

Enhancing Career Development for Engineering Students Through Role Play: Developing English Speaking Skills For Professional Settings

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of role-play activities in enhancing English speaking skills for engineering students, particularly in the context of career development. The research was conducted with 20 fifth-semester students enrolled in the Electrical Power System Engineering program at the State Polytechnic of Malang, who were enrolled in the English for Career Development (ECD) course. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, utilizing observation and questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of role-play in improving students' speaking abilities, focusing on areas such as vocabulary acquisition, confidence, and professional communication. The role-play activity centered around job interviews, where students took on the roles of both interviewer and interviewee, requiring them to engage with professional language and real-world scenarios. The results indicated that role-play significantly enhanced student participation, with the highest scores observed in the participation aspect. The students also showed notable improvements in vocabulary use, confirming the role-play's ability to activate and expand students' vocabulary in a professional context. However, the study also revealed challenges in grammar, particularly in tense usage, which impacted clarity and accuracy. The feedback provided to students helped address these issues. Additionally, the questionnaire results highlighted the positive impact of role-play on students' motivation, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, indicating that the technique fosters active engagement and enhances soft skills. The findings suggest that role-play is a valuable tool for improving English speaking skills among non-English major students, especially in technical fields, and can be effectively integrated into language curricula for career development.

Keywords: Role play; Speaking skills; English for career development

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an essential skill for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in today's globalized world. It is one of the four key language skills—along with listening, reading, and writing—that EFL learners need to master. Unlike reading or writing, speaking often takes precedence because it directly impacts a learner's ability to articulate thoughts, engage in conversations, and connect with others. Effective speaking skills empower learners to interact confidently in real-world scenarios, fostering better cultural understanding and opening up international opportunities (Kadamovna, 2021). This is especially crucial in professional settings where clear communication is key to success. For Engineering students, the ability to speak English fluently is essential not only for their academic success but also for their future career development. Engineering, as a field that heavily relies on collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving, often demands

effective communication of technical ideas in English. Mastering English speaking enables students to participate in international meetings, contribute to cross-border projects, and establish global professional connections (Nadu & Nadu, 2020). Therefore, for engineering students, refining their speaking skills is not merely an academic task but a gateway to broader career opportunities and global collaboration.

Despite the clear importance of speaking skills, students from non-English departments, particularly those in engineering, often face challenges in developing their speaking abilities (Mishra et al., 2016; Nopriyal, 2022; Wulansari, 2017). These students typically focus on technical knowledge related to their fields, with limited emphasis on communicative or public speaking skills. As a result, many struggle to develop the confidence and vocabulary necessary for effective spoken communication in English. Based on the researcher's experience in teaching English for Career Development at the Electrical Engineering Department of the State Polytechnic of Malang, it has been observed that many students are hesitant to speak English in class. This hesitation often stems from a lack of vocabulary and confidence. Some students prefer to remain silent rather than attempt to express themselves in English, fearing they might make mistakes. Efforts to improve vocabulary through text-based practice often yield limited results, as students become demotivated when their scores do not improve. This lack of engagement exacerbates the challenge of enhancing their speaking skills.

Numerous studies have identified common barriers to speaking proficiency among EFL students in non-English departments. These barriers include difficulties with vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation, as well as psychological factors such as anxiety, shyness, low motivation, and a lack of self-confidence (Khasinah et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2016; Tantri et al., 2023). These issues contribute to the students' reluctance to engage in oral communication and hinder their progress in mastering speaking skills. To address these challenges, a variety of methods have been proposed to improve speaking skills among engineering students. These methods include group discussions, technical presentations, participation in English-speaking clubs, role-playing activities, and interaction with native or proficient English speakers. By incorporating these practices, students can gain more opportunities for practical language use and gradually build the confidence necessary for effective communication.

