JURNAL KOULUTUS

IMPROVING ELEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH DEBATE ACTIVITIES DESIGNED WITH ROLE-PLAY

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Abstract

Speaking is an important skill in learning English. However, some students find it difficult to express their ideas and communicate their messages confidently. The present study focused on the effect of role-play discussion exercises on students' speaking skills. This study was quantitative pre-experimental one group pre-test post-test design with 22 eleventh grade students of SMAN 6 Kediri. Data were collected through interactive speaking assessments and analysed with descriptive statistics and a paired-sample t-test. The results showed that the mean score was increased from 64.36 to 78.18 at significance level 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). The results indicated that the role-play debate activities significantly enhanced the students' speaking skills and helped them to communicate meaningfully in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *debate activities, role-play, speaking skills, EFL learners, communication*

PENINGKATAN KETERAMPILAN BERBICARA SISWA KELAS XI MELALUI *DEBATE ACTIVITIES DESIGNED WITH ROLE-PLAY*

Abstrak

Keterampilan berbicara merupakan salah satu keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Namun, sebagian siswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam mengungkapkan ide dan berkomunikasi secara percaya diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui pengaruh kegiatan debat yang dirancang dengan *role-play* terhadap keterampilan berbicara siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain *pre-experimental one-group pre-test post-test* yang melibatkan 22 siswa kelas XI SMAN 6 Kediri. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes berbicara interaktif dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif serta uji *paired-sample t-test.* Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 64,36 menjadi 78,18 dengan nilai signifikansi 0,001 ($p < 0,05$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan debat yang dirancang dengan *role-play* secara signifikan meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa.

Kata Kunci: *debate activities*, role-play, keterampilan berbicara, pembelajaran EFL, komunikasi

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills to learn in English because it enables learners to communicate effectively ideas, opinions, feelings and information. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is an important indicator of students' language proficiency because it involves the integration of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and communication strategies in real-life interaction. Speaking is a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed, although those observations are invariably colored by the accuracy and effectiveness of a test-taker's listening skill (Brown, 2004). This view suggests that teaching speaking should not only emphasize linguistic knowledge but also provide opportunities for learners to actively use language in communicative situations. Therefore, improving students' speaking ability has become one of the main objectives of English language teaching, particularly at the secondary school level.

Many students still have problems in speaking English, although it is important. Preliminary observation at SMAN 6 Kediri, the pupils often show hesitation in speaking their ideas verbally and lack of confidence in doing a speaking activity. They are often afraid of making mistakes in grammar, pronunciation and choice of words (Vu Van, 2017). This concern may reduce students' willingness to interact in the classroom and limit their chances to practice speaking. In addition, students find it hard to respond spontaneously in classroom discussions and they tend to be passive during speaking activities. These factors limit opportunities for meaningful conversation, and may hinder the development of speaking ability.

To address these problems, teachers must use pedagogical methods that involve active engagement and meaningful interaction. A well-known way to improve speaking skills is a discussion. Debates give students the opportunity to express ideas, construct arguments, uphold positions, and interact with contrary viewpoints in an organised manner. According to (Krieger, 2005), discussion encourages substantive communiation, in which learners are actively sharing ideas and rationalising their arguments. This characteristic is particularly important in EFL courses, where students often have limited opportunities for real English communication. Also, debate forms an engaged learning environment and promotes critical thinking which enhances speaking skills. Speaking skills may be improved by debate as it helps students to organise their thoughts in a logical way and to communicate them in an effective way (Zare & Othman, 2015).

One other way that can help with speaking growth is role-play. Role-play provides students with a chance to use the language in staged but real communication situations. Role-play, as (Harmer, 2007) argues, enables learners to communicate with each other by giving them specific roles, and this allows them to practice language in a meaningful and less threatening environment. This is good for learners who are nervous speaking English as they can focus on playing a role rather than worrying about the mistakes they might make. Students feel more confident when they are expressing the words of a character rather than their own thoughts . Role-play is an effective way of getting students to engage . Thus role-play promotes engagement, enhances the readiness of learners to communicate and allows students to practice varied communication functions in English.

The combination of debate with role-play might provide more comprehensive speaking practice for pupils, with the strengths of both styles. Debate emphasises argumentative discussion and critical thinking, and role play encourages real engagement in significant situations. Role-play debating activities are designed to help students develop the ability to express their opinions, provide supporting arguments, engage with the ideas of others, and sustain conversation while playing assigned roles. (Richards, 2008) suggests that important activities for communication can enhance language development by giving learners opportunities to use language in meaningful ways. Therefore, the mixture of discussion and role-play may help students develop language competence, confidence, interaction skills and

communication efficacy. The integration could foster a more interactive and communicative learning environment that emphasises speaking proficiency.

