

# The Effectiveness of a Role-Play Activity in Practicing EFL Learners' Communicative Competence

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**Abstract:** This study was conducted to explore the effectiveness of role-play activity in practicing communicative competence of EFL learners. The writer suggested that role-play activity is a valuable classroom approach to assist students in practicing their communicative competence and to provide them with an opportunity to practice the English language with fluency and accuracy. In addition, the writer also proposed a definition of the effectiveness of role-playing activities in practicing communicative competence of EFL learners and provided relevant teaching suggestions.

**Keywords:** Role-play Activity; Communicative Competence; Effectiveness.

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## 1. Introduction

Spoken English is one of the abilities for students to learn English. It is used to develop communicative competence of students. For a successful life in many activities, especially in working, communication skills are the most important. Many organizations not only seek knowledgeable employees, but also those with good communication skills. According to Grehension in Rahim, Yassi, and Arafah, 70% of Indonesian workers have problems communicating in English.[1] It is precisely because of this situation that speaking has become the most basic skill in English teaching and learning.

There are three main reasons why students need to speak in the classroom activities.[2] The first reason is that classroom speech activities can become opportunities for rehearsal. The second reason is that oral assignments given to students require the use of the learned language, and these activities allow students and teachers to get feedback. The last reason is that students have the opportunity to activate various language elements.[3]

As teachers, they must motivate students to speak as much as possible. This has become a problem in speaking class, as some students feel scared and shy when talking in the class. To solve this problem, teachers must use the best techniques to create good atmosphere to practice in the class. Role-play activity can provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking in different social settings. Role-play activity can also become the right technique in English speaking practice, as it is more fun for students. Students understand their future roles through actions and language.[4] In this terminology, experts agree that role-play activity can be used in teaching and learning speaking. Role-play activity is a good strategy for teaching speaking, because it enables students to communicate in different social contexts and social roles.[5]

In order to achieve this goal, the purpose of this study is to elucidate the problems in role-play activities in oral English teaching in primary schools and provide relevant teaching suggestions.

## 2. Definition of Role-Play Activity and Communicative Competence

### 2.1. Role-Play Activity

Role-play activity is commonly used in the class. Firstly,

Brown stated that role-play (a) consists of one or many people in each group, and (b) has the goal to achieve.[6] There are some issues with the application of role-play activity. It requires students to participate in a drama to represent a certain character or personality. It is an important way for the students to practice speaking. Apart from it, the role-play activity provides students with the opportunity to communicate with others on a temporary basis. Rayhan explained that *role* is someone in a specific situation, and *play* must be carried out in a safe environment, where the students can be creative individuals.[7] Role-play activity allows students to experience in their imagined situations.

Role-play activity is a famous activity in oral classes. In such activity, students need extra time to prepare what they want to say. The role provides students with some opportunities to use difficult scripts. Teachers can guide the whole procedure. The level of response to complexity is the technique that determines scores of students. This technology makes candidates simpler, more focused, and more responsive.

### 2.2. Communicative Competence

Communicative competence refers to the use of learners' language abilities to achieve successful communication. It is divided into four aspects, that is, regulation, application, coherent, and cohesion.[8] Teachers can combine listening and writing competencies by designing activities such as drama, note taking, and summarization.

Communicative competence is closely related to the language proficiency of learners. The Communicative approach involves learners' behavior to the repetition and the ability to remember grammar.[9] The learners can communicate everywhere, use the proper language which can be accurately understood.

## 3. Analysis of Existing Problems in Role-Play Activities in Oral English Teaching in Primary School

Teachers' theoretical knowledge of role-play activity is insufficient. According to a survey, it was found that teachers generally have a problem of understanding types and roles of role-play activity. Firstly, most teachers only have a superficial and one-sided understanding of the content related

to role-play activity. When asked about the types of role-play activity used by teachers, their responses showed that they were not clear about it and only relied on their own experience in implementation. Secondly, most teachers believe that enhance the fun of the classroom is the most important goal of role-play activity, but they overlook its role in cultivating students' emotional attitudes and communication skills.

Teachers' teaching evaluation ability is insufficient, manifested by low evaluation frequency and lack of unified standards for evaluation. On the one hand, although most teachers' evaluations are relatively optimistic, there are still some teachers who rarely evaluate or even do not evaluate students' performance. On the other hand, there is a lack of unified standards for teacher evaluation. Teachers only provide simple comments on students' pronunciation, intonation, and other aspects of evaluation are relatively limited.