In response to these challenges, this study proposes the use of role-play as an effective technique to help engineering students improve their speaking skills. Role-play is a teaching method that offers students the chance to practice language in a variety of social contexts and interpersonal roles. Studies have shown that role-play can significantly enhance speaking skills by providing students with opportunities to engage in simulated real-life situations, where they can practice communication, cooperation, and idea generation in a supportive environment (Henisah et al., 2023; Katemba & Grace, 2023; Lestari, 2020; Maulana & Lolita, 2023). According to Negara (2021), role-play activities help students develop their communication skills by allowing them to take on different social roles and practice speaking in various contexts. This approach not only helps improve vocabulary and pronunciation but also boosts students' confidence by immersing them in real-world scenarios that encourage spontaneous interaction. The role-play technique also fosters creativity, as students must adapt to different perspectives and communicate effectively in diverse situations. Furthermore, role-play activities require more than just linguistic competence; they emphasize the importance of social communication, making them highly relevant for improving students' practical speaking abilities (Mauliddiyah, 2021).

The effectiveness of role-play in improving speaking skills has been extensively studied. A meta-analysis by Fu and Li (2025) examined the impact of role-play on language learners across a wide range of educational contexts, including secondary and

higher education. The analysis, which included 907 participants, revealed that role-play had a significantly positive effect on students' speaking abilities. This finding underscores the potential of role-play as an effective pedagogical tool for language development. Given its proven benefits, role-play should be integrated more widely into EFL teaching practices, especially for students in non-English departments who may struggle with traditional language learning methods.

In light of these findings, this study aims to explore the implementation of the role-play technique in two classes of English Career Development subjects at the Electrical Engineering Department of the State Polytechnic of Malang. The objective is to evaluate how role-play can enhance students' speaking skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition and confidence. By incorporating role-play into their learning experience, students will have more opportunities to practice speaking in a supportive and interactive environment. The study will also assess the advantages of role-play in fostering better communication skills and motivation among students who may otherwise be hesitant to engage in English-speaking activities. Through this research, the study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of effective language teaching strategies for non-English major students, particularly in the context of engineering education.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on engineering students and the application of role-play as a targeted solution to improve speaking skills in a technical discipline. While much of the existing research on role-play focuses on general language learners, this study addresses a gap by focusing specifically on engineering students, who often face unique challenges in developing practical communication skills in English. By examining the role of role-play in improving speaking proficiency among engineering students, this study offers new insights into how non-English major students can enhance their speaking skills through interactive and contextually relevant learning methods. The findings from this study could serve as a valuable resource for educators seeking innovative ways to integrate speaking practice into non-English major curricula, particularly in technical fields like engineering.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design, which is well-suited for addressing the research questions regarding the implementation of role-play as a technique to enhance English speaking skills among students. Descriptive qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring participants' experiences and gaining a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the role-play technique. Since the objective of the study was to explore how role-play influences students' speaking abilities, including vocabulary acquisition and confidence, and to understand the benefits they perceive from this approach, a qualitative design allows for a nuanced exploration of these aspects.

The descriptive approach was chosen because it emphasizes capturing rich, detailed data without manipulating variables, which aligns with the goal of understanding the natural experiences of students during the role-play activities. By using observation and a questionnaire, the researcher could gather data on the students' behavior during the role-play process and assess their perceptions of its effectiveness in improving speaking skills. This design is effective for answering the research questions because it allows for in-depth exploration of both the observable aspects of student performance (e.g., preparedness, participation, and response) and subjective perceptions of the role-play experience.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 20 fifth-semester students from the Electrical Power System Engineering program, enrolled in the English for Career Development (ECD) subject. The ECD subject focuses on preparing students for a

business context, which includes activities such as writing a curriculum vitae (CV), crafting an application letter, and preparing for job interviews. These students were selected based on their enrollment in this subject, making them directly relevant to the research context, as the subject material is closely aligned with the language skills being assessed in the study. The selection criteria for participants were based on their academic standing (fifth-semester students) and their current level of English proficiency (beginner level). Given that the study aimed to improve speaking skills for students with limited proficiency in English, these students represented an appropriate group for investigating the potential impact of role-play on enhancing their speaking abilities. The participants were selected from a cohort that is expected to engage with English in professional settings, specifically through activities like job interviews, making them ideal candidates for this study.

Research Instruments

The research utilized two primary instruments: observation and a questionnaire. Both instruments were developed and adapted to ensure they effectively assessed the objectives of the study—understanding the students' experiences with role-play and the perceived advantages of this technique. Observation: The observation was conducted during the role-play activities, which were structured as mock job interviews. The students were asked to role-play as the Human Resources Development (HRD) representatives of a company, where they were responsible for delivering questions to a candidate. To assess their performance, an assessment rubric was adapted from Brown (2007). The rubric included four key criteria: preparedness, participation, active listening or response, and etiquette. These criteria were chosen because they are essential components of effective communication, particularly in a job interview context, and align well with the study's goal of enhancing speaking skills. The rubric allowed the researcher to systematically evaluate the students' speaking abilities and participation in the role-play activities.

