THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE-PLAY ON PRIMARY STUDENTS' ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS IN INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOM: QUALITATIVE META-ANALYSIS

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Abstract

English speaking skills remain a challenge for elementary school students in Indonesia in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, anxiety when speaking, and limited opportunities for communication practice hinder students' speaking skills. The role-play method is considered adequate for overcoming these problems because it provides students with opportunities to use English in meaningful, real-life situations. This study aims to synthesise empirical findings on the effectiveness of the role-play method in improving the English-speaking skills of elementary school students in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative meta-analysis approach, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Data were obtained from journal articles published between 2015 and 2025 through the Google Scholar database. Of the 17,600 articles identified, 10 that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were analysed using thematic analysis. However, this study has limitations because it relies solely on Google Scholar, potentially excluding other relevant studies from the analysis. The results showed that the role-play method was effective in improving students' speaking skills across linguistic, affective, and social interaction aspects. Improvements included vocabulary mastery, fluency, confidence, learning motivation, and student activity. In addition, role play encourages meaningful interaction and creates a learning environment that supports English-speaking practice. To maximise results, role-play needs to be applied through scenarios relevant to students' context, explicit teaching of vocabulary and expressions, guided role-play practice, and systematic teacher feedback. Thus, role play is an effective and targeted method for improving the speaking skills of elementary school students.

INTRODUCTION | مقدمة

Speaking proficiency remains one of the most challenging skills in EFL classrooms (Suban, 2021). However, Saragih et al. (2024) explain that research on the obstacles young learners face in developing speaking skills is still rarely studied. Recent studies show that role-play-based learning is efficacious in improving English-speaking abilities among elementary school students, but results across studies still vary depending on the context of application (Guntur et al., 2025; Wasilah & Sukasih, 2024). However, only a few studies systematically examine how role-play contributes to the development of speaking skills in elementary school students. Therefore, there is a research gap: a lack of scientific synthesis or qualitative meta-analysis that summarises empirical evidence on the effectiveness of role-play in improving the English-speaking skills of elementary school students in the context of EFL in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia.

Theoretically, the role-play method is based on sociocultural theory, which emphasises that language development occurs through social interaction and meaningful communication between learners and their environment (Rofiif et al., 2025). Recent sociocultural studies show that in play, learners' attention to the meaning and form of language occurs simultaneously through social interaction, which then mediates their L2 development through the language output produced during play activities (Wong et al., 2025). Through role-play, students engage in collaborative dialogue, negotiate meaning, and use language as a tool for social interaction. In addition, role-play aligns with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasises the authentic use of language, and with experiential learning theory, which views learning as a process of constructing knowledge through direct experience and reflection. In line with this Zulianingrum, (2025) shows that role-play activities designed to mimic real-life interactions enable students to produce language spontaneously and functionally, thereby helping them apply vocabulary and language structures in authentic contexts while developing confidence and communicative skills in an integrated manner.

One way to improve speaking skills, in particular, which can have a positive impact, is role play (Sari, 2020). This method allows students to practice speaking in communicative situations that resemble real-life conditions, thereby improving their confidence and fluency. Rudi and Bahtiar (2023) revealed that one of the reasons for choosing the role-playing method is that it is considered more effective and efficient in learning speaking skills. In addition, recent research shows that role-play activities increase student participation and active engagement in the learning process, thereby creating a more meaningful learning experience oriented towards real-world communication practices (Sarifudin & Setyawan, 2025).

English language learning in Indonesia continues to evolve in line with the times, with an emphasis on more interactive and engaging methods (Nasution, 2024). In line with these developments, the development of speaking skills has become a top priority, especially at the elementary school level. Speaking skills are an important part of communicative competence, but at the elementary school level, students often face significant obstacles (Tania, 2025). Agus (2023) found that elementary school students experience difficulties in speaking English due to limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, lack of friends to talk to, low self-confidence, and an unsupportive classroom atmosphere. Linguistic and psychological factors constrain young EFL learners in Indonesia (Rahman & Wandini, 2024; Saragih et al., 2024). One effective way to improve students' English skills is to regularly involve them in activities that encourage conversation and communication in English (Yulianeta et al., 2024). Although speaking skills are considered important, in reality, many schools still use traditional learning methods (Abiwati et al., 2025).

Several recent empirical studies show that the role-play method improves students' speaking skills. Hermansyah et al. (2024) found that role-play can increase motivation, vocabulary, and the ability to construct oral sentences among elementary school students. In line with these findings, Luo and Lyu (2024) reported that role-play contributes positively to the development of students' speaking skills by providing a more varied and communicative practice space. Additionally, Moosa et al. (2025) found that structured role-play significantly increased EFL students' confidence in speaking. Taufiq and Sasabone (2025) also emphasised that role-play is effective in helping students develop oral communication skills through targeted and practice-based interactions. These findings reinforce the evidence that role-play strategies have great potential in improving students' speaking skills at various levels of language learning.

