

THE IMPACT OF ROLE PLAY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS AMONG YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores how role-playing activities help children develop soft skills while learning to speak English. The study analyzes data from previous research involving young learners aged eight to ten in elementary schools. The role play used is simple and age-appropriate, allowing children to act out scenarios without fixed dialogues, relying instead on their creativity and understanding. The findings show that role play enhances communication, problem-solving, analytical thinking, decision-making, and self-confidence in speaking English as a second language. These improvements occur because children interact naturally during role play, learn from their own speaking experiences, and become more fluent and expressive than when learning only from textbooks. Moreover, engaging in realistic situations helps them think logically, make decisions, and use language meaningfully.

KEYWORDS: role play, young learner, soft skill development, speaking skills.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most fundamental language skills, including in English, as it is also the first ability humans develop as infants. By the age of eight to ten, children have already acquired the basic components of language. During this stage, their reading, listening, and speaking skills evolve as they begin to understand abstract ideas and language systems (Tovasharovna, X.G.2025). This process also applies to learning English as a second language (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990).

In Indonesia, English is one of the most in-demand foreign languages and is included in the national education curriculum. Many families encourage their children to learn

English as a second language, recognizing its importance in modern society. Consequently, teachers specializing in English for Young Learners (EYL) are needed. These teachers apply specific methods suited to children's ways of learning, which differ from adults. As part of current language pedagogy (Hall, 2016), various teaching methods are used according to students' needs, one of which is role play as a tool for developing young learners' English-speaking skills.

When children begin learning English, they need to receive sufficient language input before they can produce it themselves (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Teachers usually model spoken English, and students repeat and practice it. Therefore, teaching speaking is essential in early stages. However, learning becomes less effective if students remain passive or unmotivated. In this regard, fostering soft skills can enhance engagement and learning outcomes. Soft skills positively influence achievement motivation and learning performance (Junita, Suarman, & Kartikowati, 2018). Since children's soft skills are still developing, teachers should integrate soft-skill training into their lessons.

Role play can serve this purpose effectively. It not only supports language learning but also helps build communication, decision-making, enthusiasm, monitoring, and problem-solving skills. Role play involves students acting out different characters or situations without fixed dialogues, allowing creativity and imagination. Unlike drama, which follows scripted texts and set directions (Cremin & McDonald, 2013), role play provides freedom for learners to express themselves through improvised interactions.

For young learners, learning should be enjoyable and playful. Games and interactive activities stimulate their senses and encourage participation. Play is essential to children's cognitive and social development; without it, their emotional growth and prosocial behavior may be hindered (Choudary, 2013). Research also shows that play-based activities are among the most effective tools for developing soft skills (Yogman et al., 2018). Hence, role play serves as a valuable method for teaching English while simultaneously fostering children's soft skills.

In conclusion, this paper explores the benefits of using role play in teaching English speaking to young learners aged eight to ten. Although previous studies have discussed role play as a teaching strategy (Mavlonova, Abulova, & Kodirov, 2020; Akmal, 2018; Suryani, 2015; Inawati, 2014; Liu & Ding, 2009; Huang & Shan, 2008), few have focused specifically on its role in developing soft skills. Therefore, this study

investigates what types of soft skills can be developed and how they emerge through role-playing activities in young learners' English-speaking lessons.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method to explore how and what types of soft skills can be developed through role-playing activities in teaching children's English-speaking skills (Khaltova Gulhayo Tovasharovna 2025). It also aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how role play can be effectively used in language learning. A problem-solving discussion approach was applied to address the research focus, supported by logical explanations of how role play stimulates the development of soft skills that enhance language learning. The analysis involved cross-checking and reviewing data from various related studies, which were then compared and evaluated to strengthen the findings.

The role-play activities used in this study were simple and appropriate for children aged eight to eleven. These involved acting out characters or situations without complex backgrounds or dialogues, allowing learners to imitate behavior and express creativity naturally.

Fostering Communication Skill

Many soft skills can be developed through role play while learning English as a second language. It is an effective and engaging method presented in the form of a simple game, though its impact is complex. While students often acquire language through textbooks, role play allows them to apply language in meaningful contexts. Since there are natural gaps between a learner's first and second languages—such as intercultural differences, pronunciation challenges, and linguistic variations—role play helps them use English as a communication tool rather than in a rigid or mechanical way. Therefore, one of the first soft skills enhanced through role play is children's **communication ability**.

The main contribution of role play in developing children's communication skills lies in providing a real context for language use. Children may learn to speak English, but true communication involves interaction and expression. In many formal classroom settings, students are rarely given the chance to practice English naturally. They may memorize words or songs in English, yet this does not necessarily mean they can

communicate effectively. As a result, their speech often sounds like textbook-based dialogue—structured but unnatural—because it lacks spontaneity and nonverbal elements (Khaltova Gulhayo Tovasharovna). Without real interaction, students cannot learn how to express themselves using tone, facial expressions, or gestures.

