

# THE USE OF ROLE PLAYING TO IMPROVE SPEAKING ABILITY

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## ABSTRACT

*In Indonesia, students learn English as Foreign Language. It is not easy to do, but the use of English is very important to secure life. Students need English to search information, communicate and learn. There are many problems for teachers to teach English in the classroom, Such as low motivation, lazy to practice and a little time to teach. Therefore, teachers need strategies to motivate and encourage students to learn, read and practice English. In order to help students to speak, a method can be used. Role Playing is a suitable method to develop students to talk. It motivates students to practice and show their performance in English.*

**Key words:** Speaking, Role Playing

## 1. Introduction

English is very important to help many people who want to communicate from over the world. The use of English can make us easy to get information, find scholarship and have many friends. Nowadays, English has been used to all countries in the world to communicate. People can use English as first language, second language and foreign language. Indonesia uses English as Foreign Language. Therefore, there are many problems in teaching English at school.

Kayi (2006) states that speaking refers to the gap between linguistic expertise and teaching methodology. Linguistic expertise concerns with language structure and language content, teaching speaking is not like listening, reading, and writing, it needs habit formation because it is a real communication and speaking is a productive skill so it needs practicing as often as possible (Kayi, 2006). The main problem is about speaking. Students have problem to speak English well and fluently.

They may feel reluctant to use the target language as they may be afraid of making mistakes. Students may have the feeling of discomfort using the target language as it deprives them of their normal means of communication (Nascente, 2001). According to English Proficiency Index (2014), Indonesia is the 24<sup>th</sup> rank among 63 countries in the world. This result shows the ability of speaking practice is still low. It is important for teachers to encourage and motivate them to speak English, especially in class.

Giving motivation to students is very important. They must have self-confidence to use English. In order to help students, a strategy can be used to motivate, ask and persuade them to practice English. Role playing is one of the strategy to motivate students to speak English. Students can play character in a group. Role-playing is the changing of one's behavior to assume a role, either unconsciously to fill a social role, or consciously to act

out an adopted role. In the field of psychology, the term is used more loosely in four senses:

- a. To refer to the playing of roles generally such as in a theatre, or educational setting;
- b. To refer to taking a role of an existing character or person and acting it out with a partner taking someone else's role, often involving different genres of practice;
- c. To refer to a wide range of games including role-playing video game (RPG), play-by-mail games and more;
- d. To refer specifically to role-playing games.

### A. Concept of Speaking Skill

Speaking English is not easy to students who learn English as foreign language. Nunan (1999) states that speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the uses of verbal and non-verbal symbol in various contexts. Furthermore, speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Nunan, 2003, p. 217).

Speaking skill is one of the language skills that are very essential to support further oral communication especially in English, but it is the most difficult skill to develop (Ur, 1996). However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance.

Teaching speaking for EFL learners to produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns, use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language, select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter, organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence, use language as a means of expressing values and judgments, use the

language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called as fluency (Nunan, 2003).

In addition, there are five components generally recognized in analysis of speaking process. They are pronunciation (including the segmental features-vowels and consonant and the stress and intonation / pattern), grammar, vocabulary, fluency (the ease and the flow of speech), and comprehension (Lado, 1995). Speaking has five dimensions or components for rating key aspects of language proficiency: (1) comprehension is the ability to interact with the meaning, context, and understand the conversation (2) fluency is described as the ability to report acts or situation, in precise words, or the ability to converse or to express a sequence of ideas fluently (3) Vocabulary is the high proportion of words and expressions that express their attitude (4) Pronunciation is the student's ability to produce pitch, intonation, individual sounds, sounds, spelling, and stress (5) Grammar is the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence.

