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## Articles

### **The use of role-play to improve speaking competence**

### **El uso del juego de roles para mejorar la competencia oral**

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## **Abstract**

This study determined the effectiveness of role-play in developing students' speaking competence in English as a foreign language at an Ecuadorian primary school. A quantitative approach and a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design were used. The population consisted of 200 students, and 41 third-grade students were selected through convenience sampling. Oral performance was assessed using the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters Speaking Assessment Rubric, which evaluated vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the differences between pre-test and post-test scores were not normally distributed. Therefore, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied. The results showed a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking competence after the three-week role-play intervention ( $Z = 5.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.90$ ), indicating a large effect. The findings suggested that structured role-play had potential as a communicative pedagogical approach for supporting speaking competence in primary school learners by providing opportunities to use English in meaningful and familiar contexts.

**Keywords:** role-play, speaking competence, English as a foreign language, primary education

## **Resumen**

Este estudio determinó la eficacia del juego de roles en el desarrollo de la competencia oral de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en una escuela primaria ecuatoriana. Se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo y un diseño preexperimental de un solo grupo con pretest y post-test. La población estuvo conformada por 200 estudiantes, de los cuales 41 estudiantes de tercer grado fueron seleccionados mediante muestreo por conveniencia. El desempeño oral se evaluó mediante la rúbrica de expresión oral Cambridge Pre-A1 Starters, que consideró vocabulario, pronunciación e interacción. Se calcularon estadísticas descriptivas y, después de verificar mediante la prueba de Shapiro-Wilk que las diferencias entre el pretest y el post-test no presentaban una distribución normal, se aplicó la prueba de rangos con signo de Wilcoxon. Los resultados mostraron una mejora estadísticamente significativa en la competencia oral después de la intervención de tres semanas ( $Z = 5,61$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ;  $r = 0,90$ ), lo que indicó un efecto grande. Los hallazgos sugirieron que el juego de roles estructurado tenía potencial como enfoque pedagógico comunicativo para apoyar el desarrollo de la competencia oral mediante oportunidades de uso significativo y contextualizado del inglés.

**Palabras clave:** juego de roles, competencia oral, inglés como lengua extranjera, educación primaria

## **Introduction**

The development of speaking competence is recognized as the most critical yet challenging component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Oral proficiency is viewed as the

main means of social and professional integration in a globalized society, according to Chen et al. (2025). However, traditional pedagogy often focuses on grammar exercises and correct sentences produced by students rather than meaningful communication and there is a gap between what students know about English and what happens when they want to communicate spontaneously. Research also shows that role-play which is an interactive learning method is effective in solving the problem, because it is a learning method that is very similar to the way people interact in the real world (Ikhsan & Akhsan, 2022). Therefore, the use of communicative approaches that promote active participation and meaningful language use remains relevant in EFL instruction.

In many Latin America countries, English language programs have no authentic contexts for the students to develop oral communication skills. The Education First (2024) report shows that the region's proficiency levels are still relatively low, primarily due to the absence of innovative pedagogical tools in classroom activities. According to scholars like Moosa et al. (2024), it is essential to include ludic and communicative tasks to overcome the cultural and linguistic barriers in the classroom. These approaches may provide learners with opportunities to use English more actively and meaningfully, particularly in contexts where opportunities for authentic language use are limited.

In the Ecuadorian educational scenario, there have been several changes to the national English curriculum, with the focus being on communicative competence and not only the teaching of grammatical structures (Quinteros & Fajardo, 2022). The curriculum fosters the development of the four communicative skills that include Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing in authentic language use as stated by Zapata et al. (2025). Nevertheless, despite these guidelines of the curriculum, communicative language teaching has been limitedly applied in many classrooms. Quinteros and Fajardo (2022) found that role-playing can promote oral expression among elementary school students, supporting the use of communicative and student-centered strategies in the Ecuadorian educational context. Similarly, Jiménez and Cabanilla (2023) examined the use of role-play to improve speaking skills among students in a public school in Loja, highlighting its potential to enhance oral communication in Ecuadorian EFL settings.