Through role play, however, children can experience and express language meaningfully. For example, two students may act as a teacher and a pupil in a classroom setting. In doing so, they use greetings, introductions, and classroom expressions learned from their textbooks but apply them in real interaction. Even if their speech is imperfect or contains mixed words, this process helps the language become deeply imprinted in their memory. When they make mistakes, they are more likely to remember and correct them in future communication.

In addition, role play encourages the use of nonverbal communication. Facial expressions and body gestures make conversations livelier and more authentic. Children often enjoy using these elements and view them as part of the fun. By learning through experience—making mistakes, expressing ideas, and interacting naturally—students gradually improve their fluency, confidence, and overall communicative competence in English.

Developing Analytical and Problem-solving Skill

Role play also plays a significant role in developing children's analytical and problem-solving skills. Since every child thinks and understands differently, role play serves as an effective strategy to strengthen logical and analytical thinking. It provides a constructive and cooperative environment where learners can explore behavior, emotions, and real-life situations, encouraging them to think critically and respond appropriately. This process aligns with the principles of **problem-based learning**, which uses real-world situations to promote understanding rather than simply presenting facts (Baden & Major, 2004).

In a role-play activity, teachers present students with a scenario or concept without a fixed dialogue, prompting them to create logical and meaningful conversations. As students plan and act out these exchanges, they unconsciously analyze how to achieve their intended outcomes. This encourages early development of reasoning and decision-making skills through language use.

For example, one child may play a lost tourist asking for directions to a museum, while another acts as a passerby. In this situation, the “tourist” must think carefully about how to ask for help politely, while the “passerby” must give clear and organized directions. Both children must construct logical sentences, sequence their ideas, and respond naturally to each other—thereby practicing analytical and linguistic skills simultaneously.

Teachers can also design problem-based scenarios—such as finding a missing pet or playing a police officer searching for a thief—to encourage deeper reasoning and creativity. These tasks motivate children to observe, interpret, and make decisions based on given clues, which further fosters critical thinking and language application.

Moreover, research shows that role play supports the development of self-confidence, creativity, socialization, participation, and initiative. For young learners who struggle with low self-esteem, role play offers a safe and supportive space to practice oral communication and gradually overcome fear or hesitation. It bridges the gap between academic learning and real-life communication, allowing teachers to better understand students’ personalities and help them manage their anxieties.

Through repeated practice, students improve their fluency, overcome pronunciation barriers, and gain confidence in using English. As they become more comfortable and expressive, their enthusiasm for learning increases, and they begin to take pride in their achievements.

Building a Confidence in Children

Children are often highly engaged and motivated by role-playing activities because such games challenge their creativity, reasoning, and analytical thinking skills. As a result, they tend to speak more logically and confidently in English as a second language.

A study by Reis (2021) on effective techniques to enhance speaking skills among less confident young learners found that role play can serve as a highly beneficial tool in developing multiple positive traits in children. The findings showed improvements in self-confidence, self-esteem, participation, interaction, initiative, creativity, and socialization skills.

For young learners with low self-confidence, role play provides a safe and enjoyable space to practice speaking. By simulating real-life interactions, children become more comfortable initiating conversations in English and gradually overcome their fear of making mistakes. Role play also helps bridge the gap between academic learning and real-life communication, allowing learners to apply what they have learned in meaningful, practical contexts.

This method enables teachers to better understand students' individual characteristics and use this awareness to help them manage anxiety or insecurity. Through consistent participation, students not only strengthen their oral communication skills but also become more fluent. Barriers such as hesitation or "stiff tongue" (Khaltova Gulhayo Tovasharovna 2025) can be reduced through frequent oral practice rather than passive textbook learning.

As students experience success in expressing themselves during role play, they develop a sense of pride and achievement. Consequently, their enthusiasm and confidence in speaking English increase, leading to greater motivation and more active participation in the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Role play effectively bridges the gap between academic learning and real-life communication. It allows learners to gain deeper insight into various situations by engaging in interactive activities based on real-world experiences. Beyond improving oral language proficiency, role play also serves as a valuable tool for developing essential soft skills in young learners.

Based on the discussions above, this study concludes that using role play in teaching English speaking to children can foster several key soft skills: communication, analytical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and self-confidence. Communication skills and confidence develop naturally through interaction, as students engage in meaningful dialogue within role-play scenarios. Experiencing real communicative contexts helps them internalize lessons, recognize and correct their mistakes, and become more fluent in using English as a second language. This approach allows learners to speak more naturally and expressively rather than mechanically, as often occurs with textbook-based learning. As their competence

improves, children gain pride in their progress, which strengthens their self-esteem and motivation.

Furthermore, role play promotes analytical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making by placing students in realistic contexts that require logical reasoning and adaptability. Even in imaginative or pretend scenarios, learners are encouraged to organize their thoughts, interpret nonverbal cues, and respond appropriately, thereby stimulating cognitive growth in meaningful way.

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