The cognitive level of students is limited, and there are differences in their English proficiency. On the one hand, primary school students are in the Foundation Stage of learning English. It is very challenging to require them to prepare for role-play activities in a relatively short time, which is not conducive to students' enthusiasm and confidence. On the other hand, the differences in English proficiency between students are reflected in their different English foundations and personality traits. As a group activity, role-play activity requires members to work together, so the differences between them will affect the actual completion effect of role-play activities.

#### **4. Suggestions for the Application of Role-Play Activities in English Teaching**

Enriching teacher role-play activity knowledge and apply various types of role-playing. On the one hand, teachers' knowledge of role-play activity need to be enriched. Firstly, teachers can learn more about relevant theories in their spare time, such as constructivist theory, situational cognition theory, etc. These theories can be well integrated with role-playing methods, providing more scientific guidance for teachers' teaching. Secondly, teachers can usually read more professional books, newspapers, magazines, and other materials to understand the procedures and principles of role-play activity. They can also watch teaching videos related to role-playing, participate in seminars, regularly discuss and exchange with other teachers, and engage in self-reflection to constantly enrich and improve themselves. Thirdly, teachers can also participate in some curriculum reforms or development, gradually improving themselves and reflecting on this process. On the other hand, there should be more types of role-playing activities used by teachers. There are four main types of role-playing, which are fully controlled, semi-controlled, semi-free, and fully free. The types that teachers use the most are fully controlled and semi controlled role-play activities. Continuing to use this simple method will make students feel that completing tasks is easy, leading to low learning motivation. For students in grades 5 and 6, teachers should arrange tasks based on their zones of proximal development, allowing them to accept certain challenging learning in order to gradually improve their English proficiency. In short, flexible and diverse teaching methods can enrich students' experiences, and reasonable role-playing types can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in

learning. Therefore, teachers should use multiple role-playing types.

Enriching methods and contents of teaching evaluation. Teaching evaluation is a very important part of the teaching process. Scientific and effective teaching evaluation can help students clarify their knowledge and shortcomings, and continuously improve and perfect themselves. Teaching evaluation should not be limited to a single evaluation method, especially one that focuses too much on knowledge or only on results. Teachers should focus on using more different evaluation methods in teaching. Therefore, Timely and effective evaluation of student performance by teachers can help students clarify the central content of their learning. Firstly, teachers should enrich teaching evaluation methods. In addition to verbal evaluation, teachers can use table evaluation methods or combine some material rewards. For example, small stickers, point redemption, etc. Secondly, teachers should enrich the content of teaching evaluation. The content of teacher evaluation should involve six aspects, that is, the accuracy of pronunciation and intonation, the appropriateness of words used, the correctness of grammar, the fluency of English expression, the enthusiasm for cooperation among members, and the appropriateness of posture language, rather than simply evaluating pronunciation and intonation. In this way, students can have a comprehensive understanding of their knowledge mastery.

Enhancing interactive communication between teachers and students. Effective interactive communication can help students change their impression of dull and uninteresting English knowledge, which is beneficial for improving their communication skills. For example, when a student performs, an encouraging look or a smile from the teacher will invisibly make the student receive recognition. This not only enhances the relationship between teachers and students, but also allows students to express themselves more confidently. In addition, during the process of guiding students, teachers can talk to them about basic language expressions, cultural differences between China and different countries, and help them understand the emotions and attitudes of the characters in the book. This can also help students understand and master knowledge from different dimensions, thus providing knowledge foundation for effective communication among students.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The role-playing method is currently a popular teaching method in English teaching. Due to its effectiveness, interest, and strong adaptability, it has been favored by most teachers and students. Therefore, whether the role-playing method has been effectively applied has also attracted the attention of many scholars. This study mainly addresses the problems in role-play activities in oral English teaching in primary school, including teachers' understanding of role-play activity, selection of role-play content and methods, and teaching evaluation. The author also proposes some improvement measures to address these issues, mainly including enriching the theoretical knowledge of teacher role-play method, improving the application level of teacher role-playing method, enhancing teachers' teaching evaluation ability, and improving students' English proficiency. In summary, through research, it has been found that using role-play activity in oral English teaching in primary school can enhance the effectiveness of oral English teaching, which is of great significance for traditional teaching methods and

enhancing students' interest in learning. However, due to my limited research ability, the conclusions drawn may not be comprehensive, and proposing solutions to problems may also be too idealistic. So, for these shortcomings, the author will continue to supplement and improve them through more reading and learning in future work and studies. It is also hoped that more and more scholars can conduct more in-depth research on role-playing methods to promote the development of teaching.

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