While the Ecuadorian curriculum aims to be communicative, problems in speaking in English still exist in the classroom with the young EFL learners. From (Pinatih, 2021), students are found to experience high level of speaking anxiety in producing language in a formal class environment. The challenge indicates that the current approach does not adequately support students to freely express themselves in the English language (Tegler et al., 2025). However, if students are able to get into role-play, their motivation will rise and their anxiety of making mistakes will also go down considerably. According to the study carried out by Katemba and Grace (2023), role-play can be an interactive method and be used to develop students' self-confidence and motivation, especially in public schools where students are taught using the traditional grammar-translation method. Sarifudin and Setyawan (2025) used role-play as one of the major teaching methods in the improvement of English learners' communicative skills. This technique enables learners to employ the target language in a supportive setting in which mistakes are of

negligible concern. Moreover, this safe space provides opportunities for learners to handle language in different contexts, scripts, roles and situations and environments, depending on their level of learning.

Previous studies have underscored the significance and potential benefits of role-play in second-language learning (Ishak & Abdul, 2022; Moosa et al., 2024). However, the impact of role-play on young EFL learners' speaking competence in Ecuadorian primary schools has received limited empirical attention, particularly regarding its effectiveness based on defined criteria for assessing speaking ability. Thus, the present study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of role-play as a teaching method for enhancing the speaking competence of third-grade EFL students in an Ecuadorian primary school. A quantitative approach and a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design were used for this purpose.

## **Methodology**

The research in this study is based on the positivist paradigm, as this paradigm enables the study to be generalizable and statistically reliable and obtain universal findings and laws (Park et al., 2020). In particular, quantitative approach was used as this approach is suitable to identify trends and investigate the relationship between the variables using numerical data (Ghanad, 2023). The study used one-group pre-test/post-test pre-experimental design based on Cambridge Pre A1 Starters model. Mohajan (2020) defines this design as a single-group intervention to see how things change over time. The design was therefore utilized to assess the effect of role-play to compare students' speaking performance in pre and post-test.

The population consisted of 200 students, from which 41 third-grade students were selected through convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique based on the accessibility and availability of participants (Golzar et al., 2022). The 41 participants belonged to an accessible third-grade class in which the intervention could be implemented consistently. The class was selected based on its accessibility and the feasibility of implementing the intervention within the available institutional conditions, including a consistent schedule that provided sufficient instructional time without disrupting regular classroom activities. The inclusion criteria were enrollment in third grade, an age between 7 and 8 years, consistent attendance, and parental consent to participate in the study. No specific exclusion criteria were applied; students who met the inclusion criteria and whose parents provided consent were eligible to participate. The participants shared broadly similar educational and English-learning backgrounds, as they were enrolled in the same third-grade class at the same public educational institution, were within the same age range, received English instruction within the same institutional and curricular context, and followed the same class schedule during the intervention. These shared characteristics supported their comparability within the target population.

The study was carried out in a public primary school in Ecuador where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). Socio-educational context whereby learners have limited contact with

English outside the classroom and where teaching of English is based on real-life tasks, speaking and student interaction. In particular, the study was carried out in the participants' classroom, where the intervention was implemented in its natural context. This setting provided ecological validity by enabling the role-play intervention to take place during the students' daily school activities (Steube et al., 2024).

The instrument used to assess students' speaking competence was the Cambridge Pre A1 Starters Speaking Assessment Rubric. The rubric evaluates speaking performance according to three assessment criteria: vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction. Each criterion is rated on a six-point scale ranging from 0 to 5, based on performance descriptors for each level. Therefore, each dimension has a possible score ranging from 0 to 5, and the maximum total speaking score is 15 points. Specifically, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction were each scored from 0 to 5, and the total speaking score was obtained by summing the scores across the three components, resulting in a possible total score ranging from 0 to 15. The same rubric and scoring criteria were used in both the pre-test and post-test. The speaking assessments were administered individually by the teacher-researcher and took approximately five minutes per student. The same teacher-researcher also scored both assessments, following the same procedure and applying the same scoring criteria in order to maintain consistency between the pre-test and post-test. The assessment criteria and scoring descriptors were based on the official Cambridge Pre A1 Starters speaking assessment framework (Cambridge Assessment English, 2024).

