

## Featured Research

---

# The effectiveness of role play method in enhancing english-speaking skills among secondary EFL learners

Ibnu Ziat Saragih<sup>\*)1</sup>, Farida Repelita Waty Br. Kembaren<sup>1</sup>, Ernita Daulay<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Tarbiyah Science and Teacher Training State Islamic University of North Sumatera

\*) Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to: Author address e-mail: [ibnuziat01@gmail.com](mailto:ibnuziat01@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This study investigates the effectiveness of the role-play method in enhancing English-speaking skills among secondary EFL learners in an Islamic boarding school context. Speaking skill is a core component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction at the secondary level; however, many learners experience difficulties such as low confidence, limited vocabulary, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful oral interaction due to the predominance of conventional teacher-centered instruction. To address this issue, the study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group. The participants consisted of 64 Grade X students, with 32 students assigned to the experimental group and 32 students to the control group. The experimental group was taught using the role-play method, while the control group received conventional instruction. Students’ speaking performance was assessed using a speaking test evaluating pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test. The results indicated that both groups had comparable speaking abilities prior to the treatment. After the intervention, the experimental group achieved a higher mean posttest score ( $M = 20.31$ ,  $SD = 2.32$ ) than the control group ( $M = 16.88$ ,  $SD = 2.49$ ). The t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $t(62) = -5.719$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with a large effect size (Cohen’s  $d = 1.47$ ). These findings demonstrate that the role-play method has a strong and meaningful impact on students’ speaking skills. Practically, role play provides structured opportunities for authentic interaction, enhances learners’ fluency and vocabulary use, and reduces speaking anxiety, making it a highly effective instructional strategy for communicative-oriented EFL teaching, particularly in Islamic boarding school settings.

**Keywords:** English as a foreign language, Islamic boarding school, quasi-experimental study, role play method, speaking skills

**Article History:** Received on 3/11/2025; Revised on 1/12/2025; Accepted on 3/12/2025; Published Online: 8/12/2025.



This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. ©2025 by author.

## INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, English proficiency has become an essential competence in response to globalization, technological advancement, and increasing academic and

professional mobility. English functions not only as an international language of communication but also as a primary medium for accessing scientific knowledge, technological innovation, and global academic discourse. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, formal education systems increasingly emphasize communicative competence as a central learning outcome rather than the mere mastery of grammatical structures (Harmer, 2007; Brown, 2007). Consequently, speaking skill is positioned as a core component of English instruction at the secondary education level, where learners are expected to actively use language for meaningful communication.

Despite its pedagogical importance, speaking remains one of the most challenging language skills for EFL learners. Speaking competence requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, affective readiness, and sociocultural awareness, all of which must operate simultaneously during oral interaction (Brown, 2007). Learners are expected to demonstrate fluency, accurate pronunciation, appropriate vocabulary use, grammatical control, and comprehensibility while managing anxiety and maintaining confidence. Empirical studies consistently indicate that many secondary EFL learners experience difficulties in oral communication, resulting in limited classroom interaction, low participation, and minimal spoken output (Alabsi, 2016; Fauziati, 2018). These challenges suggest that effective speaking instruction requires pedagogical approaches that provide structured yet meaningful opportunities for authentic oral practice.

One major factor contributing to low speaking proficiency is the predominance of teacher-centered instructional practices. In many EFL classrooms, speaking activities are still dominated by rote memorization, scripted dialogues, and textbook-based exercises, which offer limited opportunities for spontaneous language production (Harmer, 2007). Such practices restrict learners' engagement in communicative interaction and reduce opportunities to negotiate meaning, leading to passive language knowledge rather than functional speaking ability. As a result, learners may demonstrate grammatical awareness but lack fluency, confidence, and communicative spontaneity in real speaking situations (Brown, 2007; Rahman & Maarof, 2019). This condition underscores the need for learner-centered and interaction-oriented instructional strategies that actively involve students in oral language use.

The development of speaking competence becomes more complex in religious-based educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools. While these institutions emphasize discipline, character education, and structured learning environments, they also present distinctive challenges for communicative foreign language instruction. In many Islamic boarding schools, Arabic is prioritized as the primary foreign language, while English receives fewer opportunities for authentic communicative practice. Moreover, institutional norms and affective learning climates may influence learners' willingness to communicate and their confidence in using English orally (Fauziati, 2018). These contextual characteristics suggest that conventional speaking instruction may be insufficient and that communicative strategies need to be carefully adapted to address both linguistic development and affective readiness within boarding school settings.

