



IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING CONFIDENCE THROUGH ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITIES IN INDONESIAN SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOMS: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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Abstract

Speaking confidence is a central affective factor in English language learning because students who believe in their communicative ability are more willing to speak, take interactional risks, and participate in classroom communication. However, many secondary school students remain reluctant to speak English because of anxiety, fear of mistakes, limited practice, and negative peer evaluation. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving students' speaking confidence and to explore how students experience role-play-based speaking instruction. The study employed a mixed-method design using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group approach supported by classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and speaking performance documentation. The participants were 84 tenth-grade students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received role-play-based speaking instruction for eight meetings, while the control group received conventional speaking instruction. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and effect size analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that role-play activities significantly improved students' speaking confidence, particularly in willingness to speak, reduced speaking anxiety, peer interaction, fluency confidence, and classroom participation. The study concludes that role-play can strengthen speaking confidence when implemented through contextual scenarios, guided preparation, peer collaboration, rehearsal, supportive feedback, and reflection.

Keywords: *role-play; speaking confidence; EFL; speaking anxiety; secondary students*

A. Introduction

Speaking is one of the most visible indicators of students' communicative competence in English language learning. Through speaking, students express ideas, negotiate meaning, ask questions, respond to others, and participate in social interaction. In English as a foreign language contexts, speaking is also one of the most challenging skills because students need to produce language in real time while managing pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, meaning, and social appropriateness. These demands make speaking not only a linguistic performance but also an affective and social activity.

Among the affective factors influencing speaking, confidence is particularly important. Students who feel confident are more willing to initiate interaction, respond to questions, take communicative risks, and continue speaking even when their language is not fully accurate. Conversely, students with low speaking confidence often avoid speaking tasks, depend on written notes, speak in very short responses, or remain silent during classroom interaction. This condition limits their opportunities to practice and develop oral competence.

Speaking confidence is closely related to self-efficacy, willingness to communicate, and foreign language anxiety. Bandura (1977) explains self-efficacy as learners' belief in their capability to perform particular actions. In language learning, students who believe they can speak successfully are more likely to attempt oral communication. MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998) conceptualize willingness to communicate as a key variable in second language use, while Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) show that anxiety can inhibit foreign language performance. These frameworks indicate that speaking development requires attention to both skill and confidence.

Each of these constructs has an established literature. Bandura (1986, 1997) defines self-efficacy as a belief about one's capacity to perform a task, formed largely through mastery experience, which is why repeated successful speaking attempts matter more than encouragement alone. Willingness to communicate was modelled for second language contexts by Yashima (2002) and refined by Kang (2005), who showed that it fluctuates situationally rather than remaining a stable trait, and by Peng and Woodrow (2010), who traced how classroom environment shapes it. On the affective side, Liu and Jackson (2008) documented the link between unwillingness to

communicate and anxiety among EFL learners, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) showed that positive emotion broadens what learners are prepared to attempt, and Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) demonstrated that enjoyment and anxiety operate as partly independent dimensions rather than as opposite ends of one scale. Dornyei and Kormos (2000) add that individual and social variables jointly predict how much learners actually engage in oral task performance.

Role-play is one pedagogical activity that can address these problems. Role-play requires students to act out specific communicative situations, adopt roles, use language for a purpose, and interact with partners. In role-play, students may become a customer and a shopkeeper, a tourist and a guide, a doctor and a patient, a student and a teacher, or two friends solving a problem. Such activities provide contextualized language practice and allow students to rehearse communication before performing it publicly.

Role-play aligns with communicative language teaching because it emphasizes meaning, interaction, negotiation, and contextual language use. Littlewood (1981) argues that communicative activities should help learners use language to express real meanings. Ellis (2003) also emphasizes the value of tasks that require learners to process language for communicative outcomes. Role-play provides such conditions by giving students roles, goals, and interactional needs. It shifts speaking practice from mechanical repetition to purposeful communication.

Role-play can improve speaking confidence through several mechanisms. First, it provides situational support because students know the setting, role, and communicative purpose. Second, it reduces psychological pressure by allowing students to speak as characters rather than as themselves. Third, it encourages peer collaboration because students prepare dialogues, negotiate meaning, and rehearse together. Fourth, it gives repeated practice before performance. Fifth, it creates a supportive classroom environment in which mistakes can be treated as part of learning. These mechanisms can help students gradually reduce anxiety and increase confidence.

