

Improving Early Childhood Speaking Ability Through the Role-Play Method at Ar-Rahima Playgroup: A Classroom Action Research

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Abstract: *Speaking ability is a foundational component of early language development that shapes a child's communicative competence, reasoning, and self-concept. Preliminary observation at Ar-Rahima Playgroup (Kelompok Bermain, KOBER) revealed that only 27% of Group B children reached the expected level of oral expression; most remained passive, produced fragmented utterances, and lacked confidence in speaking. This study examines whether the role-play method can improve the speaking ability of children aged 5–6 years and how the improvement unfolds across action cycles. A Classroom Action Research design following the Kemmis and McTaggart model was conducted over two cycles, each comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection, with fifteen children and the classroom teacher as collaborator. Data were collected through a rating-scale observation sheet, documentation, and teacher interviews, then analysed using descriptive quantitative percentages and the qualitative model of Miles and Huberman. The proportion of children in the well-developed category rose from 27% at baseline to 60% in Cycle I and 87% in Cycle II, surpassing the 80% success criterion. Children became more willing to initiate talk, constructed longer and better-structured sentences, and asked as well as answered questions. The findings position role-play as a socially situated scaffold for oral language, while acknowledging the small single-site sample as a limit on generalisation.*

Keywords: *speaking ability; early childhood; role-play; classroom action research; language development.*

Abstrak: Kemampuan berbicara merupakan komponen fondasional dalam perkembangan bahasa anak usia dini yang membentuk kompetensi komunikatif, penalaran, dan konsep diri anak. Observasi awal di Kelompok Bermain (KOBER) Ar-Rahima menunjukkan hanya 27% anak kelompok B mencapai tingkat ekspresi lisan yang diharapkan; mayoritas anak pasif, menghasilkan ujaran terpenggal, dan kurang percaya diri saat berbicara. Penelitian ini menguji apakah metode bermain peran dapat meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara anak usia 5–6 tahun dan bagaimana peningkatan itu berlangsung antarsiklus. Desain Penelitian Tindakan Kelas model Kemmis dan McTaggart diterapkan dalam dua siklus, masing-masing meliputi perencanaan, pelaksanaan, observasi, dan refleksi, dengan lima belas anak dan guru kelas sebagai kolaborator. Data dikumpulkan melalui lembar observasi berskala, dokumentasi, dan wawancara guru, lalu dianalisis dengan persentase deskriptif kuantitatif dan model kualitatif Miles dan Huberman. Proporsi anak pada kategori berkembang baik naik dari 27% pada prasiklus menjadi 60% pada siklus I dan 87% pada siklus II, melampaui kriteria keberhasilan 80%. Anak lebih berani memulai percakapan, menyusun kalimat yang lebih panjang dan terstruktur, serta mampu bertanya dan menjawab. Temuan ini menempatkan bermain peran sebagai perancah berbahasa lisan yang tersituasi secara sosial, dengan mencatat keterbatasan sampel tunggal berukuran kecil sebagai batas generalisasi.

Kata kunci: kemampuan berbicara; anak usia dini; bermain peran; penelitian tindakan kelas; perkembangan bahasa.

Kata kunci: Toilet training; kemandirian; anak usia dini; studi kasus tunggal; pendidikan Islam anak usia dini

Introduction

Speaking skills play a foundational role in early childhood language development. Language serves as a tool for communication as well as a means of thinking, a medium for expressing ideas, and a pillar of social relationships that shape a child's self-concept. Tarigan (2008) defines speaking as the ability to articulate sounds to express and convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Between the ages of 5 and 6, children's mastery of vocabulary and sentence structure, as well as their confidence in expressing opinions, develops rapidly, making this period the foundation for more complex language skills in subsequent stages. The quality of stimulation during this phase determines the long-term trajectory of a child's language development.

Conditions on the ground reveal a wide gap between developmental expectations and actual achievements. Initial observations at the Ar-Rahima Playgroup (*KOBER*) showed that most children in Group B struggled to form sentences, had limited vocabularies, were reluctant to speak in front of teachers and peers, and tended to be passive in group conversations. Only four out of fifteen children—or about 27%—met the “developing as expected” category on the speaking indicator. Children were more often silent or answered with just one word when asked questions. These pre-cycle data highlight concrete pedagogical issues and call for a more participatory learning intervention rather than the one-way instructional approach that has been in place.

Theoretically, the development of speaking skills is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which identifies social interaction as the primary source of language and cognitive development. Children internalize language structures through participation in joint activities with adults and peers, within a space he termed the zone of proximal development. Piaget (1962) complements this framework by showing that children in the preoperational stage enjoy symbolic play, in which they act out characters and situations as a way of understanding the world. Role-playing stands precisely at the intersection of these two theories, as it provides both a meaningful social context and a symbolic space that aligns with children's ways of thinking.

Recent empirical evidence confirms the potential of this method. Yuniati and Rohmadheny (2020) found an improvement in the expressive language skills of 4–5-year-old children through role-playing over two intervention cycles. Takumansang, Triyono, and Sulthoni (2020) documented an increase in the speaking skills of children in Group A from cycle to cycle in kindergarten. Winarti and Fitri (2022) demonstrated the effect of *role-playing* on vocabulary acquisition in early childhood, while Khairani, Siregar, and Lubis (2023) emphasized its role in vocabulary enrichment and improved verbal expression. A more recent study by Lubis and Khadijah (2025) confirms a similar pattern among 5–6-year-olds. Among older learners, Katemba and Grace (2023) as well as Sukmawati, Utami, Santosa, and Ratminingsih (2025) also reported improvements in speaking fluency. The convergence of

these cross-context findings points to a consistent conclusion: systematic role-playing increases children's opportunities to produce spoken language.