Among communicative instructional strategies, the role play method has been widely recognized as an effective technique for improving speaking skills. Role play enables

learners to assume specific roles and participate in simulated social situations that mirror real-life communication, encouraging spontaneous language use and meaningful interaction (Harmer, 2007). Within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching, role play facilitates language learning by positioning language as a tool for communication rather than as an object of analysis. Previous studies have reported that role play enhances learners' fluency, pronunciation accuracy, confidence, and classroom participation (Alabsi, 2016; Fauziati, 2018; Rahman & Maarof, 2019). However, these studies have predominantly been conducted in public or non-residential school contexts, leaving limited empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness in Islamic boarding schools.

From a theoretical perspective, the effectiveness of role play can be explained through social constructivist and output-based language learning theories. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative engagement, suggesting that communicative activities such as role play create meaningful contexts for language development through peer interaction and guided participation. Similarly, Swain's Output Hypothesis highlights that opportunities for language production are essential for developing communicative competence, as learners become aware of linguistic gaps when attempting to express meaning (Swain, 2005; Swain, 2017). In this regard, role play functions as a pedagogical mechanism that not only promotes linguistic output but also reduces affective barriers, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes, through structured and supportive interaction.

Although a growing body of research has documented the positive effects of role play on EFL learners' speaking performance (Alabsi, 2016; Fauziati, 2018), limited attention has been given to its application in Islamic boarding school contexts. Furthermore, prior studies tend to focus primarily on general speaking score improvements without sufficiently examining how instructional techniques address both linguistic accuracy and affective dimensions of speaking competence. Research that specifically targets Grade X students—who are undergoing critical academic and psychological transitions—is also relatively scarce. These gaps indicate the need for context-sensitive research that examines the pedagogical effectiveness of communicative strategies within distinctive educational environments.

Based on this rationale, the present study investigates the effectiveness of the role play method in enhancing English-speaking skills among secondary EFL learners in an Islamic boarding school. By employing a quasi-experimental design and systematic speaking assessment, this study seeks to determine whether learners taught through structured role play activities demonstrate significantly greater improvements in speaking performance compared to those receiving conventional instruction. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to communicative language teaching research and practically to the development of effective and context-appropriate speaking instruction in EFL classrooms, particularly within Islamic boarding school settings.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental research design with a pretest–posttest control group model. This design was selected to examine the causal effect of the role play method on students' English-speaking skills by comparing learning

outcomes between an experimental group and a control group. A quasi-experimental design is appropriate when random assignment of individual participants is not feasible and intact classes are used as research groups.

The research was conducted during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year in a secondary-level EFL instructional context. The population consisted of 128 Grade X students enrolled in an Islamic boarding school and distributed across four intact classes. Cluster random sampling was applied to select the research sample. Two classes with comparable academic characteristics were chosen based on preliminary observation and consultation with the English teacher. One class consisting of 32 students was assigned as the experimental group, while another class consisting of 32 students served as the control group, resulting in a total sample of 64 students.

The independent variable of this study was the role play method, and the dependent variable was students' English-speaking skills. The role play method was operationally defined as an instructional technique in which students performed assigned roles in simulated communicative situations using English. The treatment was implemented over six instructional sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, conducted during regular English class hours. The role play activities were organized in progressive stages, beginning with explanation of learning objectives, introduction of language expressions relevant to the topic, distribution of role-play cards, guided dialogue practice, and oral performance. The scenarios were based on everyday communicative situations appropriate for secondary learners, such as greeting others, offering help, expressing opinions, and responding to daily social interactions. These scenarios were designed to encourage authentic interaction, spontaneous language use, and peer collaboration.

During the implementation, the teacher functioned as a facilitator by monitoring group interactions, providing corrective feedback on pronunciation, vocabulary use, grammar, and fluency, and encouraging students' participation. The control group received conventional instruction, including explanation, drills, and question-and-answer activities, without the use of role play techniques. Both groups were taught using the same instructional materials, learning objectives, and time allocation to ensure instructional equivalence.

Data were collected using a speaking performance test administered as both a pretest and a posttest. In each test, students worked in pairs to perform short dialogues based on role-play cards containing familiar communicative situations. Students' speaking performances were assessed using Harris's (1969) speaking rating scale, which evaluates five components of speaking proficiency: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Each component was scored on a five-point scale, and the total score represented the students' overall speaking performance.