Although many studies have examined the effectiveness of role-play, different research designs have yielded scattered, ambiguous results (Fu, 2025). Most studies are still descriptive in nature, use a single-site design, and have not yet identified in depth the factors that influence the success of role-play in learning speaking skills (Vân et al., 2022). Furthermore, variations in findings across studies indicate the impact of contextual factors, such as the school's environment, student attributes, and educators' pedagogical strategies, which have not been comprehensively mapped (Guntur et al., 2025; Wasilah & Sukasih, 2024). In other words, previous studies have not provided a consistent understanding of how and to what extent Role-play contributes to the development of elementary school students' speaking skills among elementary school English learners. In addition, there is a lack of scientific synthesis that systematically explores patterns of effectiveness, mechanisms of influence, and contextual factors that contribute to the successful application of role-play in elementary school EFL in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia. As a result of this problem, there is a significant need to conduct a study that synthesises qualitative evidence to generate a deeper theoretical understanding and offer pedagogical implications that support English-speaking development in young learners. To overcome these limitations, this study uses a qualitative meta-analysis (QMA) approach, which goes beyond conventional systematic reviews. QMA not only aims to summarise the results of previous studies but also integrates qualitative findings from various studies to build new conceptual and theoretical understandings of how, why, and under what conditions learning methods can work effectively. Thus, QMA in this study does not merely compile or compare studies from the past ten years, but critically interprets and synthesises qualitative evidence to reveal patterns, explanatory mechanisms, and contextual influences that cannot be seen from a single study. Through this process, QMA enables the development of a more in-depth and coherent theoretical explanation of the role of role-play in improving students' speaking skills.

Therefore, this study aims to identify and synthesise thematic patterns in the learning strategies used in role-play methods to improve English-speaking skills, and to explore contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of role-play in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Based on this, this study offers a novel systematic qualitative meta-analysis of publications from 2015 to 2025 that discuss the application of role-play in English language learning at the elementary school level in Indonesia. The methodology used includes a systematic literature review and meta-analysis, with two main objectives: (1) To identify and synthesise the general strategies used in the application of role play to improve English speaking skills (EFL) in elementary school students; (2) To explore the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of role-play in developing elementary school students' English-speaking skills.

METHOD | منهج

Data Collection

Data was collected from Google Scholar over the last ten years (2015–2025). Google Scholar was chosen because it provides free access to various international and national scientific publications, including journals that are often not indexed in paid databases such as Scopus or Web of Science. Although its indexing algorithm is inclusive, automatically indexing almost all online documents, this platform remains a crucial source for finding high-quality literature among the vast amount of available data. However, this study recognises that the lack of strict quality control found in indexed databases is a methodological limitation. Therefore, a rigorous screening and quality assessment process was applied to separate credible sources and minimise

selection bias. At this stage, researchers used keywords tailored to the research focus. Several keyword trials were conducted to identify the terms most relevant to role-play and elementary school students' speaking skills. The final keywords selected were "Effectiveness AND role play AND speaking AND primary OR elementary AND student AND Indonesia." These keywords were chosen based on their ability to generate literature relevant to the research objectives, covering studies that were adequate and representative for analysis in a qualitative meta-analysis. The methodological quality of each article was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) instrument. This assessment was not used as a basis for exclusion, but rather as a consideration in determining the weight of the interpretation of the results. The entire research process was conducted with due regard for the principles of academic ethics and epistemic fairness.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Researchers determined inclusion and exclusion criteria to filter out studies that were not relevant to the topic. These criteria ensure that the selected articles are specific to the research objectives and align with the focus on the effectiveness of role-playing in improving the English-speaking skills of elementary school students. The inclusion criteria were formulated to ensure that the selected articles were of high quality and relevant to the topic of role-playing in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in elementary school classrooms.

The selected articles were conducted in Indonesia, published between 2015 and 2025, written in English, fully accessible, and directly related to the use of role-playing or role-playing techniques to improve the English-speaking skills of elementary school students. Furthermore, the studies used qualitative methods to obtain in-depth data on the development of speaking skills. Bachelor's theses, master's theses, dissertations, and books were excluded due to accessibility limitations, as were pay-wall journals that were not fully accessible. Conference proceedings were also excluded because journal articles were considered more credible and reliable. Furthermore, studies conducted outside Indonesia, studies published outside the 2015–2025 period, and articles written in languages other than English were excluded. Articles with incomplete data, such as missing authorship information in reference management tools (e.g., Mendeley), missing journal name, missing volume/issue numbers, or incomplete publication details, were also excluded. This was done to ensure the accuracy, traceability, and reliability of all articles included in the meta-analysis. Finally, all data collected according to these criteria were analysed synthetically to identify key findings on the effectiveness of role-playing in improving the English-speaking skills of elementary school students.

