach.

This finding aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of contextualized practice in language learning. According to Brown and Lee (2021), engaging students in role-playing activities provides experiential learning opportunities where authentic communication skills are developed.

"We always do the discussion before executing the dialogues script and the setting of the role-play activity. The lecturer gave us some topics to be explored and we need to do further discussion to synchronize the ideas with the group." – Student 5

Additionally, active participation is possible for learners to acquire practical information which is crucial for internalizing language use. In the broadly discussion, Vygotsky (2020) stated that sociocultural theory also emphasizes how crucial social interaction is to students' communication and language development. The theory also underpinned that students learn more effectively when engaged in collaborative and communicative tasks. In addition, research conducted by Wulandari et. al (2019) also found out that role-playing activity helps students to develop their English-speaking abilities as well as improve their confidence in Speaking English, stimulate active engagement, and increase their enthusiasm for learning English.

"When I was acting out a scenario as a business consultant and marketing, I had to think quickly and respond to my classmate's questions. It made me speak more naturally, just like in a real conversation in daily life." – Student 8

The students' enthusiasm in English learning will be in line with the students' creativity in creating the speaking scenario. In the students' reflective journal, most of the students reported that they enjoyed designing the dialogues setting, assigning the roles for each member of the group, and preparing the simple property to present a contextual role-play practice. In similar lines, Richards and Rodgers (2019) contended that contextualized role-play greatly improves linguistic competence and interactive fluency in communicative language instruction. Moreover, Harmer (2022) highlighted the usefulness of role-playing in lowering the cognitive burden associated with language production, allowing learners to focus on fluency and content delivery. Lastly, findings of the present study also underscored the importances of immediate feedback given by the lecturer after the students' role-play activity. The input given by the lecturer was recorded in students' reflective journal as the note for their upcoming role-play activity. The input-output model in second language acquisition in which role-playing activity as a dynamic mechanism for both receiving and producing coherent input. The input is essential for the reinforcement of linguistic competence and fluency.

Enhanced Students' Confidence through Repeated Practice

The present study also found out that role-playing activities significantly boost students' confidence to speaking in English language. Many participants credited the role-play exercises' repetition, which let them practice without worrying about being judged, for their greater self-assurance. In the beginning of the semester as the students' first role-play practice, their voice is still a bit low and not sure of practicing the pronunciation of some English words. Then, when the lecturer explained about the upcoming role-play practices and the task to create the reflective journal after their practice, they felt challenged to speak more confident. Due to the needs of repeated practice, to generate fluent English speakers, the main incentive for the governments of many nations to ensure that students' communication abilities are developed is reflected in their educational policies (Paneerselvam and Mohamad, 2019).

"At first, I was nervous about speaking in front of the class, but after several role-play activities with various topics, I felt more confident to do the monologue as well as the dialogue as parts of the role-play activity." – Student 6

These results are further supported by studies by Liu and Jackson (2021) and MacIntyre et al. (2020), which demonstrate that as students participate in scaffolded and iterative speaking practices, their communicative confidence increases. Role-playing provides repetitive practice in a safe setting, helping students internalize communicative strategies and enhancing their confidence to speak spontaneously. The students' reflective journal recorded the progress of students' English-speaking competences week by week in every class practices.

Furthermore, the finding of this study is also consistent with Bandura's theory in 1997 about self-efficacy which stated that social persuasion and mastery experiences boost

confidence in carrying out particular tasks. In the regular role-play practice, the students were forced to do interaction and discussion with their group and they gained many experiences with different moods of practice. Building on Bandura's paradigm, MacIntyre and Mercer (2019) research examines how students' linguistic self-efficacy is reinforced by prolonged success in speaking tasks, especially in role-playing environments that promote low anxiety. Additionally, Peng and Woodrow (2019) have out that learners internalise favourable self-beliefs about their speaking talents when they are repeatedly exposed to communicative tasks inside role-playing practice. Several students also highlighted the supportive classroom environment where making mistakes were seen as part of the learning process. This observation supports the findings of Thornbury (2021), who argued that reducing the affective filter through engaging and non-threatening activities increases learners' self-assurance in speaking.

"I recorded my progress from the lecturer's feedback and I did realize that everyone in the class were also learning. That made me less worried about making mistakes. It was also supported by the positive affirmation and class environment which can foster my confidence." – Student 1

The students' statement was supported by MacIntyre and Mercer (2019) who posited that confidence in language learners is reinforced through positive reinforcement and feedback. Students received constructive feedback after role-play sessions, are more likely to develop a growth mindset and view mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures. Zhang and Head (2023) emphasized the social dynamics of role-play and contend that peer cooperation and positive reinforcement are essential elements that reduce speaking anxiety and boost confidence in language use.