Data were collected through three stages: pre-test, role-play intervention, and post-test. The pre-test was administered on June 3, 2026, before the intervention. The intervention lasted three weeks, from June 5 to June 19, and consisted of three role-play sessions, with one role-play conducted each week. Role-play #1, "My First Day of School," was conducted on June 5 and focused on greetings, introductions, and exchanging basic personal information through activities such as "Find a New Friend" and "School Adventure Mission." Role-play #2, "At the Store – School Supplies," was conducted on June 12 and involved students acting as shopkeepers and customers while practicing requests, prices, and polite expressions. Role-play #3, "In the Park," was conducted on June 19 and involved interactions related to games, weather, and park activities through speaking missions and short improvised conversations. Each role-play session lasted 90 minutes, from 12:40 p.m. to 2:10 p.m., corresponding to two consecutive English class periods. Students were organized mainly in pairs during the first role-play and mainly in groups during the second and third role-plays. The same teacher-researcher conducted the intervention sessions in the participants' regular classroom, maintaining consistent classroom procedures and providing clear instructions while using visual and hands-on materials appropriate to each scenario. The post-test was administered individually on June 24, 2026, after the intervention had been completed.

SPSS Statistics version 25 (IBM Corporation) software was used to perform statistical analyses. The study used descriptive statistical techniques, namely mean scores, and standard deviations, in processing the data obtained from the Cambridge Pre A1 Starters Speaking Assessment Rubric. Specifically, descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present the data

to represent the speaking performance of the participants in the pre-test and post-test in accordance with Ghanad (2023). Furthermore, descriptive statistics described the initial level of performance and analyzed improvements of the students in their competence in speaking after the intervention. Further, graphical (histogram and normal Q-Q plot) and Shapiro–Wilk tests were used to check the normality of the data. Because of the graphical assessment and the Shapiro–Wilk test, the data showed that it does not conform to the normal distribution, the research was carried out using Wilcoxon signed rank test to estimate the difference in competence of students in speaking before and after the study was carried out. Finally, the effect size ( $r$ ) for the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was calculated using the formula  $r = Z / \sqrt{N}$ , where  $Z$  represents the standardized Wilcoxon test statistic and  $N$  represents the number of paired observations included in the analysis. In this study,  $N = 41$ , corresponding to the 41 students who completed both the pre-test and post-test. The magnitude of  $r$  was interpreted according to Cohen’s (2013) conventional criteria, with values of 0.10, 0.30, and 0.50 representing small, moderate, and large effects, respectively.

Ethical considerations were considered and consent for conducting the research was obtained from the principal of the educational institution. Further, consent forms were used to ensure that the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) were informed that the children would be participating in a voluntary study, and that they could withdraw at any time and for any reason, with no consequences, after receiving all information (Dahal, 2024; Mumford et al., 2021). Furthermore, in order to keep students anonymous, the study did not use the students' names but instead used identification numbers: S1, S2,..., S41, which ensure that the specific students cannot be identified from the data collected. Besides, the study planned role-play activities that aimed at reducing stress and increasing opportunities for learning for young learners to preserve beneficence (Medvetska, 2025). These ethical practices safeguarded the dignity, privacy and rights of all involved in this study.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

