

ENGAGING TENTH GRADE STUDENTS: ENHANCING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH ROLE PLAY ICEBREAKERS

Sugeng Riyadi¹, Sri Suci Suryawati², Dienni Ratna Seroja³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung

¹sugengriyadi@radenintan.ac.id

Abstract

Engaging students in learning speaking skills is crucial for vocational school graduates, particularly in pharmacy classes at SMKS Al-Huda. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of using role play icebreakers to enhance student interest and participation in speaking activities. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved 23 tenth-grade pharmacy students at SMKS Al-Huda. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's method, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate that role play cards significantly increase students' interest and confidence in speaking, as evidenced by their enthusiastic participation and improved speaking abilities. This research highlights the potential of innovative teaching methods like role play icebreakers to make language learning more engaging and effective for students.

Keywords: *icebreakers, role play, speaking*

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning is an integrated process in which students must learn basic empathy skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are fundamental for understanding our world through listening and reading, and for expressing our feelings, needs, and desires through speaking and writing (Istiara & Hastomo, 2023). Among these, speaking stands out as one of the most vital aspects of communication. Speaking is the act of verbally conveying a message, and it directly relates to an individual's ability to articulate thoughts clearly and effectively (Istiara et al., 2023). In the context of education, particularly at vocational schools like Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK), speaking ability is essential for preparing students for the workforce. Graduates from these schools are expected to enter the job market ready to communicate proficiently in their chosen fields.

Speaking ability, according to experts like El Shazly (2021), is defined as the capacity to express ideas accurately and clearly. Similarly, Hartshorne et al. (2018) describes it as the ability to use language orally to communicate effectively in various situations. However, despite its importance, many students struggle with speaking skills. In reality, some students possess limited knowledge of English, while others lack the confidence to use the language (Sutiyono & Hastomo, 2022). This lack of confidence often stems from fear of making mistakes or being misunderstood, which can lead to disinterest and boredom in learning English. These challenges highlight the need for teachers to employ engaging and effective teaching techniques to capture students' attention and enhance their speaking skills.

One innovative approach to address these issues is the use of icebreakers and role play in teaching speaking. Icebreakers are activities designed to warm up the conversation among students and make them more comfortable speaking in a foreign language (Felani, 2022). Role

play, on the other hand, involves students acting out scenarios that mimic real-life situations, which helps them practice speaking in a contextualized and meaningful way (Sari et al., 2023). Combining these two methods can create a dynamic and supportive learning environment. Icebreaking activities can reduce anxiety and build rapport, while role play can provide practical speaking practice (Fioravanti et al., 2022). This combination is particularly useful in settings where students need to develop specific vocational language skills, such as in pharmacy classes at SMKS Al-Huda.

Teachers at SMKS Al-Huda have recognized the potential of role play icebreakers to enhance student interest in learning speaking. In their efforts to overcome students' reluctance and low scores in speaking activities, they have implemented role play cards as an ice-breaking technique. These cards contain scenarios and prompts that encourage students to engage in conversation, thereby improving their fluency and confidence. Despite the initial positive impact, the use of role play cards has not yet reached its full potential. There is a need for a more systematic and comprehensive approach to maximize their effectiveness.

Previous research has demonstrated the benefits of role play in language learning. For instance, role playing can significantly improve students' oral communication skills, including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (Poděbradská et al., 2020). It also promotes creative thinking and improvisation, as students must respond to various scenarios in real time. Moreover, role play fosters collaboration and teamwork, enhancing interpersonal communication skills (Fioravanti et al., 2022). Similar findings found that role play techniques positively impact speaking skills at the university level (Felani, 2022; Fioravanti et al., 2022). However, there is still a gap in the research regarding the long-term sustainability and transferability of speaking skills acquired through role play. Most studies have focused on the immediate effects of role play interventions, with little attention paid to how these skills persist over time or transfer to other contexts. Additionally, there is limited research on the specific challenges teachers face when implementing role play and icebreakers in the classroom. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to overcome them and ensure the successful integration of these techniques into language teaching.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the specific context of tenth-grade pharmacy students at SMKS Al-Huda and the use of role play cards as an ice-breaking technique. This study aims to provide a detailed examination of how these methods can enhance student interest and proficiency in speaking. By exploring the unique aspects of this approach, including its implementation and the obstacles encountered, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights to the field of language education. It aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, offering concrete recommendations for teachers.