Discussion and role-play have been used in many previous studies with positive outcomes for language acquisition. (Khudriyah, 2020) found that debate significantly improves students' speaking ability by enhancing students' confidence and their argumentation. Similarly, (Saputra & Lumbanbatu, 2024) found that discussion helped students to convey their ideas more effectively. (Siboro et al., 2024) found that role-play improved students' speaking performance by the opportunity of real communication. These results suggest that both discussion and role-play can significantly contribute to speaking development through active language use and meaningful interaction. However, the majority of previous research considered the two methodologies separately, focusing on debate or role-play as distinct teaching approaches.

This gap suggests the necessity of more studies on the effectiveness of role-play debate activities in EFL classrooms. Previous research has indicated that, when used separately, debate and role-play help students improve their speaking performance. However, the majority of research has used these techniques separately and has focused mostly on general speaking skill. However, little empirical information is available about the combination of debate and role-play in a single educational engagement, especially in Indonesian senior high school EFL contexts. Moreover, there has been insufficient emphasis on exploring how this integration can enhance different speaking components. The purpose of this study was to find out the effect of combining discussion and role-play on the speaking skill of the eleventh graders at SMAN 6 Kediri. The purpose of this study was to find out the students' speaking proficiency before and after the therapy and to find out whether the use of role-play debate activities had significant influence on students' speaking skills. The results are expected to contribute to communicative language teaching methodologies and to provide empirical information on the effectiveness of incorporating discussion and role-play in speaking instruction.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative method with a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test design. This research aimed to investigate the effect of role-play debate activities on students' speaking skills through comparing students' speaking skills before and after the intervention. The study was held in SMAN 6 Kediri in academic year 2025/2026.

Table 1. Research Design Table

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental Group	O_1	X	O_2

Description:
O_1: Pre-test (initial measurement)
X: Treatment (debate with role-play)
O_2: Post-test (final measurement)

The subject of this research is the 22 students of eleventh grade of SMAN 6 Kediri. The participants were selected through purposive cluster sampling as the chosen class met the aims of the study and had similar English learning backgrounds. The methodology was to give the students a pre-test before the therapy and a post-test after the therapy to see if there was any improvement in their speaking ability.

The research instrument was an interactive speaking test which consisted of a pre-test and a post-test. The speaking test was conducted in pairs through interpersonal talk tasks on topics of debate that are relevant to students' everyday lives and social issues. During the speaking performance, students had to express their thoughts, provide arguments, react to their partners' views, ask and answer questions and keep the communication during the encounter. The speaking skill was assessed based on five components by (Brown, 2004) which are fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension.

The speaking test was developed based on (Brown, 2004) criteria for instrument validity, namely, fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension. The test tasks were formulated to be related to the research objectives and the educational context of the students. To ensure the scoring consistency, the researcher used a clear scoring rubric and used the same procedures and scoring standards for both the pre-test and post-test.

The intervention was delivered through discourse activities with the role play in two sessions. Students were assigned specific roles and participated in mini-debate sessions, where they expressed beliefs, defended arguments and refuted opposing viewpoints, as assigned. The combination of debate and role-play was to provide students with a great deal of communication practice and to encourage active involvement and interaction in the speaking activities. The treatment protocol is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Treatment Procedure

Meeting	Stage	Activities
1	Introduction	Introduction to debate and role-play, explanation of learning objectives and useful expressions for giving opinions, agreeing, disagreeing, and responding to arguments.
1	Preparation	Students were divided into groups and assigned specific roles. They prepared arguments, supporting reasons, and possible rebuttals based on the debate motion.
1	Debate Activity	Students conducted a role-play debate by presenting arguments, responding to opposing viewpoints, and maintaining interaction throughout the discussion.
1	Evaluation	Feedback and reflection on students' speaking performance.
2	Review	Review of previous lesson and discussion of students' experiences during the first debate session.
2	Preparation	Students prepared stronger arguments and rebuttals for a new debate motion.
2	Debate Activity	Students participated in a more structured role-play debate involving opening statements, arguments, rebuttals, and closing statements.
2	Evaluation	Feedback, reflection, and discussion of students' speaking improvement.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean, minimum score, maximum score and standard deviation of pre-test and post-test results. Inferential statistics were conducted using a paired sample t-test in IBM SPSS Statistics to determine whether there was a significant difference in students' speaking performance before and after the treatment. The level of significance was 0.05 in this study. If the significance value was less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis

was accepted, which means that discussion sessions with role-play had a significant effect on students' speaking skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Student's Speaking Ability Before the Treatment