Data Analysis

This study was analysed using qualitative meta-analysis steps and used the PRISMA flow diagram as a framework for systematic reporting of the process. The PRISMA 2020 guidelines were chosen because they provide clear and transparent steps for recording the process of identifying, screening, and selecting articles, thereby enabling reproducibility of the analysis (Rethlefsen & Page, 2022). The researchers followed the PRISMA flow structure to screen the literature on culture-based role-play in speaking learning among Indonesian elementary school students.

The results were categorised through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (TA) is one of the most widely utilised methods for analysing qualitative data, offering a structured yet flexible framework for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within data sets (Ahmedar, 2025). This paper provides a comprehensive overview of Clarke's (2006) six-phase

thematic analysis framework, which includes (1) familiarisation with the data, in which the researchers became familiar with the data to identify potential themes related to the application and outcomes of role-play. The data consists of research findings, methods used, learning contexts, measurement instruments, role-play implementation procedures, and the results of student speaking skill development. This process allows researchers to identify initial patterns and potential themes that emerge from the various studies reviewed. (2) generating initial codes, data segments were labeled according to aspects such as based on aspects relevant to the research objectives, such as the strategy of using role-play to improve students' speaking skills and the contextual factors that influence their effectiveness in elementary school EFL classrooms. This coding process helped researchers identify initial patterns related to how role-play was used and the conditions that supported its success. (3) searching for themes, group codes to form broader themes that represent significant patterns, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes. The researchers reviewed all the themes that had emerged and assigned names that best represented their core meanings. These themes were determined by tracing consistent patterns of findings across articles published over the past ten years (2015–2025), ensuring each theme reflected the latest developments in the application of role-play to improve the speaking skills of elementary school students. (6) writing the report.

Research Design

This study used a systematic qualitative meta-analysis to synthesise empirical findings on the application of role-play to improve the speaking skills of elementary school students in Indonesia (publication period: 2015–2025). It was selected to ensure that the studies analysed are highly relevant to the current learning context. Research during this period has reflected changes in the national curriculum, developments in communicative learning approaches, and more up-to-date methodological standards. This time frame also helps to reduce historical bias and maintain the empirical context homogeneity required in qualitative meta-analysis. Thus, the synthesis results are more accurate. This research method uses meta-analysis, which means finding, examining, and re-analysing previous research findings. According to Dinata (2022) Meta-analysis is a statistical method that combines the results of several previous studies with similar problems to draw valid conclusions. In line with this, Saputri and Wardani (2021) It states that meta-analysis is a type of research carried out using analytical methods, summarising information, and using statistics to analyse some of the impacts of previous research. Qualitative meta-analysis is defined as "an attempt to conduct a rigorous secondary qualitative analysis of primary qualitative findings. The main objective is to provide a more comprehensive overview of a phenomenon and to discuss the influence of research methods on research results (Azis & Abduh, 2020).

Understanding the type of data being analysed is crucial in determining the direction of a meta-analysis. The findings from this study can be categorised as qualitative because of the small sample size and the predominantly qualitative nature of the samples (Abid, 2022). Meanwhile, quantitative meta-analysis combines data, processes it, and produces statistical conclusions (Sugano & Mamolo, 2021). Qualitative meta-analysis collects qualitative data samples and analyses them using text data and PRISMA. Meanwhile, quantitative meta-analysis uses quantitative data and emphasises the thematic synthesis of descriptive findings across studies (Heidi M, 2024). Additionally, Masic (2015) explains that in quantitative meta-analysis, statistical data are used, and systematic coding is employed to analyse them. This method is suitable for investigating the impact of a variable on a large scale.