A questionnaire consisting of four Likert-scale questions was distributed to the students to assess their perceptions of the benefits of role-play. The Likert scale was chosen because it enables participants to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with specific statements, providing a clear indication of how they felt about the role-play experience. The questions focused on areas such as vocabulary improvement, confidence-building, and the overall usefulness of role-play in preparing for real-world English communication situations. This instrument was developed to capture the students' subjective experiences and was designed to complement the observational data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of role-play. Both instruments were piloted before data collection to ensure their validity and reliability. The observation rubric was tested in a smaller setting to confirm that the criteria were clear and applicable to the students' performance in the role-play activities. Similarly, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in language education to ensure that the questions were relevant and appropriately worded for the students' level of understanding.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the observation and the questionnaire were analyzed using qualitative methods. The observational data were coded based on the rubric criteria (preparedness, participation, active listening/response, and etiquette). The researcher carefully reviewed each role-play session, noting instances where students excelled or struggled in each of these areas. This coding process allowed the researcher to identify patterns in student performance, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. The questionnaire responses were also analyzed qualitatively, with the

Likert-scale ratings providing insight into the students' perceptions of the role-play technique. These responses were categorized into themes to understand the benefits students felt they gained from the activity, such as increased vocabulary, improved confidence, and better preparedness for real-world situations like job interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the ratings, providing an overview of the overall sentiment toward the role-play activity. By combining the observational data with the questionnaire results, the researcher was able to triangulate the findings, offering a more robust understanding of how role-play affected students' speaking skills. The qualitative data analysis helped to reveal not only the objective performance of the students but also their personal reflections on the role-play experience, providing a well-rounded picture of the technique's effectiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The implementation of the role-play technique in teaching ECD has been conducted well in two classes. The topic for the role-play was about a job interview. The students took the role of interviewer and interviewee. In this case, the students went through several stages. Drafting, consulting, revising, rehearsing, role-playing, and evaluating (Mandasari, 2017). Before the students drafted the concepts, the lecturer explained and conducted discussions on common job interview questions and how to answer them. Then, the researcher divided the students into pairs. Furthermore, each stage can be seen below;

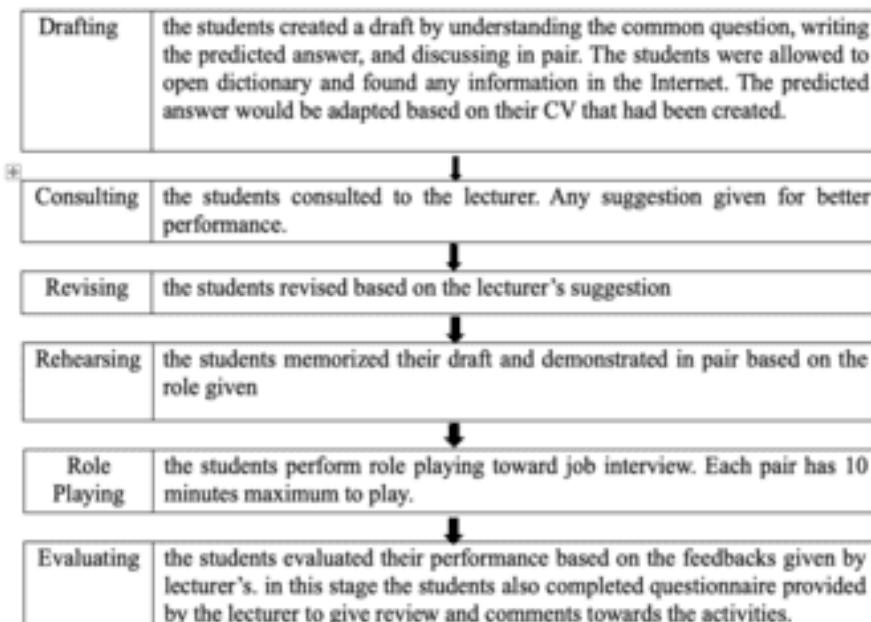


Figure 1. The Stages in Implementing Role Play

Those stages have been implemented in the class. All students participated in this activity. The role-play activity (preparedness, participation, active listening or response, and etiquette) and speaking skills (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) were assessed using a rubric, adapted from (Brown, 2007). The role-play activities' average score is reported in Figure 2.