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of students' speaking scores before the implementation of debate activities designed with role-play.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test Scores

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-Test Score	22	64.36	13.175	40	84

As shown in Table 3, the average score of the pre-test was 64.36. The lowest score was 40 and the highest was 84. The standard deviation was 13.175, indicating there was much variability among students' speaking performance before the intervention. The considerable standard deviation indicates that there was variability in the pupils' speaking proficiency. Some students achieved high scores in speaking. Some others showed low competence in the speaking components assessed. The pre-test results show that before the treatment was given the students' speaking proficiency was not at the best level.

Student's Speaking Ability After the Treatment

After conducting debate activities designed with role-play, there was a significant increase in the speaking skills of the students. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the post-test scores.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Post-Test Scores

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Post-Test Score	22	78.18	11.758	52	92

Table 4 shows descriptive statistics of students' speaking score after the integration of debating activities with role-play. The average scores increased to 78.18. The minimum score changed from 40 in the pre-test to 52 in the post-test, and the maximum score changed from 84 to 92. The standard deviation decreased from 13.175 to 11.758 indicating the student's speaking achievement improved after the intervention.

The mean score increased, indicating that students demonstrated better speaking performance after the addition of debating activities designed with role-play. Also, the increase in both the lowest and highest scores indicates that speaking ability has increased across a range of student ability. The decreasing of standard deviation means that the variability of student's speaking skill decreased after treatment. The descriptive data indicated that the speaking performance of the students improved significantly after the intervention.

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Result

This section presents a comparison of students' speaking performance before and after the implementation of debate designed with role-play. The comparison is intended to

determine whether there was an improvement in students' speaking achievement after receiving the treatment. The results are presented by comparing the mean scores obtained from the pre-test and post-test, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates the comparison between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test.

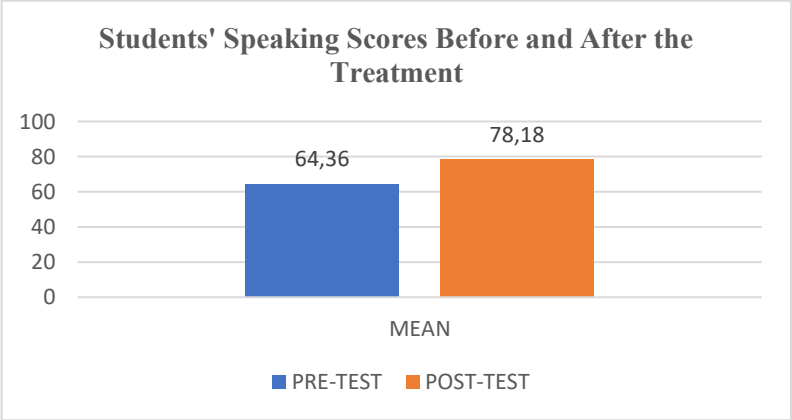


Figure 1. Comparison of Mean Scores Between Pre-Test and Post Test

The comparison indicates a remarkable enhancement of students' speaking performance post treatment. The average score increased by 13.82 points from 64.36 in the pre-test to 78.18 in the post-test. This increase means that the students' achievement in the post-test was better than in the pre-test. The difference between the two mean scores indicates a general improvement of the students' speaking ability after joining debate designed with role-play. The results show that the mean score of post-test is significantly higher than the mean score of pre-test, which indicates that students' speaking performance has improved after the intervention.

Improvement of Speaking Components

To identify which aspects of speaking improved the most, the researcher compared students' performance across the five speaking components. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of Speaking Components in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Component	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
Fluency	3.50	3.86	0.36
Pronunciation	3.36	3.91	0.55
Grammar	3.14	4.14	1.00
Vocabulary	3.45	3.82	0.37
Comprehension	3.05	3.82	0.77

As shown in Table 5, all speaking components improved after treatment. The highest improvement score was in grammar (1.00) followed by comprehension (0.77), pronunciation (0.55), vocabulary (0.37) and fluency (0.36). The results demonstrated that the greatest progress was in the aspect of grammar, which meant that the students became better at producing grammatically correct sentences in speaking tasks. The second largest gain was in

Comprehension, suggesting that students were better able to understand and respond to verbal communication during interactions. There was considerable progress in pronunciation, moderate progress in vocabulary, and moderate progress in fluency.