The primary data was obtained from journal articles on Google Scholar. Google Scholar was chosen because it provides free access to a vast and multidisciplinary body of scientific literature, including international journal articles and local literature, proceedings, theses, and institutional reports, enabling researchers to find relevant references that may not be available in paid databases (Haguston & Putri, 2024). Previous research has shown that Google Scholar can detect many important documents that are not indexed in databases such as Scopus or Web of Science (Martín et al., 2018). This research protocol followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines, a widely recognised framework for conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Vallespin and Prudente, 2024) Used in this study. The PRISMA flowchart followed in this study is based on the one shown in Figure 1
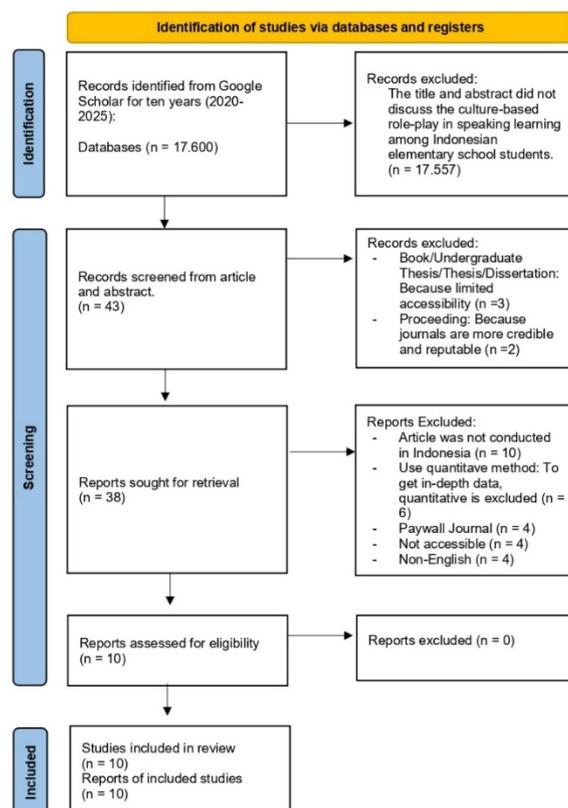

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 (J. McKenzie et al., 2017)

RESULT | نتائج

The PRISMA identification stage collected article results from the Google Scholar database. In the screening stage, article titles and abstracts were evaluated for relevance to culture-based play and English language skills among elementary school students. Duplicate studies were excluded, and each article was evaluated according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria established for this study. The researchers found data (n=17,600) from keywords searched during 10 years (2015-2025). After that, the articles were classified by year for identification.

The grouping data is transferred to Mendeley to identify titles and abstracts that match the article topic. Titles and abstracts must be based on the keywords "Effectiveness AND role play AND speaking AND primary OR elementary AND Student AND Indonesia." These keywords produce more specific and relevant results for the research. Through this rigorous selection process, the number of articles, which was originally 17,600, was reduced to 43 that met all

inclusion criteria and were deemed relevant for further analysis in a qualitative meta-analysis. Further details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Identification results from 2015-2025

Year	Result
2015-2016	3
2016-2017	2
2017-2018	2
2018-2019	-
2019-2020	1
2020-2021	7
2021-2022	4
2022-2023	10
2023-2024	9
2024-2025	5
TOTAL	**43**

Based on the identification stage in Table 2, the data collected from the keyword (n = 17.600) were identified from titles and abstracts discussing the effectiveness of role-playing on English language skills in elementary school students. The researcher found a type of data identification totalling (n = 43), consisting of (n = 38) journal articles, 2 books, 1 thesis/dissertation, and 2 proceedings. In the screening stage, the researcher focused only on journal articles (n = 38), while books, theses/dissertations, and proceedings were excluded due to limited access and concerns about credibility. There were (n = 17.557) articles that did not meet the criteria and did not focus on the effectiveness of role-playing on the English language skills of elementary school students. Further details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Type of result data in the identification stage

No.	Items	Amount
1.	Journal	38
2.	Book	2
3.	Undergraduate Thesis / Thesis/ Dissertation	1
4.	Proceeding	2
5.	The Research was not retrieved	17.557
	Total	17.600

Next, during the screening stage, data were focused on identification results (n = 38), which were then filtered to identify eligible data. The researchers established inclusion and exclusion criteria for this process, and the results were based on data (n = 38) screened using these criteria. Articles that did not discuss role play, did not focus on elementary school students' English-speaking skills, were conducted outside the Indonesian context, or did not use qualitative or mixed methods were eliminated. As a result, (n = 28) articles were excluded, leaving (n = 10) articles that met the eligibility criteria and were further analysed in a qualitative meta-analysis. In conclusion, the eligible data were (n = 10) articles that will be discussed.

Ethical Consideration

This qualitative meta-analysis study adheres to research ethics, ensuring transparency and accuracy in the articles. Researchers respect authors by citing the articles they analyse to maintain academic integrity. Researchers set inclusion and exclusion criteria objectively to prevent bias in the data. Analysis is conducted while maintaining the research context, and researchers are committed to reporting results transparently.

