CAPÍTULO 3

ROLE-PLAY STRATEGY AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG THIRD-YEAR UPPER-SECONDARY STUDENTS

ESTRATEGIA DE JUEGO DE ROLES Y DESTREZA DE HABLA INGLESA EN ESTUDIANTES DEL TERCER AÑO DE BACHILLERATO

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1. INTRODUCTION

One major goal an L2 learner has is to develop pragmatic speaking skills. These skills should be mastered through engaging and interactive methods for confidence and fluency. Role-play practice has been recognized as an innovative pedagogical approach simulating authentic events where pupils can use language in active and relevant situations. Along with increasing the development of language skills, this design cultivates collaborative creativity and confidence in students, living up to the needs of education today to turn classrooms into student-driven and student-centered learning environments.

But even though it is known to be beneficial there is still a big gap when it comes to what you see inside the classroom of an Ecuadorian. The reason of this problem is that traditionally, students do not spend time developing skills to speak English because the focus is on developing grammatical knowledge instead of communicative competence. Lack of confidence, anxiety, and lack of space to practice properly prevents students from achieving the B1 level of the Ecuadorian National Curriculum (2016), which aligns with the Common European Framework of References in Languages (CEFRL). This difference highlights the necessity of more dynamic and participatory pedagogies, such as role-play, to actively involve students in the learning process and achieve better oral language acquisition deals.

According to prior studies, it has been proved that role-play has given many contributions to the learners' speaking skills, such as fluency, confidence, and good management of real-life communicative activities (Rahayu et al., 2023; Sari & Budi, 2022). With these findings, we show how this strategy can convert classical educational spaces into thriving learning

environments. Nevertheless, whilst previous literature suggests the advantages of role-play in general, little research has been conducted that focuses on the particularities and relevance of role-play in the context of high school learners.

This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the correlation between role-play strategies and the development of speaking skills among third-year upper-secondary students in Loja, Ecuador. By focusing on this context, the study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on effective teaching methodologies, providing insights that can help educators address the specific needs of Ecuadorian students. This study is particularly relevant given Ecuador's ongoing efforts to improve English proficiency, a key factor in fostering global competitiveness and educational advancement.

The purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between role-play and students' English-speaking skills. By doing so, it aims to offer practical solutions for educators, contribute to academic discourse, and ultimately improve language learning outcomes in Ecuador.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review of this study is organized into three primary sections: Number one is role-play strategy, number two is about English-speaking skills, and number three is the state-of-the-art. The first section delves into the concept of role-play, its benefits, role-play as active learning, it in the teaching-learning process, its principles and components. The second section explores speaking skills, their importance in the classroom, types of speaking, how to develop this skill, and its strategies. Finally, state-of-the-art occurs in the final section, where the two variables are integrated

through previous studies of role-play and speaking skills. Most of the information was derived from research conducted in the last five years. However, it is important to mention that many older theories have been mentioned since they have made significant and interesting contributions to this field.

2.1 Role-Play

2.1.1 What is role play?

Role-play has been considered as an educational strategy that permits learners to simulate real-life conversations in controlled situations. It takes roles for learners in scenarios that demand to employ decision-making, personal skills, and critical thinking. Altun (2015) mentions that role-play (RP) involves movements or dialogues where students are part of the activities. This author also claims that implementing role-play in the EFL classroom enhances an effective learning experience. Therefore, sociodrama has derived this strategy which facilitates a thorough understanding of complex social situations that improves the learning process by using engaging experiences (Vasileiou & Paraskeva, 2010).

2.1.2 Benefits of role-play

Role-play is described as any speaking task in which any language student or learner places themselves in a role to interact with others (Westrup & Planander, 2023). Moreover, it offers several advantages in the English language learning context. It enhances students' engagement in their acquisition process, helps to promote collaboration among students, and allows to increase in the retention of knowledge to produce a meaningful and lifelong learning (Pavey &Donoghe, 2003). Additionally, it fosters discourse by letting learners the opportunity to understand situations from

other perspectives, it enhances not only the confidence to speaking but also thee grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and pronunciation. Likewise, it enriches their intellect for social interactions. Furthermore, role-play can enhance their communicative skills, especially in language learning settings, where it encourages students to practice speaking in a low-pressure situation. Authors like Alzboun et al., (2017), Soto et al., (2018) mention that it helps students to get more vocabulary at the moment of interaction, they can have the control of the grammar which becomes them more fluent and less shy, and it promotes confidence since they do not feel judge by others and can improve their pronunciation. So, for this reason, from the authors' perspective they consider the following benefits for the RP. (Livingstone, 1983)