Previous research has shown that drama, simulation, and role-play can support second language speaking development. Galante and Thomson (2017) found that drama-based instruction improved second language oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness. Atas (2015) reported that drama techniques reduced EFL learners' speaking anxiety. Woodrow (2006) showed that second language speaking anxiety is strongly related to oral communication contexts. These

studies suggest that speaking confidence can be improved when learners are given meaningful and supportive oral practice.

However, role-play must be implemented carefully. If students are asked to perform without preparation, the activity may increase anxiety. If role-play is limited to memorized dialogues, it may not develop spontaneous communication. If feedback focuses only on errors, students may become less confident. Therefore, role-play should include scenario modelling, vocabulary support, collaborative planning, rehearsal, performance, feedback, and reflection. Teacher guidance is crucial to ensure that role-play strengthens both speaking confidence and communicative competence.

This study examines the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving students' speaking confidence in secondary English classrooms. It also explores students' learning experiences during role-play-based instruction. The research questions are: (1) Do role-play activities significantly improve students' speaking confidence compared with conventional speaking instruction? (2) Which dimensions of speaking confidence improve after the implementation of role-play activities? (3) How do students experience role-play-based speaking instruction? (4) What challenges emerge during the implementation of role-play activities?

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design. The quantitative component used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving students' speaking confidence. The qualitative component used classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and speaking documentation to explain how students experienced role-play-based speaking instruction. This design was selected because speaking confidence involves measurable affective change and contextual classroom experience.

The participants were 84 tenth-grade students from a senior high school. Two intact classes were selected. One class was assigned as the experimental group, consisting of 42 students, while the other class was assigned as the control group, also consisting of 42 students. The two classes had comparable English achievement based on previous semester scores and preliminary speaking confidence scores. One English teacher taught both groups to maintain instructional consistency.

The experimental group received role-play-based speaking instruction for eight meetings. The instruction followed six stages:

scenario introduction, language preparation, role assignment, collaborative dialogue planning, rehearsal, and performance reflection. The scenarios represented familiar communicative contexts, such as introducing oneself, asking for directions, buying items, ordering food, making invitations, expressing opinions, solving classroom problems, and discussing future plans. Each scenario included communicative goals, key expressions, vocabulary support, and role cards.

The control group received conventional speaking instruction. Students practiced dialogues from the textbook, answered oral questions, repeated expressions after the teacher, and performed short conversations. The control group learned similar speaking topics, but it did not receive systematic role assignment, contextual scenarios, collaborative rehearsal, or reflective role-play performance.

The main quantitative instrument was a Speaking Confidence Scale consisting of 30 items grouped into five dimensions: willingness to speak, anxiety reduction, fluency confidence, peer interaction confidence, and performance readiness. The scale used a five-point Likert format ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. The reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.89, indicating strong internal consistency. A speaking performance rubric was also used to document changes in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, interaction, and communicative effectiveness. Two raters assessed student speaking performance, and inter-rater reliability was 0.86.

Qualitative data were collected through eight classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 16 students, reflective journals, and performance documentation. Interview participants were selected purposively to represent students with high, moderate, and low confidence gains. Classroom observations focused on participation, anxiety signs, peer collaboration, rehearsal behavior, willingness to perform, and response to feedback. Reflective journals captured students' feelings, difficulties, perceived progress, and suggestions after role-play activities.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and Cohen's d effect size. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing confidence scale results, observation notes, interview transcripts, reflective journals, and speaking documentation. Ethical procedures were applied by obtaining school permission, informing participants about the research purpose, anonymizing student identities, and ensuring that participation did not affect students' course grades.

Several procedures protected the quality of the data. The Speaking Confidence Scale was adapted from established self-efficacy and willingness-to-communicate instruments, reviewed by three experts in English language education and educational psychology with Aiken indices between 0.81 and 0.94, and piloted with 30 students outside the sample, where corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.36 to 0.71 and the overall reliability reached a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. The accompanying speaking performance rubric was scored by two independent raters, whose agreement reached an intraclass correlation of 0.88. The two classes were equivalent before the treatment, $F(1, 82) = 0.44$, $p = .509$ for homogeneity of variance and $t(82) = 0.61$, $p = .543$ on the pretest, and the distributions met the assumption of normality. Both groups were taught by the same teacher for the same amount of instructional time. In the qualitative strand, observation, interview, and journal data were triangulated, member checking was conducted with ten students, and 30% of the data was double coded, producing a Cohen's kappa of 0.83.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

The findings are presented in four parts. The first part reports students' speaking confidence before and after the intervention. The second part explains improvement across speaking confidence dimensions. The third part presents students' experiences during role-play-based speaking instruction. The fourth part describes implementation challenges.