To address the research question, this study calculated the means ( $M$ ) and standard deviation ( $S.D.$ ) of the speaking skills pre- and post-test of the participants including vocabulary, pronunciation and interaction. Table 1 shows the results of this calculation.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviation of Pre- Test Speaking Scores*

| Speaking Skills | N  | Mean<br>(M) | Std. Deviation<br>(S.D) |
|-----------------|----|-------------|-------------------------|
| Vocabulary      | 41 | 2.24        | .943                    |
| Pronunciation   | 41 | 2.71        | .750                    |
| Interaction     | 41 | 2.80        | 1.188                   |
| Total           | 41 | 7.76        | 2.538                   |

The pre-test results are shown in table 1, which indicates students' performance at an initial stage in the interaction, vocabulary and pronunciation. The pre-test results showed that the mean scores were 2.24 for vocabulary, 2.71 for pronunciation, and 2.80 for interaction, with a total mean score of 7.76 (S.D. = 2.538). Vocabulary had the lowest mean score, whereas interaction had the highest mean score among the three assessed components.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviation of Post-Test Speaking Scores*

| Speaking Skills | N  | Mean<br>(M) | Std. Deviation<br>(S.D) |
|-----------------|----|-------------|-------------------------|
| Vocabulary      | 41 | 3.78        | .690                    |
| Pronunciation   | 41 | 3.32        | .471                    |
| Interaction     | 41 | 4.07        | .648                    |
| Total           | 41 | 11.17       | 1.482                   |

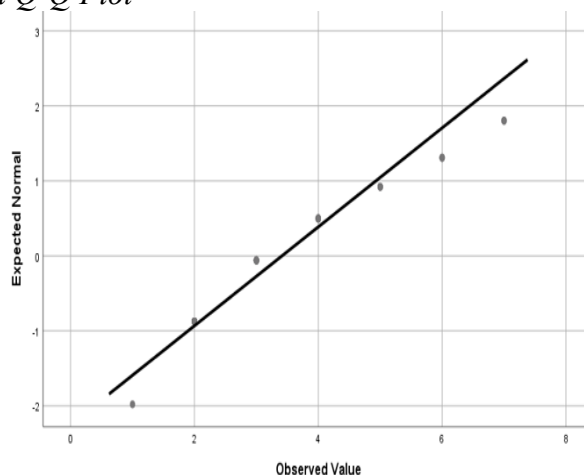
Table 2 presents the post-test results, displaying the speaking competence of the students after the intervention. The mean vocabulary score increased from 2.24 in the pre-test to 3.78 in the post-test, while the mean pronunciation score increased from 2.71 to 3.32 and the mean interaction score increased from 2.80 to 4.07. The total mean speaking score increased from 7.76 in the pre-test to 11.17 in the post-test. Interaction showed the highest post-test mean, followed by vocabulary and pronunciation.

### Assessment of Normality

Normal distribution of Difference scores (Post-Pre) was checked using graphical methods (histograms and a normal Q-Q plot) as well as the Shapiro–Wilk test before conducting the inferential analyses. Figure 1 shows a Normal Q-Q plot for the results to check for their significance. Most of the observations are approximately close to the reference line.

Figure 1

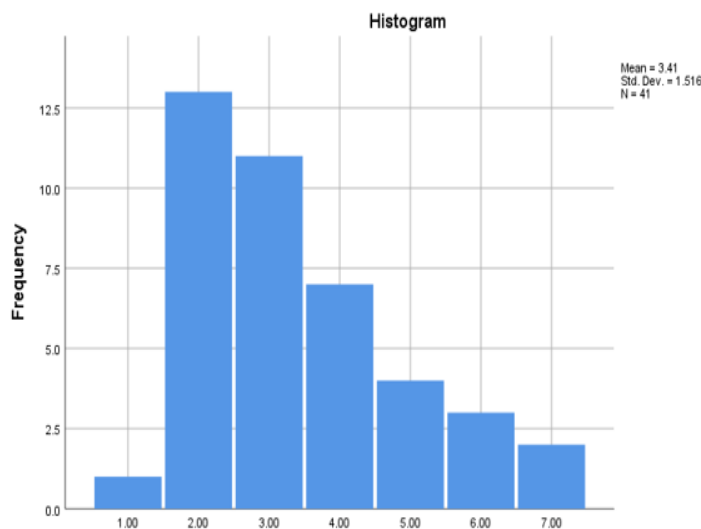
*Normal Q-Q Plot*



It is also seen from figure 1 that most observations are in good agreement with the reference line, with some minor deviations at the upper tail. The histogram in figure 2 shows the distribution of Diff\_Total scores.