To ensure instrument validity, content validity was established by aligning the speaking tasks and assessment criteria with the instructional objectives and the speaking components defined in the curriculum. The use of Harris's speaking rating scale supported construct validity, as the rubric comprehensively represents the key dimensions of speaking competence. Reliability was maintained through the application of consistent scoring procedures across all participants. Prior to data collection, the rater reviewed and

discussed the scoring criteria to ensure uniform interpretation of each speaking component. During scoring, the same rubric and scoring standards were applied to both pretest and posttest performances, minimizing subjective judgment and potential scoring bias.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics with the assistance of SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' speaking scores, while inferential analysis employed an independent samples t-test to examine differences between the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups. Before hypothesis testing, normality and homogeneity tests were conducted to ensure that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. The level of significance was set at 0.05. In addition, effect size was calculated using Cohen's *d* to determine the magnitude of the instructional effect of the role play method on students' English-speaking skills.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Pre-Test Results

The pre-test was administered to measure students' initial English-speaking ability before the implementation of the instructional treatment. The assessment focused on five speaking components: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Table 1 presents the summary of pre-test scores obtained by the control and experimental classes.

Table 1 Summary of Students' Pre-Test Speaking Scores

Class	N	Compre- hension	Fluency	Vocabu- lary	Pronunci- ation	Grammar	Total Score	Percenta- ge
Control	32	68	68	75	73	59	343	43%
Experi- mental	32	70	76	74	75	56	351	44%

As shown in Table 1, the control class obtained a total pre-test score of 343 (43%), while the experimental class achieved a slightly higher total score of 351 (44%). The differences across all speaking components were minimal, indicating that both groups demonstrated comparable levels of speaking ability prior to the treatment. Grammar emerged as the weakest component in both classes, while vocabulary and pronunciation showed relatively higher scores. Overall, the similarity in pre-test results confirms that the control and experimental groups had equivalent baseline speaking proficiency, providing a valid foundation for implementing the treatment and conducting subsequent hypothesis testing.

### Post-Test Results

The post-test was administered to measure students' English-speaking ability after the implementation of the instructional treatment. The assessment covered five speaking components, namely comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The post-test results of both the control and experimental classes are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of Students' Post-Test Speaking Scores

Class	N	Compre- hension	Fluency	Vocabu- lary	Pronunci- ation	Grammar	Total Score	Percenta- ge
Control	32	118	115	112	100	95	540	68%
Experi- mental	32	136	138	138	127	111	650	81%

As shown in Table 2, the experimental class obtained a markedly higher total post-test score than the control class. Students who were taught using the role-play method demonstrated superior performance across all speaking components, indicating a consistent improvement in overall speaking proficiency. The largest improvements in the experimental class were observed in fluency and vocabulary, suggesting that students were able to speak more confidently, smoothly, and with richer lexical resources. Although grammar remained the lowest-scoring component in both groups, the experimental class still showed better grammatical accuracy than the control class. These findings indicate that the instructional treatment contributed positively to students' speaking development.

In addition to the mean scores, the variability of students' speaking performance was examined through standard deviation analysis. The post-test results revealed that the experimental class obtained a mean score of 20.31 with a standard deviation of 2.320, while the control class achieved a lower mean score of 16.88 with a standard deviation of 2.485. The relatively comparable standard deviation values indicate that score dispersion in both groups was moderate; however, the higher mean score of the experimental class demonstrates that students taught through the Role Play method consistently outperformed those taught using conventional instruction. This finding suggests that the observed improvement was not limited to a small number of high-achieving students but was distributed across most participants in the experimental group.

To provide a clearer illustration of students' speaking proficiency after the treatment, the post-test scores were further classified into five achievement categories, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Students' Post-Test Speaking Levels

Category	Score Range	Control Class	Experimental Class
Excellent	85–100	0	8
Good	70–84	17	23
Fair	55–69	12	1
Poor	40–54	3	0
Very Poor	≤ 39	0	0

The distribution in Table 3 shows a clear shift toward higher achievement levels in the experimental class. A substantial number of students reached the Excellent and Good categories, while no students remained in the Poor or Very Poor categories. In contrast, the control class was still dominated by students in the Fair and Good categories. This pattern confirms that students in the experimental class experienced greater improvement in speaking proficiency compared to those in the control class. Overall, the post-test findings provide strong empirical evidence that the role-play method was effective in enhancing students' English-speaking skills and justify further hypothesis testing through inferential statistical analysis.