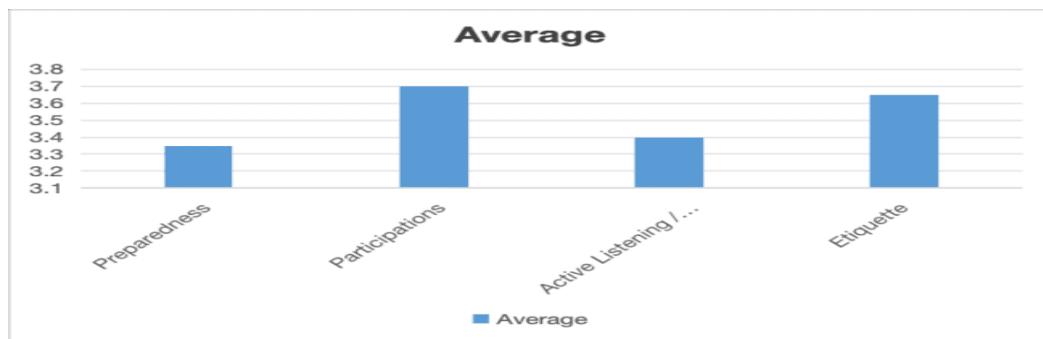


Figure 2. The average score of the role-play activity

The job interview role-play demonstrated as an effective technique for developing the English skills necessary to succeed in professional settings. The results addressed hesitancy to speak English and a lack of confidence. The highest score was in the participation aspect (3.7 of 4). In this activity, the students engaged in participating as an interviewer or interviewee, proving that the role-play is an active technique to enforce participation and switch the students from passive to active language use. Furthermore, the lowest score was in the preparedness aspect (3.35/4). Here, the students did not provide the specific evidence to support their arguments. All the script prepared was based on their experiences and knowledge. Thus, the conversation that emerged from their preparation during practices was weak. Additionally, the average of speaking skills in the role-play is presented in Figure 3.

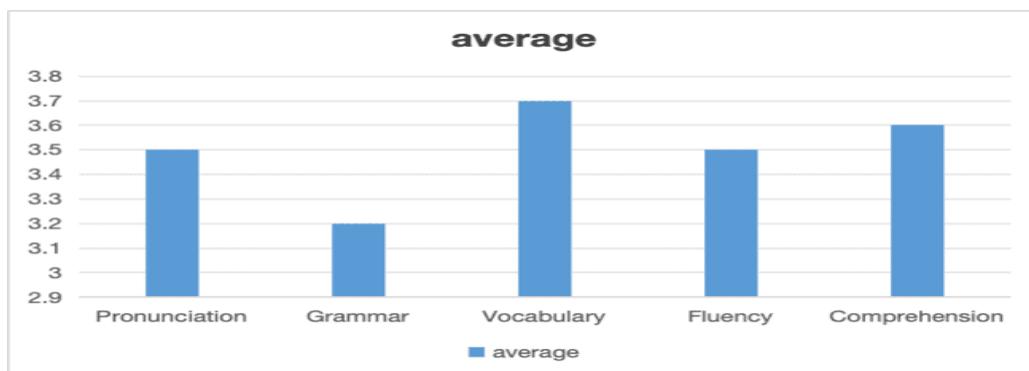


Figure 3. The Average Score of Speaking Skills

The highest score was in the vocabulary aspect. The students had problems in using specific terms or vocabulary, because in their daily practices, English is not used as well. Thus, the role-play forced the students to use professional language. This confirms that there is a good integration between being active to build vocabulary and the task's necessity. Data suggests that vocabulary development has impact to the cognitive vocabulary outcomes. Students who have a strong vocabulary in a specific academic discipline are able to comprehend and articulate the ideas better in their field (Kansizoğlu & Bekiroğlu, 2025).