Figure 2

### *Histogram*



Examining Figure 2 it can be seen that the data is slightly positively (right) skewed. This means that there are many values near 2 and 4, but not as many near 5 - 7. Overall, the conclusion drawn is that the distribution of diff\_total is not perfectly normal, but there do not appear to be extreme outliers. In addition to these illustrations, the study also ran the Shapiro-Wilk test to determine normality, or whether the observed deviations from normality are statistically significant. It was used to determine the appropriateness of parametric and non-parametric inferential tests and the criterion was that if  $p < 0.05$  (5%), then the null hypothesis of normality was rejected.

Table 3  
*Shapiro-Wilk Test*

|            | Statistic | df | Sig.  |
|------------|-----------|----|-------|
| Diff_Total | 0.888     | 41 | 0.001 |

The results showed diff\_total was not normally distributed ( $0.001 < 0.05$ ). Hence, the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used for the analysis of the differences in speaking competence of students in pre-test and post-test.

### **Component-wise Analysis**

Due to the non-normal distribution of data, this study used a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. This test also assisted in determining which aspects of speaking competence (vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction) improved post-intervention. Table 4 shows that the positive ranks (n) are the number of research participants (students) whose pre-test results are lower than the post-test results, while the negative ranks (n) are the number of research participants (students) whose pre-test results are higher than the post-test results (Mohajan, 2020).

**Table 4**

*Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Result*

| Component            | Positive Ranks (n) | Negative Ranks (n) | Ties (n) | Z      | p      | Effect Size r | Interpretation |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------|--------|--------|---------------|----------------|
| Vocabulary           | 41                 | 0                  | 0        | -5.741 | < .001 | 0.90          | Large effect   |
| Pronunciation        | 21                 | 0                  | 20       | -4.291 | < .001 | 0.67          | Large effect   |
| Interaction          | 33                 | 0                  | 8        | -5.136 | < .001 | 0.80          | Large effect   |
| Total speaking score | —                  | —                  | —        | -5.617 | < .001 | 0.88          | Large effect   |

Results in Table 4 indicated statistically significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores for vocabulary, pronunciation, interaction, and the total speaking score (all  $p < .001$ ). Vocabulary showed the largest effect size ( $r = 0.90$ ), followed by the total speaking score ( $r = 0.88$ ), interaction ( $r = 0.80$ ), and pronunciation ( $r = 0.67$ ), all indicating large effects. In addition, no negative ranks were observed for any of the assessed components. All 41 students showed higher post-test scores in vocabulary, while 21 students showed higher scores in pronunciation and 33 students showed higher scores in interaction. The remaining 20 students in pronunciation and 8 students in interaction had tied scores between the pre-test and post-test. These results indicate that participants who showed a change had higher post-test scores than pre-test scores, while some participants maintained the same scores in pronunciation and interaction. Overall, the results indicate that the three-week role-play intervention was associated with statistically significant differences in all dimensions of speaking performance assessed.