"By taking different character in role-play activity, I can explore more English expressions in each role. That was also improving my confidence to bring the characters to the audience." – Student 9

Students highlighted that role-playing activities created a low-pressure environment by allowing them to detach from their personal identity and speak through a fictional character. Role-playing activity allows students to assume different personas, which can reduce personal inhibitions and foster a sense of freedom in language use (Harmer, 2020). The students reported that the task of adopting a specific character was turning into an additional challenge to promote the students' self-confidence. The exploration of the figure and character encouraged the students to adapt with the future workforce environment. Lastly, students' intrinsic drive and self-assurance are increased by contextual role engagement with various personas, in which they adopt social roles that are pertinent to their experiences. This connection between role relevance and confidence growth emphasizes the importance of designing role-play scenarios that mirror authentic communicative needs.

Reduced Speaking Anxiety for the Better Global Competitive English Skill

A recurring finding of the study was a reduction in speaking anxiety stated by the students. Most of the students confirmed that they felt more relaxed and willing to participate actively in the class activities. In addition, students highlighted that role-playing activities

created a low-pressure environment by allowing them to detach from their personal identity and speak through a fictional character.

“At the first class’s expectation, I thought that it would be just the same frightening speaking practice. I would avoid speaking unless called on. However, role-play activity made it fun and less stressful.” – Student 10

The reduction in students’ speaking anxiety aligns with research by Horwitz et. al (2020) which indicated that communication activities can mitigate language learning anxiety by presenting a supportive and engaging environment. Role-play activity is one of the class activities that presenting engaging environment to make students more comfortable in delivering their dialogues. Similarly, Gregersen and MacUntyre (2019) focused on the positive emotional situation fostered by role-playing, which can lower affective barriers and allow learners to participate freely.

Another important aspect is the substance of collaborative learning fostered by role-playing activity. Besides, students also reported that the collaborative work in preparing the role-play scenario can reduce the performance burden. It is also supported by Horwitz et. al (2022) who confirmed that peer support and collaborative work are critical factors in reducing performance pressure.

“I was enjoying most of the role-play activities. I can share my performance pressure with the group member by sharing the responsibility.” – Student 9

This finding is consistent with MacIntyre and Mercer (2019) who asserted that peer interaction lowers individual anxiety through collective problem-solving. In addition, providing clear instructions and modelling scenarios in the group before the activity begins can mitigate confusion (Zhang & Head, 2023). Effective scaffolding, including vocabulary and structure rehearsals, ensures that students feel more equipped, reducing anxiety further and improving overall engagement.

“As the speaking practice is the most important, I could explore many new phrases and sometimes combined with idioms without worrying the judgement.” – Student 7

Bellanca & Brandt (2019) explored how task-based activities such role-play planning create opportunities for anxiety-free on language trialling and risk-taking. Role-playing encourages risk-taking in language use, an essential component for developing fluency. Students noted that assuming different roles reduced their anxiety of speaking as they had freedom to try new phrases or sentence structures without fear of being judged. According to Horwitz et al. (2022), reducing the fear of making mistakes can significantly boost speaking performance. This finding is consistent with Ortega (2020), who asserts that creating a playful, low-stress environment promotes more frequent and varied language production.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the use of authentic role-playing as a pedagogical tool significantly enhances students' English-speaking fluency and confidence. By providing contextualized, interactive, and low-anxiety learning opportunities, role-playing contributes to a more engaging and effective language learning experience to prepare university students for the globally competitive workforce. The practical application of real-life scenarios helps bridge the gap

between theoretical knowledge and work demand communication skills, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning process. Furthermore, this approach not only strengthens their linguistic competencies, but also fosters a supportive peer-driven learning culture that values collaboration and continuous improvement. As such, role-playing activities serve as a comprehensive and dynamic learning strategy that can be tailored to meet diverse language learning goals and student needs. In addition, this study underscores the importance of aligning pedagogical strategies with students' psychological needs, particularly in addressing speaking anxiety and boosting self-confidence. The findings highlight that role-playing provides a structured yet flexible environment where learners feel safe to take risks and experiment with language use. This aspect of role-play supports holistic language development by promoting both linguistic competence and emotional resilience, and critical components of effective communication. Classroom environments that integrate these practices can help foster long-term motivation and sustained language practice. Future research could investigate how varying levels of role-play complexity affect different proficiency levels, providing insights into scaffolding techniques that optimize learning outcomes. Further, comparative studies involving digital role-playing platforms may offer valuable perspectives on technology-enhanced language learning. By continuing to explore innovative applications of role-playing, lecturers can expand its potential to meet the evolving needs of language learners in diverse educational contexts.

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