However, the lowest score was in the grammar aspect. Therefore, the lecturer provided some advice after the performance. Most feedback was focused on the grammar used. The grammar mistakes, such as incorrect sentence structure, verb tenses and word forms, need to be evaluated. For example, when the students explained the work experiences and problems, some students used the present tense instead of the past tense. The illustration can be seen below;

Case 1;

Interviewer : "Do you have any work experiences or internship experiences?"

*Interviewee : Yes, I have. I **internship** at PT PLN for 3 months, my job is"*

Case 2;

Interviewer : "How did you handle a problem you faced at your previous work? "

*Interviewee : "I handle my problem **with discuss** with team and **make decisions** by ..."*

The bold sentences above are examples of instances where the students had incorrect tenses when answering the questions. Grammar mistake makes the meaning unclear or confusing (Pressto, 2003). Thus, the students need to learn more about it, since it is essential to their educational achievements and long-term career success. In this case, the students received feedback directly after practicing and repeated using correct tenses. This would help students identify and know their mistakes. Darojah & Aminin (2023) revealed a significant correlation between tenses mastery and speaking skills. It implied that the students who mastered tenses and used tenses correctly would demonstrate good speaking skills.

The Advantages

The researcher distributed a questionnaire to the participants to determine the advantages got by the participants after implementing the role-play technique in class. There were six characteristics asked in the questionnaire: interest, appropriacy, knowledge, skill, attitude, and general ability, adapted from Rahman (2021) to examine the advantages of role-playing. These six characteristics were asked in the questionnaire in 15 questions provided along with four Likert scales, (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. There were 16 respondents, and the results can be seen from the chart below;

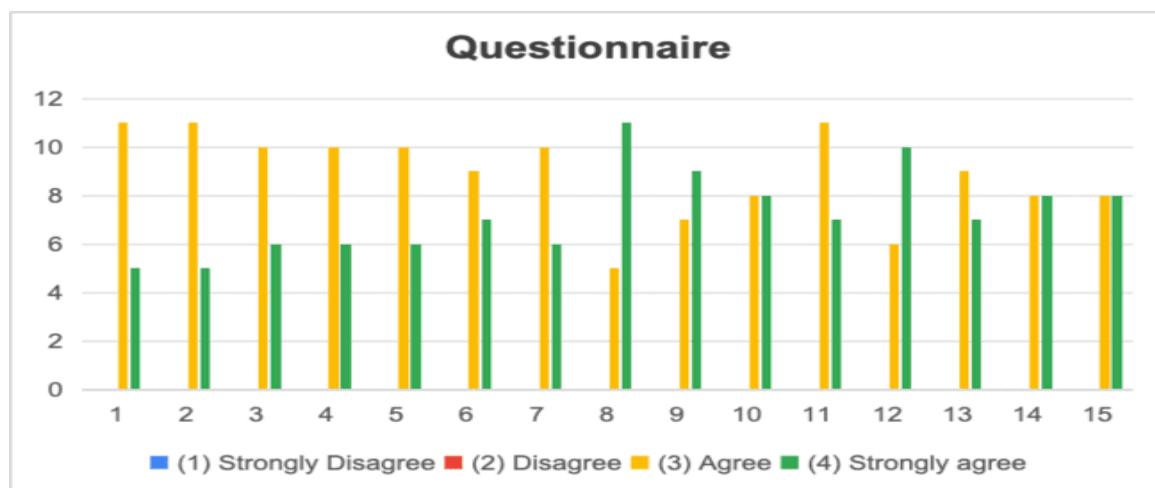


Figure 4. Questionnaire's results

It can be seen from the first to the last bar above, the results were only on agree (yellow) and strongly agree (green). The first characteristic about 'interest' was distributed to questions 1-3, which discussed students' interest, such as the students' excitement, participations and speaking interest. It was about 25.6% participants answered agree and 15.8% strongly agree. It indicated that they were excited and interested to join and actively participate to have a role play activities in class. As reported by Ruslan (2020) and Putra et al., (2024) on their research also mentioned role play can increase students' motivation for being active in learning process and students' confidence in speaking.