## Discussion

This study focused on the research problem of whether role-play was effective for enhancing the speaking skill of young EFL learners based on the criteria provided by standard assessments of speaking in an Ecuadorian primary school. The study provided evidence that the three-week role-play intervention had a significant effect on the speaking ability of the young EFL learners. The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test supported the statistically significant improvement of the students' interaction, pronunciation and vocabulary as shown by the total mean score that increased from 7.76 to 11.17 ( $p = 0.001$ ). The findings are in alignment with the previous study conducted by Salsabila et al. (2026) that showed the effectiveness of the role-play game “Catch a thief” for enhancing speaking skills of EFL students. The students reported that being

engaged in such games helped them to be courageous in speaking English and asking questions and answering. Likewise, Sánchez and Cango (2024) noted that after the eight-week implementation of the cooperative learning strategies such as Jigsaw, Roleplay, and Think-Pair-Share, the students' interactive communication, pronunciation, grammatical knowledge and vocabulary improved significantly. The present study focused on the primary education of young EFL learners as compared to the previous studies, most of which were on older learners. Likewise, the flexibility of cooperative learning to enhance English competence in higher education is not denied by Aporbo (2023), but the above study expands the field of cooperative learning with younger EFL students.

The improvement in students' language skills in speaking can be traced to the communicative type of role-play activities used. The findings are consistent with Luo (2024), who showed that role-play provides more choices for students to assume different roles and to operate in realistic situations compared with the teacher-centered teaching approach. The activities allow students to use English rather than be continually presented with lists of grammatical structures or vocabulary items. Similar results obtained by Sarifudin and Setyawan (2025) who emphasized that the authentic use of language will help the students to build their confidence, fluency and communicative competence gradually and minimize errors. Thus, the incredible improvement in the current study certainly substantiates the importance of meaningful interaction in effective language learning in the second language.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test scores ( $p < .001$ ). The large effect sizes observed across the assessed speaking components suggest that structured role-play may be a promising communicative intervention for supporting young learners' oral language skills.

The results of the descriptive analysis of speaking skills showed that the learners' speaking skills improved most when it came to vocabulary. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test also found a significant effect size, indicating that the intervention made significant improvements in vocabulary. This can be due to the fact that role-play activities, where students can acquire knowledge in the context of meaningful and natural ways (Zhiyenbayeva et al., 2026). The target words were heard and repeated by the learners in their role-play as in the school, grocery shop and in daily conversation. Students used words to complete communicative acts rather than just memorize single words, making words more meaningful and memorable. Continued encounters with real communicative contexts reinforce the learning of vocabulary, as new words were related to real experiences, thereby enabling the students to use suitable words in oral communication.

Furthermore, there were significant improvement scores for pre- and post-intervention data for interaction. The results confirm those obtained by Lahbib and Farhane (2023) who found that the role-play technique helps the learners to be able to conduct a conversation, respond to their interlocutors appropriately, and maintain the conversation. Turn taking, Question and Answer, starting conversations and spontaneous responses were practiced all the time in role-play as students were working together. Such communicative behaviors are seldom used in most

traditional classrooms where classroom instruction is mostly grammars. The observed improvement in interaction may be related to the opportunities provided by role-play for students to practice turn-taking, question-and-answer exchanges, initiating conversations, and spontaneous responses. However, students' confidence was not directly measured in this study. This finding supports the view that a language competence is not only a component of a person's speech competence, but it is also an interactional negotiation of meaning.

Moreover, the study found a statistically significant improvement in pronunciation after the three-week role-play intervention ( $p < .001$ ). Although the effect size for pronunciation ( $r = 0.67$ ) was smaller than that observed for vocabulary ( $r = 0.90$ ) and interaction ( $r = 0.80$ ), it still represented a large effect. This is consistent with Sayow and Marsevani (2024) who stressed that pronunciation is a natural phenomenon and is expected with time, through exposure, listening and repeated oral production. The smaller effect size observed for pronunciation may be related to factors that were not examined in the present study. One possibility that could be explored in future research is whether the duration or intensity of the intervention influences pronunciation outcomes, particularly because pronunciation development may require sustained exposure, listening, and repeated oral production. The statistically significant difference indicates that students' pronunciation scores were higher after the intervention; however, the present design does not allow the specific mechanisms underlying this change to be determined. In communicative activities, students had opportunities to use familiar words repeatedly and practice their pronunciation in meaningful contexts.