DISCUSSION | مناقشة

This qualitative meta-analysis also has several important limitations. First, the research data were collected solely from Google Scholar, so relevant articles from other databases may not have been included in the analysis. Furthermore, this study focuses on the effectiveness of role-play in general for elementary school students. Hence, variations in needs, classroom characteristics, and speaking abilities across grade levels were not specifically analysed. This study also focused on a formal educational context, so the use of role-play in informal or non-formal learning environments was not included. These limitations emphasise the importance of further research to expand the database of sources, analyse the effectiveness of role-play in greater depth at each grade level, and explore its application in informal learning contexts.

Table 3. Data Extraction of Indonesian Primary EFL Students' Speaking Effectiveness in Role-Play Activities (2015–2025)

No.	Title	Author	Method	Population	Research Objective	Findings
1	The Use of Role Playing to Improve Speaking Ability	Agustiawati, (2017)	Classroom Action Research with a Qualitative approach (planning, action, observation, and reflection)	Indonesian students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL)	This paper's objective is to explain how Role-Playing can be an effective method for motivating students and improving their English-speaking ability, particularly in the EFL classroom context in Indonesia.	The findings indicate that Role-Playing increases students' motivation, confidence, participation, and speaking practice. The method encourages active communication, supports fluency development, and creates a supportive learning environment for EFL learners.
2	Improving Students' Speaking Skills through Role-Play Technique in the 21st Century	Pinatih (2021)	This study used library research as the primary method for data collection and analysis.	Student learning English speaking skills.	This paper aims to assess the effectiveness of role-play teaching in addressing students' speaking problems, such as low motivation, anxiety, and shyness, in the English classroom.	The findings indicate that Role-Play is an effective and attractive teaching technique that can significantly improve students' speaking skills, increase motivation, and encourage active participation in speaking activities.
3	The Effect of Role Playing and Snowball Throwing Learning Model on Students' Speaking Skill at Grade III Elementary School in Gugus RA Kartini	Yusmi et al., (2021)	Quantitative (questionnaires, observation and documentation)	60 Students in grade III of elementary schools in the RA Kartini cluster.	This paper's objective is to describe the influence of role-playing and snowball-throwing learning models on students' speaking skills at the third-grade elementary school in the RA Kartini cluster	Thus, it was concluded that the role-playing learning model was more influential than snowball throwing learning on the students' speaking skills at the second grade of elementary school in Gugus RA Kartini
4	Role Play for Fostering Young Learners' Soft Skills in Speaking English	Jayanti, (2022)	Qualitative (analysing and observing)	Young Learners aged 8-10 years at the elementary school level	This paper explores what soft skills are developed and how they are gained through the use of simple role-play activities in teaching speaking skills to young learners	The study found that role-play significantly enhances communication skills, self-confidence, analytical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. These improvements occur due to active interaction, experiential learning, and real-life

					language application, which support more fluent and natural English speaking
5	Application of The Role-Playing Method to Improve Speaking Skills in Class V Students of UPT SPF SD Negeri Baddoka Kecamatan Biringkanaya Kota Makasar	R. P. Assagaf (2023)	Classroom Action Research with a Qualitative approach (planning, action, observation, and reflection)	One English teacher and 34 fifth-grade students at UPT SPF SD Negeri Baddoka.	This paper's objective is to examine the application of the Role-Playing method in improving students' speaking skills.	Thus, it can be concluded that the Role-Playing method can improve speaking skills among class V students at UPT SPF SD Negeri Baddoka, Kecamatan Biringkanaya, Kota Makassar.
6	Improved Speaking Skills in English Language Learning in Elementary Schools	Fransisca (2023).	Qualitative Literature Review	Elementary School Learners	This paper's objective is to examine improvements in English-speaking skills in elementary school English instruction and to analyse affective strategies that influence students' responses to the teaching and learning process.	The findings indicate that students' rejection of the learning process should be interpreted as a neutral affective response rather than a negative one. Positive affective strategies were reflected through behaviours such as laughter, smiling, and expressions of enjoyment, which contribute to a supportive learning atmosphere for developing speaking skills.
7	Using Role Playing Models to Improve the Speaking Skills of Class II Elementary School	Amalia et al. (2024)	Mixed-method approach using a sequential explanatory design, combining quantitative and qualitative data.	38 Second-grade elementary school students (20 male and 18 female) at an elementary school in Bandung Regency	This paper's objective is to determine (1) the improvement of students' speaking skills through the Role-Playing model, (2) students' responses toward learning using the Role-Playing model, and (3) teachers' obstacles in implementing the Role-Playing learning model	The results showed that the Role-Playing learning model was effective in improving students' speaking skills, as indicated by an N-gain score of 73% and an increase in the average speaking score from 51.97% (pretest) to 87.50% (posttest).
8	The Influence of Role-Playing Method on the Speaking Skills of Grade 4 Students at Muhammadiyah 4 Elementary School, Malang City	Fardana et al. (2025)	This study employed classroom Action Research using qualitative and quantitative descriptive analysis	1 English teacher and 24 fourth-grade students (18 male and 6 female) at SD Muhammadiyah 4, Malang City	This paper's objective is to determine the improvement of fourth-grade students' speaking skills through the application of the Role-Playing method	The findings showed a clear improvement in students' speaking skills after the implementation of Role Playing. In Cycle I, the average speaking score was 54.73%, with 10 students achieving mastery and 14 students requiring remediation. In Cycle II, the average score