- Roleplay provides students with a funny, entertaining, and reflexive learning experience
- This strategy feeds students with more vocabulary and expressions
- It makes to feel students ready for a real conversation
- Role-play gives the opportunity to interact with prompt
- Intentionally, it promotes students' creativity with the speech, motivated to speak, and confident
- It increases the level of social interactions

2.1.3 Role-play as an active learning

As part of active learning, the role-playing strategy encourages students straightforward in their learning process, which allows them to be the center of their education. In contrast to traditional methodologies that use lecture-based instructions, there is a low improvement due to the lack of encouragement and participation (Joyce &Weil, 2000). This strategy aligns

with the theory of constructivism, which ensures that knowledge is built up through experience and reflection (Kettula & Berghall, 2013).

2.1.4 Role-play in the teaching-learning process

In the teaching-learning process, role-play is a dynamic tool to cross the gap between theory and practice. It permits learners to try the language skills in context, making a meaningful learning experience. This strategy not only fosters linguistics proficiency but also helps in the development of subskills such as teamwork and negotiation. By engaging in role-play, students can simulate real-world scenarios, facilitating a more profound understanding of the material (Bhattacharjee, 2014).

2.1.5 Principles of role-play

There are several key principles of the role-play strategy. First, clarity in subjects is essential; instructors should outline what students are expected to enrich through the activities. Secondly, adequate preparation is vital for both instructors and students to ensure a successful learning experience (Rao & Stupans, 2012). The feedback after the activity is essential to reinforce learning and address any misconceptions that arise during the role-play. According to Criollo (2018) the principles for RP are six which are described as follows:

- Learners need to know
- Self-concept of learner
- Prior experience
- Readiness to learn
- Orientation to learning
- Motivation to learn

2.1.6 Components of role-play

Role-play is made of several components: the objectives, setting, scenario, and roles. The objectives clarify the learning outcomes that are linked with the activities. The setting takes into consideration the environment where the role-play takes place. The scenario provides the context that the situation will occur while roles define the features that learners will use (House et al., 1983).

2.2 Speaking skills

2.2.1 What is speaking?

Speaking is an essential aspect of language development and refers to the action of communicating thoughts, feelings, and information using words. It involves many little parts like pronunciation, fluidity, choice of vocabulary, and even the proper formation of grammatically correct sentences. The importance of conversational fluency in building successful communication is crucial and is responsible for a lot of personal as well as professional interactions.

2.2.2 Importance of Speaking in the Classroom

Among the four language skills of reading, writing speaking, and listening, the skills of speaking play an important role in the classroom. It enables students to get hands-on practice of language, and immediate feedback and builds confidence. Interactive speaking activities promote communication between students, creating a learning communication environment (Brown, 2007). In addition, speaking skills are important for succeeding in an academic field that requires discussion, presentation, and so on.

2.2.3 Teaching speaking: Brown´s theory

Brown (2007) The principles for teaching speaking according to Brown (2007) also indicate the importance of meaningful communication and contextualized practice. He also stresses the importance of activities that encourage students to use real language, like role plays, debates, and speaking. In this sense, instructors can establish an atmosphere that facilitates student interaction in the language by focusing more on communicative competence rather than mere accuracy.

2.2.4 How to develop speaking skills Types of speaking skills

Speaking skills also include different types of speaking, i.e., Interpersonal, Transactional & Public speaking. Interpersonal speaking leads to informal conversations and transactional speaking is based on the information transferred to facilitate exchanges. Public Speaking- Giving a speech to an audience. Given that each type of speaking needs various skills and strategies, it is clear how teaching speaking skills should be comprehensive (Brown, 2007).

2.2.5 Speaking strategies in the classroom.

Classroom speaking strategies; offer students real-life language opportunities, and promote collaborative tasks and scaffolding. This is a great way to make speaking engaging by creating pair work, group discussions, and role-playing activities. Moreover, the use of technology and multimedia resources can increase motivation among students and create various environments for developing speaking skills (Rao & Stupans 2012).

2.3 State-of-the-art

2.3.1 Previous studies

The incorporation of the role-playing strategy in language learning has been a vital key for research. Particularly in English language acquisition, several researchers have employed correlational designs to explore the relationship between speaking skills and role-play. This part of the theoretical framework reveals six significant studies carried out in many educational environments. They show a positive result regarding their speaking skills during their language learning process.