Overall, the findings suggest that role-play can reinforce multiple components of the speaking skill. There was no single skill that was addressed in the intervention but rather vocabulary and pronunciation, and interaction were integrated into it. The improvement is multidimensional, which shows that communicative language teaching is a whole and holistic approach because language skills are learnt and acquired by using it communicatively for meaningful purposes. It is more likely that activities requiring learners to use all of these skills will produce broader learning outcomes as speaking is an integrated skill. The findings, thus, validate the application of integrated communicative tasks in primary English classrooms empirically.

The role-play situations used in the intervention represented familiar contexts, including school, shopping, and play. These contexts provided opportunities for students to use English in meaningful communicative situations related to everyday experiences. However, factors such as cognitive load, anxiety, and classroom environment were not directly measured in this study; therefore, their potential contribution to the observed improvement cannot be determined from the present data. Future research could examine these variables directly to determine whether they contribute to the effectiveness of role-play activities.

From the pedagogical point of view, the findings are significant to the English teachers in primary schools. The result of this study suggests that language learning should be conducted in a different way from the conventional approach, by adding communicative activities so that the language learners can participate actively in the learning process. Students are able to practice

using English in realistic scenarios, build their vocabulary and pronunciation and interact with others about language through role-play. On this point, it is believed that structured role-play activities may be regarded as a pragmatic approach to the use of oral communication in regular lessons that may be taken into account during lesson planning by teachers. In addition, role-play is also a learning method that can be transferred to other learning environments without using sophisticated technology and preparing a lot of learning materials.

## **Conclusions**

In accordance with the findings of this study, it can be concluded that structured role-play has potential to support the development of speaking competence among third-grade young EFL learners in the Ecuadorian primary school context examined. By providing opportunities to use English in familiar and meaningful situations, role-play may facilitate the development of oral communication as an integrated skill, particularly when learners engage in structured interactions with their peers. Thus, the contribution of this study lies in providing context-specific evidence that structured communicative role-play can be a practical approach for supporting young learners' oral performance in primary EFL classrooms.

The component-wise analysis also showed considerable improvements in vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction, with large effect sizes across all three speaking components. Specifically, vocabulary showed the largest effect size ( $r = 0.90$ ) among the three assessed components. Furthermore, the selected scenarios, such as The First Day of School, At the Store: School Supplies, and In the Park, provided opportunities for students to use English in contexts related to their everyday experiences. Overall, these findings suggest that structured role-play may be a useful communicative approach for supporting oral performance among young EFL learners in primary school contexts similar to that of the present study.

The findings of this study suggest that structured role-play has potential as a communicative approach for supporting the development of vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction in EFL learners in contexts with characteristics similar to those of the present study. Teachers working in comparable primary EFL settings may consider incorporating structured role-play activities that provide opportunities for learners to use English in familiar and meaningful situations. However, the findings should not be generalized beyond similar contexts without further evidence. Larger samples, participants from multiple institutions, and experimental or quasi-experimental designs with comparison groups are needed to determine the extent to which the observed differences can be replicated and generalized to other EFL contexts.

However, some limitations need to be noted in interpreting the findings of this study. The intervention was implemented in a public educational institution with 41 third-grade students using a pre-experimental, one-group pre-test/post-test design. Institutional changes and time constraints affected the intervention schedule during implementation. Also, because of the limited English proficiency of the participants, more facilitation was needed and more time was used during the

activities. Considering these challenges, the findings should be interpreted within the particular context of the study and should not be generalized to other settings without further research.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence regarding the use of structured role-play to support speaking competence among young EFL learners in a primary school in Ecuador. The findings suggest that incorporating communicative activities into English instruction can provide opportunities for students to use English in meaningful contexts rather than relying primarily on memorization-based learning. The study may also serve as a practical reference for teachers working in similar contexts who wish to incorporate structured role-play into their English lessons. Further research is needed to examine the effectiveness of role-play with larger samples, multiple institutions, and comparison groups, as well as to investigate other factors that may contribute to students' speaking development.

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