No	Title	Author	Method	Subject	Objective	Findings
						increased to 80.25%, with all 24 students achieving mastery, indicating that the Role-Playing method effectively enhanced students' speaking skills.
9	Roleplay-Based English Language Learning Strategies and Interactive Programs to Improve the Speaking Skills and Interest of Elementary School Students in Rural Areas in Indonesia - Systematic Literature Review	Tania (2025).	Systematic Literature Review	Elementary School Students aged 10–13 years in rural areas, particularly Bangun Sari Village, Silau Laut District, Indonesia.	This paper's objective is to analyse the effectiveness of roleplay-based English learning strategies and interactive programs in improving speaking skills and learning interest of elementary school students in rural areas.	The findings indicate that roleplay-based, interactive, media-based, and game-based learning methods effectively improve students' speaking skills, motivation, and interest in learning English.
10	The Effectiveness of Using the Role Play Method to Improve the Speaking Skills of Children Aged 7-10 as EFL Students at the EBISI English Course	Agung et al., (2025)	Qualitative research methodology (classroom observation, teacher, and students' opinions)	Young EFL Learners aged 7-10 years at EBISI English Course	This study aimed to investigate (1) the effectiveness of role-play in developing young EFL learners' speaking skills, (2) the impact of role-play activities on students' motivation, and (3) the challenges in implementing role-play successfully in the classroom.	Role-play significantly improves students' speaking skills by creating an engaging and interactive learning environment. Role-play also increases intrinsic motivation, promotes social interaction, and reduces learners' stress levels, supporting more effective language learning.

Based on Table 3, a synthesis of 10 articles that met the criteria and were published between 2015 and 2025. In terms of research design, five (n = 5) used a classroom action research (CAR) design and demonstrated gradual improvement in students' speaking skills across several learning cycles. This improvement was evident from the increase in average speaking scores, the percentage of learning completeness, and the increase in student activity in speaking activities in class.

In addition, studies using quantitative and mixed-methods approaches (n = 2) reinforced these findings through pretest and posttest results, including N-gain scores in the moderate to high range. These results indicate that the role-play method is effective in significantly improving students' speaking skills. Several studies also highlight affective and social aspects, including increased self-confidence, increased learning motivation, active participation, and decreased anxiety and fear of speaking among students.

Meanwhile, studies based on literature reviews and systematic reviews (n = 3) support empirical findings by emphasising that role play is an interactive, contextual, and enjoyable learning strategy, especially for elementary school students, including those in rural areas with limited learning facilities. A synthesis of the 10 articles that passed the selection process revealed

three major themes related to the effectiveness of role-play methods in improving the English speaking skills of elementary school students:

Instructional and contextual support

Based on the data, the researcher found that many successes in role-play in language learning are greatly influenced by instructional and contextual support. Such support includes instructional design, the teacher's role as a facilitator, and learning conditions that enable students to be actively involved. Various studies show that role play will not be effective without systematic learning planning and a supportive learning environment.

Studies by Assagaf (2023), Amalia et al. (2024), and Tania (2025) found that role-play must be designed in a structured manner, from determining learning objectives and selecting scenarios relevant to students' lives to providing clear activity stages. Best learning designs help students understand roles, communication contexts, and the language to be used. Recent research by Lisa et al. (2025) shows that role-play structured through stages of orientation, material exploration, role performance, and reflection can significantly improve students' communication readiness, as students have the opportunity to practice language in meaningful and authentic contexts. In addition to learning design, teacher facilitation plays an important role in supporting the effectiveness of role play. Teachers not only function as conveyors of material but also as mentors who provide examples of language use, feedback, and reinforcement during the learning process (Firdaus et al., 2025). In line with this, Sarifudin and Setyawan (2025) found that active teacher involvement in directing role play, providing contextual language corrections, and encouraging student participation can increase students' confidence and language accuracy. Conversely, a lack of teacher facilitation results in role play becoming a formal activity with little impact on language skills.