- Rahayu et al. (2023) The research was conducted in Indonesia and it used quantitative methods using pre-tests and post-tests to measure the students speaking performance. A positive strong relationship was determined between the role-play activities and their fluency and confidence when students spoke in speaking tasks. Researchers carried out multiple role-plays with high school students in realistic circumstances.

- Sari et al. (2022) While this research in Indonesia further addressed students' anxiety of speaking. Study design: A mixed-methods approach that included surveys and interviews. Results showed that participation in role-play significantly decreased students' speaking anxiety and they improved in oral communicative ability. Importantly, through role play, there was a supportive learning environment. The support of a working team seems pivotal to appropriate role portrayal and learning (Table S1).

- Azhar et al. (2023) This study was conducted in Pakistan and examined the effects of role-play on interactional Competence. Findings using a correlational design with structured observations

and performance assessments, the results suggest that those students participating in role-play activities were more effective speakers of English, specifically improving conversational skills and exhibiting better negotiated meaning when holding a discussion.

· Hapsari et al. (2023) An Indonesian study used qualitative methods with group discussions while testing the peer role-play interaction in dyads and small groups. Results revealed that collaborative role-play developed oral skills through peer communication and feedback, and created a community in the classroom.

· Yuliani (2022) Impact fortunes were conducted at a teacher education program in Indonesia and focused on pre-service teachers using an action research approach. Participating in role-play enhanced how the teachers taught and spoke, thus providing a head start to life after placement.

· Lestari (2023) The research focus in this study was on drama-based role play for university students within Indonesia. With a quantitative survey design, the research concluded that active participation in role-play was strongly positively correlated with overall speaking proficiency. The findings indicated that drama techniques worked very well when it comes to improving speaking abilities.

To conclude, the literature review shows the effectiveness of role-play strategies in improving English-speaking skills in second-language learners. These findings underscore the importance of integrating role-play to foster engagement, reduce anxiety, and improve significantly their speaking abilities. As language educators continue to explore innovative strategies that incorporate role-play in order to transform the way of traditional classes and promote better learning experiences.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Setting.

The study occurred in a private upper-secondary school in Loja, Ecuador, during the 2024- 2025 academic year, where the technology is not enough for the length of the class. This physical setting provided an established educational environment where students had regular English lessons aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) standards. In each English class, approximately 35 students attended, making it challenging for the teacher to assess each student's speaking skills individually. Consequently, role-play activities were integrated as an instructional strategy to foster more dynamic and interactive speaking practice among students. These activities enabled students to participate actively, allowing the teacher to observe and assess their oral language use in real-time while addressing the logistical challenges of large class sizes.

Research Participants.

The participants consisted of third-year upper-secondary students who were identified as having a B1 level of English proficiency, as defined by the CEFRL. From the larger population of students at the institution, a convenience sample of 40 students was selected to represent the target group, since the researcher is the teacher and he had the permission of the authorities and the necessary time to carried out this study. This sample was chosen to reflect typical English proficiency levels within the institution and to ensure that the students had a foundational ability to engage in conversations, express personal opinions, and participate in familiar social contexts.

Research Approach and Research Design.

This study followed a quantitative approach which to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Mills & Gay, 2012). This approach allowed for the statistical examination of speaking skills improvement, along with insights into students' perceptions of role-play activities. The research design was correlational, as described by Creswell (2012), focusing on determining the association between the use of role-play strategies and the development of English-speaking skills among students. This correlational design was descriptive, aiming to identify trends without manipulating variables, thus capturing the natural relationship between the use of role-play and speaking proficiency.

Data Collection Sources and Techniques.

Two primary techniques were employed to collect data: the testing and survey techniques. To gather quantitative data on English-speaking skills, an achievement test was administered using based on the speaking component of the First Certificate in English (FCE) exam. This test, validated by the CEFRL and adapted by the researcher according to students' knowledge divided into four parts. The parts measured grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication all of them scored by a rubric taken from the First Certificate of English (FCE) exam, which provided a reliable measure of students' speaking abilities and allowed for statistical analysis of their baseline skills (Madsen, 1983). Additionally, quantitative data were collected through a survey technique, using a structured closed-ended questionnaire of seven questions designed to capture students' perceptions of role-play activities and their impact on language skills

through Likert's scale. The questionnaire responses helped identify patterns and tendencies, adding depth to the quantitative findings.

Data Analysis.