#### B. *The Elements of Speaking*

1. Pronunciation (including the segmental features-vowels and consonants and the stress and intonation patterns. As stated by Harmer, if students want to be able to speak fluently in English, they need to be able pronounce phonemes correctly, use appropriate stress and intonation patterns and speak in connected speech. The speaker must be able to articulate the words and create the physical sounds that carry meaning.
2. Grammar  
It is obvious that in order to be able to speak foreign language, it is necessary to know a certain amount of grammar and vocabulary. Grammar is the sounds and sound patterns, the basic units of meaning, such as words and the rules to combine them to form new sentences
3. Vocabulary  
As we know, vocabulary is a basic element in language. Vocabulary is single words, set phrases, variable phrases, Phrasal verbs, and idioms. It is clear that limited vocabulary mastery makes conversation virtually impossible.
4. Fluency  
In simple terms, fluency is the ability to talk freely without too much stopping or hesitating. Meanwhile, according to Gower et-al fluency can be thought of as 'the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously. When speaking fluently students should be able to get the message across with whatever resources and abilities they have got, regardless of grammatical and other mistakes.
5. Comprehension  
The last speaking element is comprehension. Comprehension is discussed by both speakers because comprehension can make people getting the information they want. Comprehension is defined as the ability to understand something by a reasonable

comprehension of the subject or as the knowledge of what a situation is really like

#### C. *Concept of Role Playing*

Role Playing is a strategy to learn speaking English easily. Students can express their ability in speaking English. They can play a character and improve their vocabulary and Speaking Skill. A role-playing game is a game in which the participants assume the roles of characters and collaboratively create stories. Participants determine the actions of their characters based on their characterization, and the actions succeed or fail according to a formal system of rules and guidelines. Within the rules, they may improvise freely; their choices shape the direction and outcome of the games.

Role play is a speaking activity where learners participate either as themselves or as somebody else in a specific situation. In this way they can act in various interaction patterns.

- 1) A real need in the learners' lives (at the doctor, at the station), the learners may or may not have the direct experience;
- 2) The events that few learners will ever experience but which are easy to play such as being a journalist;
- 3) Fantasy roles which are imaginary, absurd and have nothing to do with reality.

Role play is one of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation the three elements in role playing: what the characters want, who they are, and their moods or attitudes at the time. These elements are then affected by how the situation develops. Role Play is an example of "learning by doing" The word *role* indicates that the students must actively apply knowledge, skill, and understanding to successfully speak and act from different, assigned perspective. The term play indicates that the students use their imaginations and have fun, acting out their parts in a nonthreatening environment. Thus Role Play engages students in a participatory activity that requires them to apply course concepts as they assume fictional identities or envision themselves in unfamiliar situation (Barkley, 2005: 150).

Ments (1999) comments that role-play are "motivational and effective because it involves activity" (p. 13). In role-play the participant is asked to play the part of someone else. He is given details about the person and situation that he is supposed to be in. Role-play must not be confused with acting because, unlike acting, role-playing is focused on how the roles of the players interact with and affect each other. Ments (1999) also comments that the most obvious uses of role-play are in those areas which deal primarily with aspects of communication. (p. 19). Role-play is a communicative activity where the learners can use spontaneous language. It also helps learners to develop real life speaking skills.

#### *D. Role-play: An Approach to Teaching and Learning*

Role-playing is a technique that allows students to explore realistic situations by interacting with other people in a managed way in order to develop experience and trial different strategies in a supported environment. Depending on the intention of the activity, participants might be playing a role similar to their own (or their likely one in the future) or could play the opposite part of the conversation or interaction. Both options provide the possibility of significant learning, with the former allowing experience to be gained and the latter encouraging the student to develop an understanding of the situation from the 'opposite' point of view.

#### **2. How it works**

Participants are given particular roles to play in a conversation or other interaction, such as an email exchange, typical of their discipline. They may be given specific instructions on how to act or what to say, as an aggressive client or patient in denial, for example, or required to act and react in their own way depending on the requirements of the exercise. The participants will then act out the scenario and afterwards there will be reflection and discussion about the interactions, such as alternative ways of dealing with the situation. The scenario can then be acted out again with changes based on the outcome of the reflection and discussion.