### **Gained Score (N-Gain)**

The gained score was calculated to measure students' improvement in English-speaking skills by comparing pre-test and post-test results using the normalized gain (N-Gain) formula. This analysis was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the instructional treatment by examining the proportion of actual learning gains relative to the maximum possible gains achieved by students in both groups.

The results show a clear difference in learning improvement between the control and experimental classes. The control class obtained an average N-Gain score of 43%, which falls into the moderate improvement category. This indicates that students who received conventional instruction experienced some progress in their speaking skills; however, the improvement was relatively limited and inconsistent across individuals. Several students showed only minimal gains, suggesting that traditional teaching methods were not equally effective for all learners.

In contrast, the experimental class achieved a higher average N-Gain score of 68%, categorized as high improvement. This finding indicates that the implementation of the role-play method resulted in more substantial and consistent improvement in students' speaking skills. The range of N-Gain scores in the experimental class was also notably higher, with all students demonstrating meaningful progress and several achieving very high gains. This pattern suggests that the role-play method effectively supported students with varying levels of initial speaking proficiency, including those who previously struggled.

Overall, the N-Gain analysis provides strong empirical evidence that the role-play method was more effective than conventional teaching methods in improving students' English-speaking skills. The higher average gain and more uniform improvement in the experimental class confirm that role play facilitated deeper learning and greater speaking development, reinforcing its value as an effective communicative teaching strategy in EFL contexts.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the Role Play method in enhancing students' English-speaking skills. The analysis was carried out through several stages, including preliminary analysis (normality and homogeneity tests), hypothesis testing using an independent samples t-test, and effect size calculation to determine the magnitude of the treatment effect.

Before testing the hypothesis, prerequisite tests were conducted to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for parametric statistical analysis. Normality tests were applied to the pretest and posttest scores of both the control and experimental classes using the Shapiro–Wilk test, as the sample size in each group was fewer than 50 participants. The results of the normality tests indicated that all pretest and posttest data in both groups were normally distributed, as the significance values exceeded the threshold of 0.05. This confirms that the distribution of students' speaking scores was normal and suitable for further inferential analysis.

In addition, a homogeneity of variance test was performed using Levene's Test to determine whether the variances of the two groups were equal. The results showed that the significance values for both pretest and posttest data were greater than 0.05, indicating that the variances between the control and experimental classes were homogeneous. These findings confirm that the data fulfilled the assumptions for conducting an independent samples t-test.

Following the prerequisite analysis, hypothesis testing was conducted using an independent samples t-test to determine whether there was a significant difference in speaking skills between students taught using the Role Play method and those taught using conventional teaching methods. The descriptive statistics revealed that the experimental class obtained a higher mean posttest score ( $M = 20.31$ ,  $SD = 2.320$ ) compared to the control class ( $M = 16.88$ ,  $SD = 2.485$ ). This initial comparison suggests that students who received instruction through the Role Play method demonstrated better speaking performance than those in the control group.

The results of the independent samples t-test showed a t-value of  $-5.719$  with a degree of freedom (df) of 62 and a significance value of  $0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). Since the significance value was lower than the predetermined alpha level of  $0.05$ , the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted. This indicates that there was a statistically significant difference in English-speaking skills between students taught using the Role Play method and those taught using conventional instructional methods. Therefore, the application of the Role Play method had a significant positive effect on students' speaking skills.

To further examine the magnitude of the treatment effect, effect size was calculated using Cohen's d formula. The pooled standard deviation was computed based on the standard deviations of both groups, resulting in a value of  $2.40$ . The difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control classes was  $3.43$ . The effect size calculation yielded a Cohen's d value of  $1.47$ . According to Cohen's criteria, this value falls into the category of a strong effect ( $d > 1.00$ ), indicating that the Role Play method had a substantial impact on improving students' English-speaking skills.

In summary, the results of the data analysis demonstrate that the Role Play method significantly and strongly enhanced students' speaking skills. The fulfillment of statistical assumptions, the significant t-test results, and the large effect size collectively provide robust empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the Role Play method as an instructional strategy in EFL speaking instruction.