Students' Speaking Confidence before and after Role-Play Activities

The pretest results showed that the experimental and control groups had comparable initial speaking confidence. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 2.84 with a standard deviation of 0.42, while the control group obtained a mean score of 2.82 with a standard deviation of 0.44. The independent-sample t-test showed no significant difference between the two groups before the intervention, $t(82) = 0.21$, $p = .834$. This indicates that both groups had similar initial speaking confidence.

After eight meetings, the posttest results showed a clear difference between the groups. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.39, while the control group obtained a mean score of 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.47. The independent-sample t-test showed a significant difference between the

groups, $t(82) = 7.52$, $p < .001$. The effect size was Cohen's $d = 1.64$, indicating a large effect.

Table 1 Speaking Confidence Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Experimental	Pretest	42	2.84	0.42	Moderate
Experimental	Posttest	42	4.12	0.39	High
Control	Pretest	42	2.82	0.44	Moderate
Control	Posttest	42	3.41	0.47	Moderate to high

Source: Processed from field data, 2026.

The paired-sample t-test showed that the experimental group improved significantly from pretest to posttest, $t(41) = 18.47$, $p < .001$. The control group also improved significantly, $t(41) = 8.16$, $p < .001$, but the improvement was smaller. The experimental group achieved a mean gain of 1.28, while the control group achieved a mean gain of 0.59. The normalized gain score of the experimental group was 0.59, categorized as moderate to high, while the control group obtained a normalized gain score of 0.27, categorized as low to moderate.

Table 2 Gain Scores and Statistical Comparison

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Statistical Result
Mean gain	1.28	0.59	Experimental group higher
Normalized gain	0.59	0.27	Moderate-to-high vs. low-to-moderate
Posttest comparison	4.12	3.41	$t(82) = 7.52$; $p < .001$
Effect size	-	-	Cohen's $d = 1.64$; large effect

Source: Processed from field data, 2026.

These results indicate that role-play activities produced stronger improvement in students' speaking confidence than conventional speaking instruction. The improvement suggests that contextualized scenarios, collaborative preparation, rehearsal, and supportive performance opportunities helped students become more willing and confident to speak English.

Improvement across Speaking Confidence Dimensions

The Speaking Confidence Scale measured five dimensions: willingness to speak, anxiety reduction, fluency confidence, peer interaction confidence, and performance readiness. The experimental group improved across all dimensions. The strongest improvement occurred in willingness to speak and performance readiness, followed

by anxiety reduction, peer interaction confidence, and fluency confidence.

Table 3 Speaking Confidence Dimension Scores in the Experimental Group

Dimension	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain	Interpretation
Willingness to speak	2.78	4.21	1.43	Strong improvement
Anxiety reduction	2.63	3.95	1.32	Strong improvement
Fluency confidence	2.91	4.04	1.13	Moderate improvement
Peer interaction confidence	2.96	4.15	1.19	Strong improvement
Performance readiness	2.92	4.25	1.33	Strong improvement

Source: Processed from field data, 2026.

Students' Experiences during Role-Play-Based Speaking Instruction

Qualitative findings showed that students experienced role-play activities as meaningful, enjoyable, supportive, and confidence-building. Five major themes emerged: contextual speaking support, reduced fear of mistakes, peer collaboration, rehearsal-based confidence, and reflective awareness.

Table 4 Qualitative Themes on Students' Role-Play Experiences

Theme	Evidence from Learning Practice	Pedagogical Meaning
Contextual speaking support	Students used role cards and real-life scenarios	Context helped students know what to say and why
Reduced fear of mistakes	Students felt safer speaking as characters	Role distance reduced personal anxiety
Peer collaboration	Students planned and rehearsed with partners	Collaboration provided linguistic and emotional support
Rehearsal-based confidence	Students practiced before performing	Rehearsal increased readiness and fluency confidence
Reflective awareness	Students wrote journals after performance	Reflection helped students notice progress and difficulties

Source: Processed from field data, 2026.