The next characteristic focused on 'appropriacy' in question 4-6 where 23.2% agreed and 18.8% strongly agreed that role play was appropriate to apply. Additionally,

they expressed willingness to recommend this activity to other departments and juniors. The next characteristics were 'knowledge' and 'skills' addressed in questions 7-12. Approximately 37.6% agreed and 50.4% strongly agreed. The focus was the speaking, grammar, vocabularies, and students' confidence as part of their soft skills. These results were in line with the findings of (Maryam Nur Annisa et al., 2023) which revealed that role play significantly enhanced not only knowledge but also skills, particularly soft skills such as students' self-confidence and public speaking. The last characteristics were 'attitude' including behavior skill and 'general ability' such as useful ideas, creativity, and good preparation for the students to have English interview job in the future. It showed that 20% agreed and 22.7% strongly agreed that they experienced positive enhancement in these areas.

Therefore, based on the results and discussions above, it can be implied that role play offers several advantages, including interest, appropriacy, knowledge, skills, attitude and general abilities, as evidenced by the significant improvements reflected in the questionnaires' responses. It can be concluded that 51.1% students agreed, while 48.9% strongly disagreed. Thus, this implementation technique clearly improved those six characteristics for the students. The role-play for the Electrical Engineering students succeeded in forcing them to activate their technical knowledge in English. So, job interview role-play is not just a speaking activity, yet it is a vocabulary activation that prepares the students of their future careers.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that role-play is an effective technique for enhancing English speaking skills among engineering students, particularly in the context of preparing them for professional settings. These results align with the broader body of literature that highlights the significant benefits of role-play in developing communication skills, especially for non-English major students (Henisah et al., 2023; Katemba & Grace, 2023). This section will interpret the findings of the study by comparing them with previous research, noting where they confirm, contradict, or extend the existing body of knowledge.

One of the most notable findings of this study was the positive impact of role-play on students' participation. The students demonstrated high levels of engagement, with the participation aspect of the role-play activity receiving the highest score (3.7 out of 4). This result is consistent with previous studies that have found role-play to be a powerful tool for increasing student involvement in language learning activities. For instance, Ruslan (2020) and Putra et al. (2024) also reported that role-play activities can significantly enhance students' motivation and participation. These findings confirm the effectiveness of role-play as an interactive and engaging pedagogical approach that encourages students to actively use the language in real-world contexts. The high participation score suggests that role-play can be an excellent tool for shifting students from passive learning to active, experiential learning, which is crucial for language acquisition.

However, the study also identified areas where students struggled, particularly in the preparedness aspect, which received the lowest score (3.35/4). Despite the structured approach to role-play, many students failed to provide sufficient evidence to support their answers, relying on personal experiences and general knowledge rather than detailed, job-specific information. This finding aligns with previous research that highlights the challenges non-English major students face in mastering specialized vocabulary and professional language (Wulansari, 2017; Mishra et al., 2016). In the context of this study, the limited preparedness could be attributed to the students' lack of familiarity with professional English terms and job interview scenarios. This finding suggests that role-

play, while effective, needs to be accompanied by additional preparatory work, such as vocabulary building and more focused research on the job roles being simulated.

The vocabulary aspect of the speaking skills assessment showed the highest improvement, which supports the integration of role-play into language learning to enhance vocabulary development. The students were required to use professional terms during the role-play, which encouraged them to activate and expand their vocabulary. This result echoes the findings of Kansızoglu and Bekiroğlu (2025), who reported that role-play can significantly improve students' vocabulary and cognitive outcomes. The active use of vocabulary in a professional context not only aids in language retention but also enhances students' ability to articulate ideas more effectively in real-world scenarios. By incorporating job-specific vocabulary, role-play enables students to gain the language proficiency necessary for future career success, which is particularly crucial for engineering students who may need to communicate complex technical concepts in English.

On the other hand, grammar remained a challenge for many students. The grammar aspect of the speaking skills assessment received the lowest score, indicating that students had difficulty using correct sentence structures, tenses, and verb forms during the role-play. This aligns with findings from previous studies, which have shown that grammar errors, particularly tense and sentence structure issues, are common among EFL learners (Pressto, 2003; Darojah & Aminin, 2023). The students in this study frequently used the present tense instead of the past tense when discussing their work experiences, which disrupted the clarity and accuracy of their responses. The importance of mastering grammar for effective communication cannot be overstated, as errors in tense or word forms can lead to confusion and misunderstanding, particularly in professional settings. The feedback provided to the students after the role-play activities, focusing on correcting these grammar mistakes, was essential in helping them improve their language accuracy. Darojah and Aminin (2023) emphasize the critical role of grammar mastery in enhancing speaking proficiency, suggesting that students who have a solid understanding of grammar are better able to communicate clearly and effectively.