The primary goal of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of role play icebreakers in improving the speaking skills of tenth-grade pharmacy students at SMKS Al-Huda. The study will assess how well these techniques engage students, increase their confidence, and enhance their speaking abilities. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the research will gather data on student performance, engagement, and perceptions of the role play activities. This comprehensive approach will provide a holistic understanding of the impact of role play icebreakers on language learning. Speaking is a critical skill for students, particularly those in vocational education, as it prepares them for effective communication in the workforce. Despite its importance, many students struggle with speaking due to lack of confidence and interest. Role play icebreakers offer a promising solution to these challenges by creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. This research aims to explore the effectiveness of this approach in the specific context of tenth-grade pharmacy students at SMKS Al-Huda, providing insights that can inform teaching practices and improve language education outcomes.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the effectiveness of role play icebreakers in enhancing student interest and proficiency in speaking. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and reactions to the intervention. Descriptive research provides a detailed account of the current state of students' speaking abilities and how these are influenced by the use of role play icebreakers. The study focuses on capturing the nuances of classroom dynamics and the specific ways in which the intervention impacts student engagement and learning outcomes.

Population

The population for this study consists of tenth-grade pharmacy students at SMKS Al-Huda, located in Jati Agung, South Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia. The school offers vocational training, and the selected population includes students who are preparing for careers in the pharmacy field. A total of 23 students from this grade level participate in the study. These students were chosen because they represent a critical stage in their vocational education, where developing effective communication skills is essential for their future professional success.

Data Collection

Data collection involves multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impact of role play icebreakers on students' speaking skills. The primary methods include interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews are conducted with both students and teachers to gather detailed insights into their experiences and perceptions of the role play icebreakers. Semi-structured interview guides are used to allow for flexibility in exploring emerging themes. Classroom observations are carried out to witness firsthand the implementation of role play activities and to note student engagement, participation, and interaction. Observational notes are taken systematically to capture relevant details. Additionally, the collection of students' work, including speaking exercises, role play scripts, and assessment records, provides additional data on their progress and proficiency. These documents offer tangible evidence of the students' development over time.

Data Analysis

Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This initial stage involves sorting and organizing the collected data to highlight significant patterns and themes. Unnecessary information is discarded to focus on relevant findings. Data is presented in an organized format, such as matrices, graphs, and charts, to facilitate a clear understanding of the trends and relationships observed. Visual representations help in making sense of the data and identifying key insights. Based on the reduced and displayed data, conclusions are drawn regarding the effectiveness of role play icebreakers. These conclusions are continually verified against the raw data to ensure accuracy and reliability. The analysis aims to identify the extent to which role play icebreakers enhance student interest and speaking proficiency, as well as to uncover any challenges faced during implementation. By triangulating data from interviews, observations, and documentation, the study ensures a robust and comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interviews and observations detailed in the study, several key findings emerged regarding the use of role-play cards to enhance student interest in learning speaking skills at the tenth-grade pharmacy class of SMKS Al-Huda. Initially, many students were hesitant and anxious about speaking English in class, fearing mistakes and peer judgment. This was evident

from interviews where students expressed nervousness and a lack of confidence. However, the introduction of role-play cards significantly increased student engagement and confidence. Students reported feeling more comfortable and enthusiastic about speaking English during role-play activities, with the interactive nature of these activities helping to reduce anxiety and build confidence. The relevance of the role-play scenarios to the students' daily lives and future careers in pharmacy made the learning process more engaging and meaningful.

Teachers observed notable improvements in students' speaking skills, including better pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, indicating the effectiveness of these activities. Despite the overall positive impact, some students were less enthusiastic and participated less actively, requiring teachers to employ various strategies, such as group work and positive reinforcement, to encourage participation. The teacher's role was crucial in facilitating role-play activities, as effective guidance, support, and feedback were essential in creating a positive learning environment. Role-play activities also required significant time for preparation and execution, necessitating careful time management to ensure they did not interfere with the overall curriculum schedule.