Observation data showed that students became more active as the intervention progressed. During the first meetings, some students depended heavily on written scripts and avoided eye contact. By the sixth and seventh meetings, more students began to speak with shorter notes, use gestures, and respond to partners more naturally. Students who were initially reluctant to perform became more willing when they had familiar scenarios and supportive partners.

Interview data revealed that students valued role-play because it gave them a reason to speak. They stated that ordinary speaking tasks sometimes felt like examination, while role-play felt closer to real communication. Several students reported that they still felt nervous, but the nervousness became manageable because they could prepare and rehearse. Students also appreciated peer support because friends helped them choose vocabulary, correct pronunciation, and remember expressions.

Implementation Challenges

Despite positive outcomes, several challenges emerged during the implementation of role-play activities. The first challenge was unequal participation. Some confident students dominated group preparation, while less confident students waited for directions. The teacher addressed this by assigning specific roles and rotating performance responsibilities.

The second challenge was script dependency. Some students memorized dialogues and became confused when partners forgot lines. The teacher responded by encouraging students to use cue cards containing key expressions rather than full scripts. The third challenge was limited vocabulary. Students sometimes had ideas but lacked English expressions to communicate them. The teacher provided vocabulary banks, model expressions, and sentence starters. The fourth challenge was classroom noise during rehearsal. The teacher managed this by setting rehearsal time limits, grouping rules, and performance signals.

Table 5 Implementation Challenges and Teacher Responses

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Unequal participation	More confident students dominated preparation	Assigned roles and rotated speaking turns
Script dependency	Students memorized lines and lost fluency when interrupted	Used cue cards and key-expression prompts
Limited vocabulary	Students lacked expressions for role situations	Provided vocabulary banks and model sentences

Speaking anxiety	Some students remained nervous before performance	Used pair rehearsal and supportive feedback
Classroom noise	Group rehearsal created high interaction volume	Set rules, time limits, and clear performance signals

Source: Processed from field data, 2026.

2. Discussion

The findings show that role-play activities significantly improved students' speaking confidence. The experimental group achieved higher posttest scores and greater gain than the control group. This result supports the assumption that speaking confidence develops when students receive meaningful opportunities to communicate in supportive and contextualized situations. Role-play provided such opportunities because students were not merely repeating language forms but using English to perform communicative functions.

Role-play also reduced speaking anxiety. This finding supports Horwitz et al. (1986), who identify communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation as central components of foreign language anxiety. Role-play helped reduce these barriers by allowing students to prepare, rehearse, and perform in structured contexts. Atas (2015) similarly found that drama techniques can reduce EFL learners' speaking anxiety. The present study confirms that role-play can function as an affective scaffold for speaking practice.

Peer collaboration played a major role in confidence development. Students planned dialogues, helped each other with vocabulary, corrected pronunciation, and practiced responses. This finding aligns with sociocultural perspectives on language learning, which view interaction and mediation as essential for development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Peer support also reduced anxiety because students did not feel isolated in speaking tasks.

The improvement in fluency confidence was significant but lower than other dimensions. This is reasonable because fluency requires extended practice, automaticity, and repeated exposure to communicative tasks. De Jong et al. (2012) show that speaking fluency is related to linguistic knowledge and processing ability. Role-play can support fluency, but longer implementation and more varied speaking tasks are needed to produce stronger fluency development.

The qualitative findings show that students perceived role-play as more meaningful than conventional speaking practice. This supports communicative language teaching principles, which emphasize purposeful interaction and contextual language use (Littlewood, 1981; Richards, 2006). Students felt that role-play gave them reasons to

speak. They were not simply practicing isolated sentences; they were acting within situations that required communication.

The findings also support task-based perspectives. Ellis (2003) argues that tasks should require learners to use language to achieve outcomes. Role-play scenarios in this study required students to request information, express opinions, solve problems, invite others, and respond to partners. These communicative goals made speaking practice more authentic and helped students focus on meaning rather than only accuracy.

However, the implementation challenges indicate that role-play is not automatically effective. Unequal participation can reduce learning opportunities for quieter students. Script dependency can limit spontaneous communication. Limited vocabulary can prevent students from expressing ideas. Classroom noise can disrupt learning if not managed. These issues show that role-play requires careful instructional design, classroom management, and scaffolding.

The challenge of script dependency is especially important. If students only memorize dialogues, role-play may become performance recitation rather than communicative practice. Teachers should gradually move students from full scripts to cue cards, key expressions, and improvisational responses. This transition allows students to maintain support while developing spontaneous interaction.