If you are interested in trying out role-play there are a few practical questions that you should answer:

1. Where in the course/module would this approach work best?
2. Are there situations and interactions that students would benefit from being able to explore?
3. Would 'live' role-play be most appropriate or would it need to be staggered over a longer period of time?
4. Should the students take on all of the roles, will the tutor take a role, or can people with direct experience be involved, e.g. having a genuine client or patient play their own part?
5. How much technology should be involved? Which tools are most suited? What support would be needed?
6. Are the students (and other tutors) ready for this?

Having thought about these questions, you should have worked out whether role-play is an approach that makes sense in your context and have some ideas about how to introduce it. If you are still unsure, you could try a small exercise in a single session and see how the students respond

#### *A. Why use role-playing?*

It is widely agreed that learning takes place when activities are engaging and memorable. Jeremy Harmer advocates the use of role-play for the following reasons:

1. It's fun and motivating
- a. The creative aspect of the exercise will make it seem more like play than like work.

- b. The pressure to solve a problem or to resolve a conflict for their character can motivate a student far more than the sort of pressure that they usually face preparing for an exam, and it is far more typical of the pressure that will be on them in real life.
- c. Role-playing exercises are particularly useful in courses for non-majors to emphasize the intersection between science and daily life. Popular geoscience role-playing scenarios generally deal with hazards and environmental issues that combine natural and social sciences.
2. Quieter students get the chance to express themselves in a more forthright way
  - a. The primary purpose of role-playing exercises is to get students to look at the material they are learning in a new light. The instructor is persuading them to alter their mental maps of the world instead of just filling them in ([Blatner, 2002](#)).
  - b. Role-playing exercises show the world as a complex place with complicated problems that can only rarely be solved by a simple answer that the student has previously memorized ([Cage, 1997](#)).
  - c. Additionally, the students learn that skills they learn separately (such as quantitative and communications skills) are often used together in order to accomplish many real-world tasks ([Bair, 2000](#)).
  - d. Adding a sympathetic, generally human element to science is often encouraging to students with science and math anxiety. Lessons can use role-playing to emphasize the value of feelings and of creativity as well as of knowledge ([Dallmann-Jones, 1994](#)).
  - e. Exercises emphasizing the importance of people and their viewpoints are important preparation for students who will go on in many professions, including business, academia, and politics.
3. The world of the classroom is broadened to include the outside world - thus offering a much wider range of language opportunities
  - a. Students need to understand the needs and perspectives of the people around them to get through life, and to understand themselves.
  - b. Role-playing exercises can be used to develop skills important inside and outside of science: the kind of skills needed to make learned information useful in the real world. Many of these are very difficult to teach using more traditional methods of instruction: self-awareness, problem solving, communication, initiative, teamwork ([Blatner, 2002](#)).
  - c. If an assignment includes research or problem solving, students are more likely to retain knowledge that they have constructed themselves more than that simply handed to them in lecture ([Havholm, 1998](#); [Duveen and Solomon, 1994](#)).
  4. [Bonnet, 2000](#) tried, with some success, to instill ethics in school children using role-playing.
  5. Accounting students from the University of Illinois had an easier time finding jobs after completing a

curriculum that included role-playing than they did after the traditional curriculum (Cage, 1997).

*B. Key Steps in Constructing a Role-play (Ashok, 2015)*

1. The first step for the teacher is to define the aims and objectives of the role-play in order to practice skills, explore concepts etc.
2. Then the teacher is to determine external constraints like the class size or the space available.
3. Define time limit of the role-play. Construct the role-play by making use of the time effectively with maximum participants
4. Define the setting of the role-play. It has to be defined in brief. This enables the students to understand the context of the role-play setting.
5. Define clear role descriptors and at least few dialogues of major characters.
6. Define observer tasks like taking down the feedback on each role-played, new and improved dialogues etc.
7. Define debrief agenda and also clearly define the facilitator tasks.