Data analysis incorporated both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize overall trends, including measures of central tendency, procedure/test correlation, and the normality test which were generated using JAMOVI software. JAMOVI facilitated the organization of data into tables and graphs, enhancing the visualization and interpretation of quantitative results. Regarding to data gathered from the questionnaire was categorized using an adapted Likert scale, allowing for systematic analysis aligned with the study's objectives (Bergin, 2018).

Procedure.

The research process was organized into several stages. First, the initial planning phase involved selecting the sample and defining the role-play activities suitable for the students' proficiency level, intending to determine the correlation between the implementation of role-play activities and the improvement of students' speaking skills. In the initial planning phase, the researcher selected a sample of third-year upper-secondary students and identified role-play activities appropriate for their B1 English proficiency level, focusing on activities that encouraged spontaneous conversation and expression. Given the large class size, role-play was chosen as an effective strategy to provide ample speaking opportunities for all students while making it feasible for the teacher to observe and evaluate individual performance within group settings. Secondly, an achievement test of English-speaking skills was administered

to assess students' baseline abilities in integrating structured conversations into the students' regular language curriculum.

Finally, students completed a survey to provide quantitative feedback on their experiences with the role-play activities. Data collected were then analyzed as described, with JAMOVI aiding in statistical calculations allowing for deeper insights into students' improvements and perspectives on the role-play strategies used.

4. RESULTS

The analysis focuses on the statistical and perceptual data obtained through the study's instruments, which were carefully designed and modified for the student's performance. The goal is to determine the relationship between role-play strategies and English-speaking skills while adhering to the four-step interpretive process.

Table 1.

Normality test Shapiro Wilk – Achievement speaking test.

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	N	W	p
TOTAL	20	0.871	0.012
1 Do you think that using role-play helped you to improve your interaction?	20	0.608	<.001
2 Did prompts help you to increase your creativity at the moment of speaking?	20	0.711	<.001
3 Do you think that role-play activity helped you to increase your confidence at using the language?	20	0.580	<.001

4 Do you consider effective role-play to practice during the learning process?	20	0.351	<.001
5 Do you think that using roleplay in English classes is appropriate to foster the collaboration among classmates?	20	0.632	<.001
6 Do you think that the implementation of role-play improved your pronunciation and fluency?	20	0.433	<.001
7 Through the application of role play, do you think that it helped to enhance your vocabulary and the correct use of the grammar?	20	0.433	<.001

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicate a significant departure from normality for all variables ($p < 0.001$). These findings suggest non-normal distributions in students' responses to role-play-related questions, reflecting considerable variability in their perceptions and performance. Notably, Question 4 ("Do you consider effective role-play to practice during the learning process?") displayed the lowest W value (0.351), highlighting diverse opinions regarding the practicality of role-play. This variability might stem from individual differences in familiarity with role-play or its integration into prior learning experiences.

The overall significance ($p = 0.012$) for total scores aligns with the notion that complex, non-linear factors influence students' perspectives and performance outcomes on role-play-driven tasks. For instance, their responses suggest variability in how role-play aids different aspects of speaking, such as interaction, fluency, and confidence.

Table 2.

Correlation between the survey results and the achievement test for English-speaking skills.

SURVEY RESULTS	ACHIEVEMENT SPEAKING TEST —
1 Do you think that using role-play helped you to improve your interaction?	0.679***
2 Did prompts help you to increase your creativity at the moment of speaking?	0.536**
3 Do you think that role-play activity helped you to increase your confidence at using the language?	0.678***
4 Do you consider effective role-play to practice during the learning process?	0.467*
5 Do you think that using roleplay in English classes is appropriate to foster the collaboration among classmates?	0.756***
6 Do you think that the implementation of role-play improved your pronunciation and fluency?	0.625**
7 Through the application of role play, do you think that it helped to enhance your vocabulary and the correct use of the grammar?	0.601**
Note. H_a the correlation is positive	

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001, one-tailed

The correlational analysis underscores a positive and statistically significant relationship between role-play strategies and speaking skill enhancement. Key insights include a strong correlation with the highest correlation (r = 0.756, p < 0.001) related to question 5 ("Do you think that using role-play in English classes is appropriate to foster collaboration?"). This finding aligns with role-play's capacity to encourage teamwork and interactive learning, as highlighted in the theoretical framework. Likewise, moderate correlations between Creativity and grammar use (r = 0.536 and r = 0.601, respectively) demonstrate moderate associations, signifying that while role-play is effective, its impact might be contingent upon the instructional design and prompts used. Finally, Confidence and Interaction, Questions addressing confidence (r = 0.678, p < 0.001) and interaction (r = 0.679, p < 0.001) showed strong relationships. These results emphasize the contribution of role-play to reducing speaking anxiety and fostering active participation.