Learning conditions are also a determining factor in the successful implementation of role play. A conducive learning environment, a classroom atmosphere that supports interaction, and the availability of time and learning resources greatly influence student engagement. Research FROM Anjani, (2025) shows that role-play is more effective when conducted in a classroom that encourages cooperation, discussion, and reflection among students. In addition, contextualising role-play scenarios with students' real experiences makes learning more meaningful and relevant, encouraging students to use the target language actively (Wehlan & Reinke, 2023).

However, the implementation of role play still faces several obstacles, such as limited learning time, large class sizes, a lack of teacher training in designing role play activities, and limited supporting media (Latifah & Priantari, 2024). Therefore, adequate instructional and contextual support is needed through systematic learning design, effective teacher facilitation, teacher professional development, and curriculum adjustments, as well as the provision of learning resources. Without such support, role play cannot function optimally as a communicative learning strategy, so role-play-based language learning needs to emphasise a practical, contextual approach to achieve meaningful development of students' language skills.

Linguistic Factor

Linguistic factors are among the main factors that influence students' speaking skills in role-play activities. Based on the research synthesis, three articles were identified that discuss the linguistic problems students face during role-play implementation. The findings show that limited vocabulary, inaccurate use of pronouns, and lack of speaking practice are the most dominant linguistic problems (Agustiawati, 2017; Fardana et al., 2025; & Yusmi et al., 2021). The level of

linguistic difficulty experienced by students ranges from moderate to high, especially in spontaneous verbal interactions. This problem is generally caused by poor vocabulary mastery and weak understanding of basic language structures, making it difficult for students to express their ideas directly in English (Zulianingrum, 2025). As a result, students tend to hesitate, rely on memorised expressions, and struggle to maintain fluency. This shows that the output aspect of this activity requires not only the courage to speak, but also a strong linguistic foundation to support accurate and targeted language production.

In addition, role-play is considered to intensively expand students' language practice. For example, Classroom Action Research by Putri and Zaki (2025) found that after a series of role-play activities, fluency scores, vocabulary comprehension, and sentence structure skills increased significantly, even though there were still initial weaknesses in several linguistic areas. This is consistent with the findings of Mariyanah (2025) which shows that participation in role-play results in improved vocabulary and mastery of language structure, enabling students to apply language more effectively.

However, several studies also reveal linguistic challenges that still require attention in the application of role play. In some learning contexts, students who were previously less active in speaking activities showed uneven improvements in speaking skills, especially when vocabulary enrichment and sentence structure practice were not provided optimally (Yusuf & Setyamardani, 2020). Research conducted by Hidayat (2023) shows that although role play can increase students' motivation to speak, vocabulary mastery and understanding of language structure remain linguistic aspects that need to be emphasised more systematically in learning design. In line with these findings, a study by Lisa et al. (2025) confirms that the effectiveness of role play is highly dependent on the provision of linguistic material integrated into the learning scenario, so that the development of students' speaking skills is not only participatory but also supported by adequate reinforcement of linguistic elements.

Affective and Social Interaction Factor

The final practical role-play dimension analysed concerns the affective aspect, which is recognised as a key factor influencing students' speaking skills in role-play activities. Based on the synthesis of the research results, therefore Pinatih (2021), Jayanti (2022), Fransisca (2023), and Agung et al., (2025) which explains that affective variables such as self-confidence, motivation, willingness to speak, and speaking anxiety significantly influence student engagement during role-play. Several studies also reveal that students in the early stages tend to experience moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety, mainly due to limited vocabulary and weak mastery of basic sentence structures, causing students to hesitate to express their ideas verbally (Soriano & Co, 2022).

The study Syofianis et al., (2024) shows that anxiety in speaking during role-play activities is closely related to students' limited vocabulary. Students with low vocabulary mastery and limited understanding of language structure tend to be afraid of making mistakes, which affects their self-confidence and willingness to speak. However, Zulfa et al., (2024) also reported that repeated student involvement in structured role-play activities can reduce anxiety levels and gradually increase student confidence through contextual interaction and peer communication.

However, several studies show different findings, in which Angelica and Wulandari, (2025) explain that some students still show low motivation and limited involvement in role-play activities. In line with this, Subekti and Goram, (2022) explain that this condition is generally influenced by a lack of teacher facilitation, an unsupportive learning environment, and

differences in students' language abilities. Differences in the learning context and student backgrounds also influence the research results. Thus, it can be concluded that affective factors and social interaction in role-play are highly dependent on adequate linguistic and instructional support.