All components were improved but the degree of improvement varied among different characteristics. Results showed that the treatment significantly improved speaking ability and positive improvements were seen in all the components evaluated. The data reveal that the students benefitted from the speaking exercises on various dimensions of speaking performance and not on one aspect.

Statistical Analysis of the Treatment Effect

To determine whether the improvement in students' speaking ability was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 6. Paired Sample T-Test Result

Variable Pair	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Test – Post-Test	-13.818	8.617	1.837	-7.522	21	< 0.001

Table 6 shows that the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was -13.818. The t-value calculated was -7.522 with 21 degrees of freedom. The p value ($p = 0.001$) was less than 0.05 of the significance level. The significance value was < 0.05, so the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. This indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the students' scores on the pre-test and post-test. The statistical analysis showed that students' speaking performance after treatment was significantly different from their speaking performance before treatment. The implementation of role play debating activities was found to improve significantly the speaking skills of the students.

Discussion

Improvement of Students' Speaking Skills

The results showed that the students' speaking proficiency improved after the implementation of discussion sessions with role-play . The students' speaking performance was improved after the intervention. The mean score increased from 64.36 in the pre-test to 78.18 in the post-test. This improvement suggests that the combination of discussion and role-play provided students with good opportunities to be involved with English actively and interactively in classroom sessions.

The improvement was attributable to the communication component of the intervention. During the debate sessions, students were required to voice their opinions, back up their arguments with evidence, counter the arguments of the opposite side and justify their positions. Role-play provided the students an opportunity to express themselves from the perspective of assigned viewpoints and interact according to their roles. These activities provided real communication situations in which pupils had to use English for real reasons rather than just rehearsing isolated language structures. As a result, students had more chances to express themselves, negotiate meaning and actively participate in classroom discussions.

The results support what (Brown, 2004) said, that speaking ability consists of several interrelated components including fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension. This view holds that in order to improve speaking skills, learners should be able to combine many language elements at the same time in a conversation. The improvement

of all speaking components indicates that the students benefited from the communicative speaking activities that made them use the language as a whole rather than a single aspect of speaking(Celaj & Jani, 2025). (Richards, 2008) argues that speaking proficiency develops when learners are engaged in meaningful communication that involves negotiation of meanings and active participation. The role-play debate activities provided students with opportunities to participate, think about different points of view and to keep the conversation going.

The results are in line with (Krieger, 2005) who argues that discussion encourages the active use of language as the learners are encouraged to express their ideas, argue their cases and interact with different perspectives. These communication needs could account for the students' greater confidence and ability in the use of English during the intervention. In the same vein, (Thi Dieu Linh, 2024) reported that debating events had a significant impact on students' speaking development because it stimulated active participation and provided opportunities for meaningful connections. The study adds to the growing evidence that discussion is a useful technique for improving speaking skills in EFL classrooms, especially when combined with role-play activities that facilitate authentic communication.

Improvement of Speaking Components

The analysis of speaking components showed that all speaking components improved after the intervention. The highest improvement score (1.00) among the five components was in grammar. This finding showed that students were better able to express ideas and support arguments while making grammatically correct statements. One possible explanation is that debating activities required pupils to systematically develop ideas and express them in complete sentences. Constant practice of giving arguments and counterarguments led students to be skilled in the correct use of grammatical structures in communication. The structured nature of discussion may have raised pupils' comprehension of sentence structure and linguistic quality.

Second highest improvement is comprehension (0.77). This result indicates that students improved their ability to understand spoken words and to respond appropriately to them in interactions. At the debating events, students were required to listen carefully to arguments made by their peers, to think critically about different points of view and to formulate relevant responses. This engagement may have enhanced the pupils' ability of auditory information processing and effective communication. The finding indicates that speaking activities with a lot of contact might simultaneously promote the development of listening comprehension.

Pronunciation improved significantly with a gain score of .55. The oral practice in argument sessions provided pupils with ongoing output in spoken language. (Brown, 2004) suggests that pronunciation develops through repeated opportunities to use oral language in communicative contexts. This indicates that the frequent participation of speaking activities may result in better pronunciation since learners have more opportunities to practice language production. Thus, the improvement in pronunciation might be related to the students' more exposure to speaking practice in the intervention.