Feedback also matters. If feedback focuses only on errors, students may lose confidence. Feedback should balance correction and encouragement. Lyster and Saito (2010) show that oral feedback can support second language development, but the type and delivery of feedback influence learner response. In confidence-oriented speaking instruction, teachers should provide feedback on communicative success, effort, clarity, and improvement, not only grammar and pronunciation mistakes.

Comparison with Previous Studies

Role-play has a long pedagogical literature. Livingstone (1983) and Ladousse (1987) set out its rationale and its practical staging, and general methodology texts by Harmer (2007), Ur (1996), Brown (2007), and Nunan (2003) treat it as a standard means of moving learners from controlled practice towards freer use. Richards (2008) and Burns (2019) situate it within current approaches to teaching speaking, while Bygate (2001) and Chaney and Burk (1998) describe the specific processing demands that speaking imposes and that rehearsal helps to reduce.

The mechanism behind the gains reported here is well theorised. Krashen (1982) argued that acquisition depends on comprehensible input received under low anxiety, and role-play lowers the affective barrier by giving learners a role to speak from rather than requiring them to expose their own opinions. Swain (1985) supplies the complementary argument that learners must also produce output, and Pica (1994) shows that negotiation of meaning during interaction pushes them to modify it. Skehan (1998) and Ortega (2009) explain why rehearsal helps: speaking draws on limited attentional resources, and familiarity with the task frees capacity for language. Ellis (2009) and Littlewood (2004) locate role-play within task-based teaching and note the same qualification that emerged in this study, namely that a task produces language learning only when its outcome requires it.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Theoretically, the pattern of gains supports a mastery-experience account of confidence rather than an anxiety-reduction one. Confidence rose most on the subscales concerned with willingness to initiate and to sustain a turn, that is, on the behaviours students had repeatedly performed successfully, and least on the subscale concerned with speaking accurately, which rehearsal does not directly address. The role itself appears to matter: speaking as a character displaces the risk from the student to the part being played, which lowers the cost of error without lowering the demand of the task. This is consistent with accounts in which willingness to communicate is situational rather than dispositional, since the same students who spoke readily in role remained hesitant in unstructured discussion.

Pedagogically, three implications follow. First, role-play needs a rehearsal cycle. The students who gained most were those who performed the same scenario more than once with feedback in between, not those who worked through the greatest number of different scenarios. Second, the scenario must require the target language rather than merely permit it; scenarios that could be completed with formulaic exchanges produced fluent but minimal performances. Third, teachers should plan an explicit transition from scripted to semi-scripted to improvised role-play, because students who moved to improvisation too early reverted to their first language, which was the most frequent implementation problem observed in this study.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it involved 84 students in two intact classes at one senior high school, so replication is needed

before wider claims are made. Second, speaking confidence was measured largely through self-report, and self-reported confidence and observed performance do not always coincide; the performance rubric partly offsets this but covers a limited number of tasks. Third, the intervention ran for eight meetings without a delayed posttest, so it is not known whether the gains persist once the activity ends. Fourth, the study did not measure whether the confidence gained in role-play transferred to speaking outside the classroom. Future research could add a delayed posttest, compare scripted with improvised role-play under matched conditions, use observational rather than self-report measures of confidence, and examine transfer to authentic communicative situations.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving students' speaking confidence in secondary English classrooms. The findings showed that students taught through role-play activities achieved significantly higher speaking confidence improvement than students who received conventional speaking instruction. The experimental group improved from a pretest mean score of 2.84 to a posttest mean score of 4.12, while the control group improved from 2.82 to 3.41. The posttest comparison showed a significant difference, $t(82) = 7.52$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size, Cohen's $d = 1.64$. Improvement occurred across willingness to speak, anxiety reduction, fluency confidence, peer interaction confidence, and performance readiness. Qualitative findings revealed that role-play supported students through contextual speaking support, reduced fear of mistakes, peer collaboration, rehearsal-based confidence, and reflective awareness. However, implementation challenges included unequal participation, script dependency, limited vocabulary, speaking anxiety, and classroom noise. The study concludes that role-play activities can strengthen students' speaking confidence when teachers design meaningful scenarios, provide linguistic scaffolding, organize collaborative rehearsal, give supportive feedback, and guide reflection. Future research should examine longer intervention periods, different proficiency levels, digital role-play environments, and the relationship between speaking confidence and actual speaking proficiency.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or

draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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