Contradictory or Context-Dependent Findings

Although most studies show that role-play is efficacious in improving the speaking skills of elementary school students, some studies yield mixed results that depend heavily on the learning context. Some studies show that improvements in speaking skills do not occur evenly, especially among students with limited vocabulary and language structure, or in less supportive classroom conditions. As empirical evidence, a study by Agung et al., (2025) found that although role play can increase student participation and confidence, some students still experience anxiety when speaking in the early stages. The students reported that they felt nervous at first, but more confident after repeated practice (Agung et al., 2025). These findings show that the positive effects of role play do not appear instantly, but develop gradually through repeated practice and consistent learning support. In line with this, other studies also confirm that without adequate teacher facilitation, provision of initial vocabulary, and supportive classroom management, role play tends to become a formal activity that does not have a significant impact on the development of students' speaking skills (Dewi, 2025; Umami, 2025).

Thus, these contradictory or contextual findings confirm that role-play success is not automatic but rather depends heavily on instructional support, students' linguistic readiness, and a safe, supportive learning environment. This critical reflection reinforces the argument that role-play needs to be designed systematically and contextually to function optimally as a communicative learning strategy.

The results of this qualitative meta-analysis indicate that role-play methods consistently improve English-speaking skills among elementary school students in Indonesia. This effectiveness is not only seen in improved speaking scores, but also in affective and social aspects such as confidence, motivation, and active participation. These findings can be explained by several language-learning theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Explanation and Comparison with Global Studies

The effectiveness of role-play in improving the speaking skills of elementary school students can be strongly explained through Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which shows that language development occurs through social interaction and scaffolding from more competent individuals, so that students can use language beyond their actual abilities (Muntasir & Akbar, 2023). This concept aligns with the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which encourages language learning through meaningful communicative tasks, as well as Experiential Learning, where hands-on experience helps students internalise vocabulary and language structures more naturally. Findings from national studies such as Agung et al., (2025) show that role play improves speaking skills, learning interest, and social interaction among EFL students aged 7–10 years. Another study by Zulianingrum, (2025) reports that role-play successfully expands students' vocabulary and communicative competence in the context of TBLT while reducing speaking anxiety.

Comparisons with international studies further reinforce the finding that the effectiveness of role-playing in speaking depends on the context. Several global studies show that role-playing and interactive language tasks can increase confidence, fluency, and willingness to communicate

in learners of English as a foreign language (EFL); for example, research on the impact of role-playing on learners' oral performance found that students involved in role-playing activities achieved higher speaking scores and greater confidence compared to the control group (Khasbani & Seli, 2021). However, several international studies also emphasise that the success of this strategy is greatly influenced by instructional support and classroom conditions. Without adequate scaffolding, clear language input, and a supportive environment, some students may still struggle with spontaneous speaking even during role-playing. Muhammad and Moelier (2025) reported that role-playing increased elementary school students' confidence and reduced speaking anxiety, but these effects depended heavily on repeated practice and consistent teacher support. Therefore, although role-playing is effective globally, its implementation needs to be adapted to the local context, students' affective and linguistic readiness, and the quality of the pedagogical support provided to achieve continuous improvement in speaking skills.

The implication for teachers is that role play needs to be optimally designed by providing initial vocabulary, dialogue examples or language chunks, balanced student grouping, and gradual, reflective scaffolding. With careful design and adequate pedagogical support, role play not only serves as a communicative activity but also as a learning strategy aligned with the principles of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and effective English teaching practices in elementary schools.

CONCLUSSION | خاتمة

Based on a qualitative synthesis of 10 studies published over the past decade, the role-play method is efficacious in improving English-speaking skills among elementary school students in the context of EFL in Indonesia. This effectiveness is reflected in improvements in students' linguistic, affective, and social interaction skills, such as vocabulary mastery, fluency, confidence, motivation, and active participation in learning. The findings also indicate that successful role-play implementation depends on strong instructional and contextual support, including systematic lesson planning, effective teacher facilitation, and a supportive classroom environment. At the same time, challenges such as limited instructional time, large class size, insufficient teacher training, and students' restricted vocabulary and grammatical awareness continue to constrain its optimal use.

This review contributes to the field by synthesising fragmented empirical evidence into a coherent framework of role-play effectiveness and highlighting the triad of linguistic, affective, and instructional factors that mediate its success. Based on this framework, it is recommended that teachers design role-play activities with explicit linguistic objectives, scaffolded speaking tasks, and structured feedback, while also fostering a supportive atmosphere that reduces anxiety and encourages participation. Such a targeted and theoretically informed approach can help ensure that role-play not only engages learners but also leads to sustainable improvement in their English-speaking competence.

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