Specific Objective:

· To measure students' speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language.

Table 2.
Students´ performance in English-speaking skills.

Test	N	Medium	SD	Min	Max
Vocabulary	20	1.77	0.313	1.250	2.00
Grammar	20	1.57	0.430	0.750	2.00
Discourse Management	20	1.56	0.428	0.500	2.00

Pronunciation	20	1.86	0.206	1.500	2.00
Interactive Communication	20	1.86	0.263	1.250	2.00

Descriptive statistics reveal that students performed most strongly in pronunciation and interactive communication, both with a mean score of 1.86. These areas are critical for speaking proficiency, aligning with findings that role-play bolsters articulation and dialogue capabilities. The lowest mean was observed in grammar (1.57), indicating an area for targeted improvement. This disparity suggests that while role-play enriches fluency and interaction, structured grammar activities might be necessary to complement its effects.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings align with earlier research emphasizing role-play's benefits in language acquisition. For instance:

1. Interaction and Collaboration: As noted in the works of Azhar et al. (2023) and Hapsari et al. (2023), role-play fosters effective peer interaction and team-based learning, reflected in the high correlation for fostering collaboration (r = 0.756).
2. Speaking Fluency and Confidence: Studies by Rahayu et al. (2023) and Sari et al. (2022) highlight role-play's impact on fluency and anxiety reduction. This parallels the strong correlations observed in this study for confidence and interaction (r = 0.678 and r = 0.679).
3. Perception and Effectiveness: While Yuliani (2022) and Lestari (2023) affirm role-play's role in improving proficiency and creativity, the lower perception of its practical learning value in this study (Question 4) suggests cultural or pedagogical nuances.

Alternative Explanations

Variability in students' perceptions of role-play's effectiveness (e.g., Question 4's low agreement) might stem from:

· Instructional Design: The novelty of role-play activities for some students may have affected engagement or comprehension.

· Assessment Familiarity: The achievement test's alignment with CEFR criteria might not fully encapsulate gains made in informal speaking contexts.

· Group Dynamics: Time constraints and extracurricular activities likely influenced some participants' focus and involvement.

· Scope and Limitations

This study is bounded by its small sample size and specific context, limiting the generalizability of findings. Moreover, the correlational design precludes causal inferences. However, its mixed-methods approach ensures robust insights into both statistical trends and qualitative perceptions.

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between role-play strategies and English-speaking skills among third-year upper-secondary students. The correlational design revealed significant positive associations, emphasizing role-play's role in enhancing interaction, confidence, and speaking fluency. The research question, "What is the relationship between role-play strategies and students' English-speaking skills?" was addressed

through both statistical and perceptual data, offering comprehensive insights into this dynamic.

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6. CONCLUSIONS

· This research confirms a strong, positive relationship between role-play strategies and English-speaking skills. Key findings include role-play's significant impact on interaction, fluency, and collaboration. Nevertheless, areas like grammar and practical learning applications require complementary strategies for holistic development.

· Role-play strategies are a transformative tool for enhancing English-speaking skills, turning traditional classrooms into dynamic spaces for interaction and collaboration. This study demonstrates their effectiveness, with strong correlations to key competencies such as interaction ($r = 0.679$) and collaboration ($r = 0.756$), highlighting their role in fostering confidence-driven and engaging learning environments.

· Role-play motivates students by reducing speaking anxiety, promoting authentic communication, and encouraging creativity. Its significant impact on fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary affirms its value, though the need for supplementary strategies to enhance grammar development remains critical for holistic progress.

· The broader implications of this research underscore its relevance beyond the classroom. For Ecuadorian students, in particular, it offers a pathway to overcoming systemic barriers in English proficiency and achieving meaningful linguistic advancement.

· Ultimately, role-play transcends being merely a teaching strategy; it is a transformative approach that empowers learners, fosters meaningful interactions, and prepares them for the challenges of an interconnected world.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

· Enhanced Role-Play Design: Incorporate diverse scenarios and structured prompts to address grammar and creative expression.
· Teacher Training: Equip educators with tools to integrate role-play seamlessly into curricula.
· Future Research: Investigate role-play's effects across larger, more diverse samples to ensure scalability and inclusivity.

8. CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS

M.A.H.M: Introduction, Theoretical framework, Methodology, Discussion.

J.M.A.C: Results and interpretation, Conclusions and Recommendations.

O.V.L.E: Revision of the book chapter

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