Maintaining student enthusiasm and participation required continuous teacher effort, with strategies such as regularly changing role-play scenarios and providing ongoing encouragement proving necessary. Overall, students gave positive feedback about the role-play activities, finding them enjoyable and helpful in improving their speaking skills, and expressing a desire for more frequent role-play activities in their English classes. The positive impact of role-play activities extended beyond speaking skills, with students reporting increased interest in learning English as a whole, indicating that these activities contributed to a more engaging and effective learning experience.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the use of interactive and engaging teaching methods to enhance language learning. For example, Tipmontree & Tasanameelarp (2021) found that role-playing games significantly improved students' speaking skills, including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. This study similarly observed improvements in these areas, suggesting that role-play activities are effective in enhancing language abilities. Furthermore, Harmer (2001) emphasized that ice-breaking activities like role play can reduce anxiety and increase self-confidence among students. The current study supports this assertion, as students at SMKS Al-Huda showed increased confidence and reduced fear of speaking English after participating in role-play activities. This indicates that role-play cards can be a valuable tool for overcoming language learning anxiety.

Comparatively, while Winardy & Septiana (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of picture cards in improving speaking skills, the current study specifically highlights the benefits of role-play cards in creating a more interactive and engaging learning environment. The interactive nature of role-play cards provides additional benefits in enhancing student interest and participation, suggesting that they may be more effective than static learning tools in promoting active language use.

The teacher's role in creating a supportive and encouraging classroom environment was crucial in overcoming initial student reluctance. This finding aligns with Dörnyei (2007) assertion that activities involving social interaction can increase students' intrinsic motivation. Teachers at SMKS Al-Huda implemented strategies such as providing positive reinforcement and starting activities in small groups to gradually build students' confidence, which proved effective in increasing participation.

Despite the overall positive impact, the research highlighted the challenge of maintaining consistent student enthusiasm, particularly among those initially reluctant to participate. This issue aligns with Brown' (2006) observation that not all students feel comfortable or motivated to engage in role-play activities. The current study's findings suggest that while role-play cards are effective, they require continuous teacher effort to ensure all students are actively involved, highlighting the need for tailored strategies to address individual student needs.

Another significant finding was the relevance of the role-play scenarios to students' daily lives and future professional contexts. This relevance helped students see the practical value of learning speaking skills, thereby increasing their motivation. This is consistent Hastomo's (2021) recommendation that learning materials should be relevant and appropriate to students' language levels and life contexts. The alignment of role-play scenarios with the pharmacy context of the students at SMKS Al-Huda made the learning process more meaningful and engaging.

The research also identified the importance of adequate teacher preparation and skills in implementing role-play activities effectively. Felani (2022) noted that teacher readiness is critical for successful role-play sessions, which was echoed in the current study. Teachers at SMKS Al-Huda had to be adept at managing class dynamics, ensuring active participation, and providing constructive feedback, which were essential for the success of the role-play activities.

Time constraints were another challenge highlighted in the study. Sari et al. (2023) pointed out that role-play activities often require more time compared to traditional teaching techniques, a challenge also faced by teachers at SMKS Al-Huda. Effective time management and careful planning were necessary to integrate role-play activities without disrupting the curriculum schedule, emphasizing the need for teachers to balance innovative methods with curriculum demands.

CONCLUSIONS

This research investigated the use of role-play cards to enhance student interest and improve speaking skills in the tenth-grade pharmacy class at SMKS Al-Huda. The findings indicated that role-play cards significantly increased student engagement and confidence in speaking English. Students found the activities relevant to their daily lives and future careers, which made the learning process more engaging and meaningful. Teachers observed notable improvements in students' pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Despite some challenges, such as varying levels of participation and the need for continuous teacher encouragement, the overall feedback from students was positive. They expressed enjoyment and a desire for more frequent role-play activities, highlighting the effectiveness of these interactive learning tools.

However, the study had some limitations that need to be addressed. One limitation was the small sample size, which may not provide a comprehensive representation of all tenth-grade students at SMKS Al-Huda. Additionally, the study was conducted over a relatively short period, limiting the ability to assess long-term effects of role-play activities on student speaking skills. The reliance on teacher observations and student self-reports also introduces potential bias, as these methods may not fully capture the objective improvements in speaking abilities. Furthermore, the study did not compare role-play cards with other teaching methods, making it difficult to determine the relative effectiveness of this approach.