*C. The Role of the Teacher in a Role-play (Ashok, 2015)*

1. A teacher should keep in mind learners' needs and interests in order to choose an appropriate situation for role-plays. Ensure that the selected role-plays should be interesting and also it should give the students an opportunity to practice what they have learned. In order to make the role-play interesting it is good to let the students choose the situation among them. Encourage them to suggest themes that intrigue them or to choose a topic from a list of given situations. Teacher can also ask them to write down situations which they encounter in their own life, or when they read a book or watch a movie as this will enable them to construct the role-play in a way which will be interesting to their class members.
2. Always provide important role to intelligent, smart students and leave the average students relaxed with less important roles. The good performance of the bright students will be an encouragement to other students and some of them will take up leading roles in the next role-play session. Teacher can also interchange the roles among students based on their ability.
3. While deciding on the composition of each group teacher should consider both the abilities and disabilities of the students. For example, a group consisting only of shyest students will not lead to a good performance in role-play so teacher should mix each group with students of different abilities.
4. After the selection of the situation of the role-play think about the language needed for it especially, vocabulary. At the initial level, the students are able to tackle the language but when they move towards higher level it will be more difficult to use the correct and appropriate language. So it is better to introduce new words and its meanings related to the role-play situations to the students. It will help them to

prefigure accurately what language they need to use in those situations. It will enable the students to get an idea of roles assigned to them clearly also help them to learn new words.

5. Provide the students with concrete information and clear role descriptions, so that they could play their roles with confidence. For example, in the situation at a bus station, the person who is assigned the act of giving the information should have relevant details like: the times and destination of the bus, price of tickets, etc. with him on a cue card. Information like a fictitious name, status, age, personality, etc can also be given in it.
6. It is always better if the teacher can take one of the roles and act it out as a model at the beginning level instead of asking for volunteers to act out the assigned role-play in front of the class members.
7. Debriefing after the role-play session does not mean that pointing out and correcting mistakes. Pointing out mistakes will sometimes make the students less confident and less willing to do the other role-plays assigned to them. So feedback should be on each students opinion about the role-play and teacher should welcome their comments.
8. The aim of the feedback session should be to discuss what has happened in the role-play and what they have learned from it, their valuable suggestions and remarks. In addition to this teacher can also ask them evaluation questions on each role-plays.
9. Teacher can also note down mistakes during the role-play. It will provide the teacher with feedback for further practice and revision.
10. Teacher should avoid intervening in the role-play with error corrections and do not to discourage the students during their participation in the role-play.
11. Teacher can also give the students home task on role play exercises which will in turn help them to learn useful words and expressions. It also enables them to think about the language and to construct the sentence accordingly for an effective role play performance with confidence.

*D. Benefits of using Role Playing in the classroom*

Here are just a few of the benefits of making role-play a part of your business training:

1. **Build confidence:** When your team role-plays, you can throw any number of situations at them. Role-playing provides a safe environment to encounter these scenarios for the first time, which builds confidence in team members that can help them in their day-to-day roles.
2. **Develop listening skills:** Good role-playing requires good listening skills. In addition to understanding the words the other person is saying, it's important to pay attention to body language and non-verbal clues. Better to have your team develop these skills while role-playing than when they're trying to perform in the real world.
3. **Creative problem-solving:** No matter how outlandish a situation you create in a controlled

environment, generally, something even more bizarre is bound to happen on the job. Role-playing will at least give your team the chance to get some experience in handling difficult situations and in developing creative problem-solving skills.

#### *E. How to Start Role-Playing*

While some organizations prefer to hire a professional facilitator for the most effective role-play, here are a few tips for doing it yourself:

1. **Use actual locations:** The best role-play is as realistic as possible. Put participants in the physical locations where they actually would experience the scenarios you're trying to replicate, whether that's the boardroom, the warehouse, or an executive's office.
2. **Videotape your role-play:** Videotaping the participants in role-playing scenarios is a valuable teaching tool. It allows people to see themselves—and their strengths and weaknesses, which can be quite powerful. It also allows them (and you) to “record” improvement as they progress.
3. **Imitate real-world scenarios:** This is perhaps one of the easiest forms of role-play training to execute yourself. Give the “customers” or “clients” a personality profile and list of objectives that the trainee doesn't know about. Make the goal to determine the “customer's” objectives.
4. **Hire consultants and actors:** Getting an authentic role-play experience from your team may be difficult to do on your own. Bring in consultants and professional actors to get the training your team deserves.