Vocabulary increased up from 3.45 to 3.82. This improvement suggests that students are getting better at choosing the right words and phrases to express their ideas. During the discussion of events, students often used words for expressing opinions, agreeing, disagreeing, giving arguments and responding to the views of others. These exercises had great potential to enhance contextual vocabulary. The students repeatedly used these expressions in their interactions, which increased their familiarity with the vocabulary involved and improved the effectiveness of their communication.

Fluency increased from 3.50 to 3.86, showing that the pupils were better at maintaining communication with fewer pauses and hesitations. According to (Thornbury, 2005) fluency is

when learners communicate that is meaningful and involves spontaneous language production. This implies that learners are more fluent when they are motivated to attend to meaning rather than just to produce accurate language. The role-play debating sessions the students had to actively respond to arguments and express concepts in the present moment may have improved their speaking fluency.

The enhancement of all speaking components indicates that discussion activities employing role-play are beneficial to the overall speaking development by not emphasising a single aspect of speaking performance (Tiarnita Maria Sarjani Br.Siregar et al., 2026). The presence of argumentative discourse and contextual engagement seems to provide balanced opportunities for students to develop different aspects of speaking proficiency.

The Effectiveness of Debate Activities Designed with Role-Play

The The paired-sample t-test resulted in a significance value of 0.001, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The results of this study indicate that debate sessions with role-play had a statistically significant effect on the students' speaking abilities. The improvement found in pupils' speaking performance was not incidental but connected to the implementation of the treatment.

The findings support previous research about the effectiveness of debate and role-play in language learning. (Br. Sitanggang, 2024) found that role-play improved the students' speaking skill by encouraging authentic conversation and improving the learners' confidence. This finding is relevant to the present study because students were assigned roles to communicate through, which could have lessened anxiety and increased participation. Similarly, (el Majidi et al., 2024) pointed out that debate is a great educational tool to enhance second-language speaking skills through contact, argumentation, and purposeful use of the language. Such features were also identified in the process of treatment implementation when students participated actively in sharing ideas and expressing their viewpoints.

These results are in agreement with (Saputra & Lumbanbatu, 2024) which found that the confidence and communication skills of students increased due to discussion activities. Argument makes kids active participants in, rather than passive users of, information. At the same time, role-play reduces anxiety about speaking since students are speaking in a particular role rather than speaking their own views. The combination of these two strategies seems to contribute to a conducive learning environment that encourages active participation and significant interaction, which might explain the significant improvement observed in this study.

One of the major contributions of this study is the combination of discussion and role play in one teaching activity. Prior work has mostly looked at debate and role-play in isolation. The findings of this study suggest that the combination of the argumentative nature of debate and the contextual involvement of role-play can improve learners' speaking experiences. Students are encouraged to not only defend points but to articulate from specific views, adding to the authenticity and engagement of the encounter. This combination may have greater potential for language use than either strategy used separately.

The result shows that role play discussion exercises are a useful teaching method to improve students' speaking skills. The method develops active involvement, meaningful communication, analytical thinking and interaction which improve speaking skill in EFL classes. Therefore, the addition of discussion and role-play can be a potential option for teachers who want to develop more communicative and learner-centered speaking teaching.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to analyse the influence of discussion activities and role-play towards speaking skills of eleventh grade students of SMAN 6 Kediri. The result showed that the application of treatment improved the speaking performance of the pupils. The

comparison of pre-test and post-test scores showed that the students speaking proficiency was better after they participated in debating activities and role-play. The results indicate that the communicative learning activities of discussion and role-play provide students with the opportunity to engage in more active and meaningful English practice .

The improvement was noticeable in all the speech components tested fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension. Of these components, the grammar was the most improved, followed by comprehension and pronunciation. The paired sample t-test statistical analysis further confirmed the statistically significant enhancement. Thus, it can be inferred that the activities of debate and role-play were effective in enhancing the students' speaking skills.

The findings of this study suggest that the employment of debate and role-play could be an effective teaching strategy in EFL courses. Through meaningful interaction and argumentative discourse, students learn to articulate thoughts, respond to different perspectives, and use English in more important situations. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers adopt this approach to increase active participation and to encourage more interactive speaking tasks in the classroom.

But some limits have to be recognised. The study had no control group and involved only one group of 22 students. Thus, future studies should use larger sample sizes, experimental designs with control groups, and more comprehensive assessment methods to increase the evidence of the effectiveness of discussion coupled with role-play in improving speaking skills.

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