The implications of this research are significant for language educators, particularly those teaching English as a foreign language. The findings suggest that role-play cards can be an effective tool for increasing student interest and participation in speaking activities. By incorporating relevant and interactive scenarios, teachers can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment that reduces student anxiety and builds confidence. This approach can lead to improved language skills and greater overall interest in learning English. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of continuous teacher support and preparation in successfully implementing role-play activities.

Future research should address the limitations identified in this study. Larger and more diverse samples should be included to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of role-play cards on student learning. Long-term studies are needed to assess the sustained effects of these activities on speaking skills. Additionally, future research should compare the effectiveness of role-play cards with other interactive teaching methods to determine the best practices for enhancing language learning. Teachers should also be provided with professional development opportunities to enhance their skills in using role-play activities effectively. By

addressing these areas, future research can build on the findings of this study and contribute to the development of more effective language teaching strategies.

REFERENCES

- Brown, H. D. (2006). Principles of language learning and Teaching (5th Edition). In *Pearson Education ESL*.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.
- El Shazly, R. (2021). Effects of artificial intelligence on English speaking anxiety and speaking performance: A case study. *Expert Systems*, 38(3), e12667. <https://doi.org/10.1111/EXSY.12667>
- Felani, H. (2022). Use of icebreakers and games for interactive online learning. *Communications in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(2), 65–70. <https://doi.org/10.21924/chss.2.2.2022.39>
- Fioravanti, M. L., de Oliveira Sestito, C. D., de Deus, W. S., Scatalon, L. P., & Barbosa, E. F. (2022). Role-Playing Games for Fostering Communication and Negotiation Skills. *IEEE Transactions on Education*, 65(3), 384–393. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TE.2021.3117898>
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). Longman Ltd.
- Hartshorne, J. K., Tenenbaum, J. B., & Pinker, S. (2018). A critical period for second language acquisition: Evidence from 2/3 million English speakers. *Cognition*, 177, 263–277.
- Hastomo, T. (2021). Video Conferences in Teaching EFL: A Case Study Of Using Zoom. *Lentera: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan*, 14(1), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.52217/LENERA.V14I1.830>
- Istiara, F., & Hastomo, T. (2023). Exploring lecturers and administrative staffs' strategies to hone EFL students' digital literacy. *JOALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literature)*, 8(1), 151–172. <https://doi.org/10.33369/JOALL.V8I1.25568>
- Istiara, F., Hastomo, T., Indriyanta, W. A., Pgri, S., & Lampung, B. (2023). A Study of Students' Engagement and Students' Speaking Skill: A Correlational Research. *TEKNOSASTIK*, 21(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.33365/TS.V21I1.2198>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.
- Poděbradská, M., Noel, M., Bathke, D., Haigh, T., & Hayes, M. (2020). Ready for Drought? A Community Resilience Role-Playing Game. *Water*, 12(9), 2490. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w12092490>
- Sari, D. M., Nelloe, M. K., Rofii, A., Putra, R. M., Fitriani, N., & Pattiasina, P. Y. (2023). The Implementation of Icebreaker Technique toward Students' Speaking Skill and Their Motivation in English Language Teaching at Senior High School 1 Gunung Labuhan. *Journal on Education*, 6(1), 1673–1686. <https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v6i1.3131>
- Suchada Tipmontree, & Asama Tasanameelarp. (2021). Using Role Playing Activities to Improve Thai EFL Students' Oral English Communication Skills. *International Journal of Business and Society*, 21(3), 1215–1225. <https://doi.org/10.33736/ijbs.3345.2020>
- Sutiyono, A., & Hastomo, T. (2022). Zoom Conference: A Study of Students' Perception on the Academic Achievement during COVID-19 Pandemic. *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris*, 15(2), 193–205. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ee-jtbi.v15i2.13539>
- Winardy, G. C. B., & Septiana, E. (2023). Role, play, and games: Comparison between role-playing games and role-play in education. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 8(1), 100527. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100527>