## Discussion

This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the Role Play method in improving the English-speaking skills of Grade X students at an Islamic boarding school. The discussion section elaborates on the findings presented in Chapter IV by relating them to the research questions, research objectives, and relevant theoretical and empirical studies.



### **The Impact of Role Play on Students' Speaking Skills Based on Pretest Results**

The pretest results indicate that the English-speaking skills of tenth-grade students in both the experimental and control classes were relatively low and nearly equivalent prior to the implementation of the instructional treatment. The total pretest score of the control class was 343 (43%), while the experimental class obtained a score of 351 (44%), showing only a marginal difference between the two groups. This minimal discrepancy confirms that both classes possessed comparable initial speaking abilities before the Role Play method was introduced, thereby fulfilling the prerequisite condition for experimental research.

Further analysis of the assessed speaking components—comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar—revealed limited performance across all aspects. Grammar emerged as the weakest component in both classes, with each group achieving only 16%. This finding indicates that grammatical accuracy was a major obstacle for students in oral communication. Similar conditions have been reported by Suryani (2015), who found that students often demonstrate low grammatical control and limited oral expression prior to the application of interactive speaking techniques. Such weaknesses suggest that conventional instructional approaches provide insufficient support for developing foundational speaking competencies.

In addition, the distribution of pretest scores showed that most students in both the experimental and control classes fell into the Poor and Very Poor categories. This pattern suggests that students experienced substantial difficulties in expressing ideas orally in English and lacked confidence in spoken communication. Previous studies have consistently reported similar baseline conditions in EFL classrooms, where learners exhibit low speaking proficiency due to limited exposure to communicative practice and an overreliance on teacher-centered instruction (Anjani & Yuliati, 2025; Kamengko, 2025). These studies emphasize that before interactive methods are applied, students' speaking abilities generally remain underdeveloped.

Overall, the pretest findings address the first research question by demonstrating that students' English-speaking skills prior to the treatment were still low and had not yet developed optimally. This condition underscores the urgent need for an instructional approach that actively engages learners in meaningful oral interaction. In line with findings from previous research, the comparable and low pretest performance in both groups provides a strong rationale for implementing the Role Play method as an interactive and communicative strategy to enhance students' speaking skills (Suryani, 2015; Anjani & Yuliati, 2025; Kamengko, 2025).

### **The Impact of Role Play on Students' Speaking Skills Based on Posttest Results**

The posttest results demonstrate a substantial improvement in students' English-speaking skills, particularly among those in the experimental class who were instructed using the Role Play method. The experimental class achieved a total posttest score of 650 (81%), whereas the control class obtained a lower score of 540 (68%). This notable difference indicates that students exposed to role-play-based instruction experienced significantly greater progress in speaking performance than those who received conventional instruction. Similar patterns of improvement have been reported in previous studies, which

emphasize the effectiveness of role play in fostering active oral language use in EFL classrooms (Kamengko, 2025; Suryani, 2015).

Further analysis reveals that improvement in the experimental class occurred consistently across all assessed speaking components, namely comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The aspects of comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary each reached 38%, indicating that students became more capable of understanding conversational topics, expressing ideas more smoothly, and utilizing a broader and more appropriate range of vocabulary. These findings support Sukmara et al. (2025), who found that role-play activities promote meaningful interaction and encourage learners to use vocabulary contextually in spoken communication.

In addition, improvements were also evident in pronunciation (35%) and grammar (31%), suggesting that the Role Play method contributed not only to communicative confidence but also to linguistic accuracy. Through repeated enactment of realistic communicative situations, students were able to practice articulation and grammatical structures in a natural context, which aligns with Suryani's (2015) assertion that role play facilitates gradual improvement in accuracy through continuous oral practice.

The distribution of posttest scores further reinforces the effectiveness of the Role Play method. Eight students in the experimental class reached the Excellent category, while none of the students in the control class achieved this level. Moreover, no students in the experimental class remained in the Poor or Very Poor categories, indicating a significant reduction in low proficiency levels. In contrast, the control class still exhibited a wider distribution across lower achievement categories, reflecting more limited improvement. This shift toward higher performance levels mirrors findings by Kamengko (2025), who reported that role play encourages active engagement and elevates overall speaking proficiency among EFL learners.

From a theoretical perspective, the significant improvement observed in the experimental class supports the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes meaningful interaction as the core of language acquisition (Richards, 2008). The Role Play method provides learners with opportunities to engage in authentic communicative situations, enabling them to practice language functions in context rather than through isolated drills. This aligns with Swain's Output Hypothesis, which posits that language production plays a crucial role in developing fluency and linguistic accuracy, as learners become aware of gaps in their language knowledge through active use.