In terms of the advantages of role-play, the questionnaire responses revealed several positive outcomes, including increased interest, appropriateness, knowledge, skills, attitude, and general ability. These results are consistent with the findings of Maryam Nur Annisa et al. (2023), who reported that role-play not only enhances language skills but also boosts students' self-confidence and soft skills, such as public speaking and interpersonal communication. In this study, the students expressed increased interest and engagement in the learning process, which is a common benefit of role-play activities. As noted by Putra et al. (2024), role-play motivates students to actively participate and engage with the language, which is particularly important for students who may be reluctant to speak English in class. The high levels of interest and engagement observed in this study further support the idea that role-play can be an effective tool for fostering motivation and participation in language learning.

Additionally, the questionnaire results indicated that students felt the role-play activity was appropriate for enhancing their knowledge and skills, particularly in relation to vocabulary, grammar, and speaking confidence. This is consistent with the findings of Henisah et al. (2023), who found that role-play significantly improved students' speaking proficiency by providing opportunities to practice communication in real-world scenarios. The focus on professional language use in the role-play, such as job interview scenarios, allowed students to gain relevant experience that will benefit them in future career situations. Furthermore, the feedback provided during the role-play activity helped students develop a more professional attitude and better prepare for real-life job interviews, which is an essential skill for engineering students who will eventually enter the workforce.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide strong support for the use of role-play as a technique for enhancing English speaking skills among engineering students. The results confirm previous research that role-play is an effective method for increasing student participation, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence in speaking. However, the study also highlights areas where students continue to face challenges, particularly in grammar use and preparedness. These challenges underscore the importance of providing additional support and guidance to students, particularly in mastering professional language and grammar. Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of research on the effectiveness of role-play in language learning, particularly for non-English major students, and offers valuable insights into how this technique can be used to enhance speaking skills in professional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the significant benefits of incorporating role-play activities into English for Career Development (ECD) courses for engineering students, specifically in improving their English speaking skills. The findings demonstrate that role-play is an effective technique for addressing common challenges faced by non-English major students, such as hesitancy to speak, lack of confidence, and limited vocabulary. By simulating real-world situations, such as job interviews, role-play encourages students to actively engage with the language and use professional vocabulary, thereby enhancing both their speaking proficiency and overall communication skills. The study revealed that students actively participated in the role-play, with the highest scores recorded in participation, showcasing the engaging nature of the activity. Furthermore, the use of professional language during the role-play helped students expand their vocabulary, which is crucial for their future careers in technical fields where clear communication of complex ideas is essential. These findings align with previous research, which emphasizes that role-play can significantly enhance language proficiency by providing a context for students to practice communication in a dynamic and supportive environment.

However, despite the positive outcomes, the study also highlighted areas for improvement, particularly in students' preparedness and grammar use. Although role-play significantly enhanced students' participation and vocabulary, many students struggled with grammatical accuracy, particularly in tense usage, which affected the clarity of their responses. This aligns with the findings of Presso (2003) and Darojah and Aminin (2023), who noted that grammar errors, particularly in tense and sentence structure, are common challenges among EFL learners. The feedback provided to students during and after the role-play sessions was crucial in addressing these issues, helping students recognize and correct their mistakes. To further enhance the effectiveness of role-play, it is recommended that instructors provide additional practice focused on grammar and sentence structure, especially for students with limited English proficiency. Despite these challenges, the overall success of the role-play activities in engaging students and improving their speaking skills underscores the potential of this method to be used more widely in English language teaching, particularly for students in technical disciplines.

RECOMMENDATION

For future research, the study of role-play as an approach can be extended by examining additional data sources from non-English-speaking students that would provide insight into its impact on their future careers. Moreover, the analysis could be compared across their enhancement of aspects of students' speaking proficiency: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, with other elements such as students' motivations and confidence in improving their speaking skills. On the other hand, like 'a client-consultation', 'business negotiation', and other professional role-play activities can be used as an approach to build vocabulary in professional settings.

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