#### *F. The Importance of Role-Playing*

Activities that develop and build on children's self-esteem are important in helping children learn who they are. Role play, including acting out scenarios to problem solve, story making through dramatic play and practice in coping with real life situations will support children's social-emotional growth and development. Role play will give children the skills to handle problematic social interactions, such as bullying, which may happen as they progress through life.

When children engage in role playing it helps to develop their way of thinking and helps them to develop feelings of empathy. When children are given the opportunity to role play skits/scenarios they will be able to experience the role of bully, victim, and bystander. They will also learn how to help others who are being bullied and how to avoid bullying.

A way for you to introduce the concept of role playing using the topic of bullying would be to develop several scenarios for the children to follow. Select situations that you have observed occurring. You can write the scenarios or use the social scripts available in the Bullying Workshop until the children develop a general comfort level and can write their own. Have the children develop scenarios from their own experiences. The children can write a skit or scenario about a

distressing situation having to do with bullying whether the focus is on the bullies, victims or bystanders. Every one of the skits/scenarios should be recorded and presented in a way where the individuals who wrote them are anonymous. For example, have the children jot the ideas down on a piece of paper, hand them in, rearrange them and hand them out again. When these ideas are shared anonymously the children will begin to learn that others have shared the same experiences.

#### *G. When encouraging opportunities for children to role play regarding bullying:*

1. Prepare and introduce the subject. Educate children on bullying by talking about bullies, victims, and bystanders before introducing the activity. You can refer to the document titled Educating Children about Bullying for ideas about introducing the topic of bullying to children in your group. Arrange the room in a way where all children can be effective contributors to the role play activity. This may involve moving tables and chairs to create a more open space for greater participation. Model the first scenario by taking part yourself with two other children who would be most comfortable with performing in front of the group. This will give the children an idea of how to start off. Use specific scripts at first and practice at least once in the beginning.
2. Define roles (bully, victim, bystander) and situations (see scenario examples below). Once the group is ready to ad-lib the skits and practice problem solving you no longer need to provide them with prewritten scripts. Make it realistic and fun by using phrases such as “Action!” to begin the role play, “Freeze!” to have the children stop to discuss the situation as a group, and “Cut!” to end the dialogue.
3. Small groups allow all the children to have a turn in role playing. It will give all children a chance to act out their feelings and ideas. Smaller groups are also great for children who may be more reluctant to share their ideas in a larger group setting. Keep it short for the first few times the children participate in the activity. This will provide an opportunity to discuss the main points.
4. Reverse roles played by the children to allow the children to experience and therefore identify with the roles played (bully, victim and bystander). Ensure that children who tend to bully have a chance to experience the role of the victim.
5. Change groups to allow the children to discuss different points of view and build on ideas. Expect noise. Children will become excited, laugh and possibly raise their voices. Provided this excitement is because of the task at hand, allow this to take place. It will create genuine feelings and ideas if the children are given the opportunity to establish realistic scenarios.
6. Praise all efforts. Provide specific positive feedback such as, “I like the way you stood up to the bully and told her to leave you alone”. Coach the children

through skits, if necessary. Coaching the children may involve asking questions about feelings, problems, solutions, obstacles (e.g., “Why do you think he was not comfortable enough to deal with the bully himself?”), body language (e.g., “Johnny had his arms crossed when you were talking to him. What do you think that means?”) and more.

7. Construct questions for the children to think about as the role plays are happening. Some questions may include: How do you feel when this happens to you? How do you think your friends feel when they are bullied? What kind of things do you think will help to stop bullying? The children think about these questions both generally and as they relate to the scenarios that are being role played.

### 3. Conclusion

Indonesia uses English as a Foreign Language. There are many problems in teaching English for teachers. In order to help teachers and students to do teaching and learning process, a method is very helpful to be applied in the classroom. Role playing is one of the methods to motivate students to practice English. Students can act, talk and express their feeling through this method. They will have self-confidence to talk because they are in a group. Teachers also have important role, they can be motivator, guide and advisor in order to assess students' speaking ability. Through role playing, students will have motivation to talk and to practice their English.

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