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of role-play activities reflects Vygotsky's Social Constructivist theory, which highlights the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. Through peer interaction and guided practice, students were able to negotiate meaning, receive immediate feedback, and gradually internalize language structures. This theoretical framework explains why improvements in fluency and vocabulary were particularly pronounced in the experimental class, as students were encouraged to speak spontaneously and experiment with language in a supportive environment.

Overall, these results confirm that the implementation of the Role Play method leads to meaningful and substantial gains in students' English-speaking skills. The interactive

and student-centered nature of role play enables learners to practice language in simulated real-life situations, thereby increasing confidence, reducing hesitation, and enhancing willingness to communicate. Consistent with Huang's (2008) perspective, the findings demonstrate that role play effectively transforms passive language knowledge into active and functional communicative competence.

### **Differences in Speaking Skills Between Role Play and Conventional Methods**

To address the third research question, an Independent Samples t-test was conducted after the data met the assumptions of normality and homogeneity. The results of the Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that both pretest and posttest data were normally distributed, as all significance values exceeded 0.05. In addition, Levene's Test confirmed that the variances between the experimental and control groups were homogeneous (Sig. > 0.05), indicating that parametric statistical analysis was appropriate.

The t-test results revealed a t-value of  $-5.719$  with 62 degrees of freedom and a significance value of  $0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). This result indicates a statistically significant difference in English-speaking skills between students taught using the Role Play method and those taught using conventional instructional methods. Moreover, the mean posttest score of the experimental class ( $M = 20.31$ ) was substantially higher than that of the control class ( $M = 16.88$ ), demonstrating the superior effectiveness of role-play-based instruction in enhancing speaking performance.

These findings confirm that the Role Play method is more effective than conventional teaching approaches in improving students' English-speaking skills. This result is consistent with previous studies which report that role play significantly enhances learners' speaking proficiency by providing opportunities for authentic interaction and active language use (Katemba & Grace, 2023; Sukmara et al., 2025). In contrast to conventional methods that tend to emphasize grammatical explanation and teacher-centered instruction, role play encourages spontaneous language production, peer interaction, and contextualized communication, which are essential components of effective speaking development.

Furthermore, the acceptance of the research hypothesis strengthens these conclusions. The alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted and the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected, as the obtained significance value was lower than the predetermined alpha level of 0.05. The effect size calculation yielded a Cohen's  $d$  value of 1.47, which falls into the strong effect category. This large effect size indicates that the Role Play method has a substantial and meaningful impact on improving students' English-speaking skills, beyond mere statistical significance. Similar findings were reported by Harefa et., al (2024), which highlighted that role play not only improves speaking scores but also enhances students' confidence and willingness to communicate.

From a theoretical perspective, these results provide strong empirical support for communicative learning theory, which emphasizes learners' active engagement in meaningful and contextualized language use. The effectiveness of role play aligns closely with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, which regard interaction as the core mechanism for developing communicative competence (Richards, 2008). Practically, the findings suggest that the Role Play method can serve as an effective instructional

strategy for improving speaking skills, particularly in EFL contexts where students have limited exposure to real-life English communication, such as Islamic boarding schools.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that all research objectives have been successfully achieved. The study confirmed that students' initial speaking abilities were relatively low prior to the treatment, as evidenced by the pretest results. Following the implementation of the Role Play method, students in the experimental class showed significant improvement in speaking skills and consistently outperformed those in the control class. The statistically significant differences, supported by a strong effect size, indicate that this study makes a meaningful empirical contribution to the development of effective speaking instruction in EFL settings.

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to two intact classes from a single Islamic boarding school. As a result, the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts, school types, or student populations may be limited. Future studies are encouraged to involve larger samples and multiple institutions to enhance external validity.

Second, the duration of the treatment was confined to a limited instructional period. Although the results demonstrated substantial improvement in students' speaking skills, longer intervention periods may provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of the Role Play method on language development, particularly in grammatical accuracy.

Third, speaking performance assessment inherently involves a degree of subjectivity. Although a standardized speaking rubric was used and consistent scoring procedures were applied, the possibility of rater bias cannot be entirely eliminated. Future research may incorporate multiple raters and inter-rater reliability analysis to further strengthen the objectivity of speaking assessment.

By acknowledging these limitations, this study provides a transparent and balanced interpretation of its findings and offers clear directions for future research on communicative speaking instruction in EFL contexts.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the implementation of the Role Play method has a significant and substantial effect on improving the English-speaking skills of Grade X students in an Islamic boarding school context. While both the experimental and control groups demonstrated comparable speaking proficiency prior to the treatment, students who received instruction through role-play-based activities exhibited markedly greater improvement in posttest performance. The statistically significant difference and strong effect size indicate that the Role Play method is not only effective in producing measurable learning gains but also impactful in facilitating meaningful oral language development.

Beyond confirming statistical effectiveness, the findings of this study highlight important pedagogical implications for EFL instruction, particularly in religious-based educational institutions. The Role Play method enables teachers to create interactive and contextually meaningful learning environments that encourage students to actively use English despite limited exposure to real-life communication. Through simulated social

situations, students are provided with opportunities to practice fluency, expand vocabulary, and build confidence in speaking, which are often underdeveloped in teacher-centered classrooms. Therefore, integrating role play as a regular instructional strategy can serve as a practical solution for enhancing communicative competence in EFL classrooms within Islamic boarding schools.

From an institutional perspective, the results suggest that English instruction in boarding school settings can be strengthened by adopting communicative teaching approaches that balance linguistic objectives with affective considerations, such as reducing anxiety and increasing learners' willingness to communicate. Teachers are encouraged to design structured role-play activities that align with curricular goals while remaining sensitive to the unique cultural and disciplinary environment of religious education.

Despite its contributions, this study also opens avenues for future research. Further studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples across different Islamic boarding schools to enhance the generalizability of findings. Future research may also explore the long-term effects of role play on speaking development, examine its impact on affective variables such as anxiety and motivation, or compare role play with other communicative strategies. By extending research in these directions, a more comprehensive understanding of effective EFL speaking instruction in religious-based educational contexts can be achieved.

## REFERENCES

- Alabsi, T. A. (2016). The effectiveness of role play strategy in teaching speaking skill for EFL learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(2), 227–234. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0602.04>
- Anjani, E. P., & Yuliati, Y. (2025). The implementation of role play in supporting speaking class. *ELT Forum: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 14(Special Issue). <https://doi.org/10.15294/elt.v14iSpecial%20Issue.28817>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., & Walker, D. (2010). *Introduction to research in education* (8th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. Pearson Education.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Fauziati, E. (2018). *Teaching English as a foreign language: Principles and practices*. Surakarta: Era Pustaka Utama.
- Harefa, P.T, Harefa, A.T, Zega, R., & Waruwu., Y .(2024). *The Implementation Of The Role Play Method In Improving Students' Speaking Skill At The Eighth Grade Of UPTD SMP Negeri 4 Gunungsitoli Selatan*. *International Journal of English Education and Linguistic*, 7 (2). <https://ejournal.unuja.ac.id/index.php/ijoeel/article/view/12267/pdf#tab-citedby>

- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Harris, D. P. (1969). *Testing English as a second language*. McGraw-Hill.
- Huang, I. Y. (2018). The use of role play in English speaking classes. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 6(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v6i2.13290>
- Kamengko, D. F. (2025). Empowering EFL students' oral proficiency: The impact of role-playing in enhancing speaking skills. *ELT Worldwide: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.26858/eltww.v11i2.64640>
- Katamba, C. V., & Grace, R. M. (2023). Role-playing improves speaking proficiency skills. *Acuity: Journal of English Language Pedagogy, Literature, and Culture*, 8(2), 31–53. <https://doi.org/10.35974/acuity.v8i2.3153>
- Nation, I. S. P. (2013). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Rahman, M. M., & Maarof, N. (2019). The effect of role play on improving students' speaking skills in ESL classrooms. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 15(3), 29–40. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v15i3.7805>
- Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sukmara, E., Friatin, L. Y., & Tarwana, W. (2025). Boosting EFL speaking skills through role play: Evidence from seventh grade students. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy*, 9(2). <https://jurnal.unigal.ac.id/jall/article/download/21510/pdf>
- Suryani, L. (2015). The effectiveness of role play in teaching speaking. *Eltin Journal: Journal of English Language Teaching in Indonesia*, 3(2), 106–109. <https://doi.org/10.22460/eltin.v3i2.p%25p>
- Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 471–483). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.