The area that has not yet been thoroughly explored lies in the mechanisms, not the effects. Most previous studies have merely reported that this method is effective, without detailing how role-playing shifts specific speech indicators from one cycle to the next. Others have focused on foreign language learners or higher educational levels, so their findings do not necessarily translate to the context of an Islamic-based playgroup with limited resources. This study fills that gap by tracing the cycle-by-cycle dynamics of three measurable speaking indicators within the KOBAR Ar-Rahima setting. Two questions guide this study. First, does the role-playing method improve the speaking skills of 5–6-year-old children at KOBAR Ar-Rahima? Second, how does this improvement process unfold over the course of two action cycles? The research objectives were formulated in line with these two questions, with the hope of offering an action model that teachers can adapt to design communicative language learning.

Method

This study employed a classroom action research design (*classroom action research*) based on the spiral model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). This model was chosen because it allows for the gradual improvement of teaching practices through reflective cycles. The study was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle consisted of four interrelated stages: planning, implementation of actions, observation, and reflection. The results of the reflection from the first cycle served as the basis for refining the action plan in the second cycle.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at KOBAR Ar-Rahima. The participants consisted of fifteen children in Group B, aged 5–6 years, accompanied by their classroom teacher, who served as a collaborator in designing, implementing, and reflecting on the intervention. Consent to participate was obtained from the institution and the parents, and the children's identities were kept confidential throughout the reporting process.

Instruments

The primary instrument is a scaled observation sheet that measures three indicators of speaking ability. The first indicator is the child's ability to utter simple sentences with correct structure. The second indicator is the child's ability to answer and ask questions. The third indicator is the child's ability to tell a story or explain something in a coherent manner. Each indicator is rated on a four-level scale: not yet developed (*BB*), beginning to develop (*MB*), developing as expected (*BSH*), and developing very well (*BSB*). A child is categorized as developing well if they achieve at least the *BSH* level. The content validity of the instrument was reviewed by experts to ensure that the observation items align with indicators of language development in early childhood.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data were collected through observations of children's speech behavior during activities, documentation of the learning process, and interviews with collaborating teachers.

Quantitative analysis was conducted descriptively by calculating the percentage of children who achieved the “developing well” category at each stage, then comparing achievements across cycles. Qualitative analysis followed the model by Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions, so that observation notes and interviews could provide meaning to the obtained figures. The success criterion for the intervention was set at 80%, meaning the study was considered successful if at least 80% of the children achieved the “developing well” category by the end of the cycle.

Results and Discussion

The program was implemented in two cycles to improve the speaking skills of fifteen children in Group B at KOBAR Ar-Rahima. The outcomes for each stage are summarized in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Peningkatan Kemampuan Berbicara Anak Antarsiklus

Step	The Child is Developing Well	Percentage (%)
Wake up	4 out of 15 children	27
Cycle I	9 out of 15 children	60
Cycle II	13 out of 15 children	87

Source: Researchers' observational data processed (2025).

Pre-cycle assessments revealed poor speaking skills. The children tended to be passive, rarely asked questions, and had difficulty expressing their opinions verbally. During lessons, they were more often silent or gave brief answers when the teacher asked questions. The one-way instructional approach previously in place had not been effective in encouraging active oral language production, resulting in only 27% of the children falling into the “developing well” category.

In the first cycle, the teacher used role-playing with simple themes such as doctor and patient, seller and buyer, and teacher and student. The teacher modeled short dialogues and prepared supporting props such as puppets, toy stethoscopes, and a small table. Some children were still shy, while the classroom atmosphere began to liven up. Some children imitated the teacher’s speech and then developed their own dialogues using short sentences. The percentage of children categorized as “developing well” rose from 27% in the pre-cycle to 60% at the end of Cycle I. This figure indicates growing confidence in speaking, although fluency and spontaneity have not yet fully developed, and this achievement has not yet met the 80% success criterion.

This increase aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory regarding the role of social context in language development. Children acquire language through interactions with adults and peers during shared activities, and role-playing provides a natural setting for verbal interaction. In play, children not only listen but also actively respond and voice their thoughts. The sense of freedom that arises in play situations reduces pressure, making children more

confident in producing speech. The same pattern was observed in studies by Yuniati and Rohmadheny (2020) and Takumansang et al. (2020), which documented a surge in spoken language production once children were placed in meaningful role-play scenarios.

In the second cycle, the scenarios were refined to be more complex and varied, including simulations of the marketplace, a hospital, and a school. Teachers extended playtime and assigned more diverse roles to each child. The children became more enthusiastic and actively engaged in conversations. They formed longer and clearer sentences, such as “I’d like to buy two carrots, please, Ma’am” or “I have a stomachache; please check me, Doctor.” Structurally, the children began to understand sentence order, verb usage, and context-appropriate expressions. By the end of the second cycle, 87% of the children reached the “developing well” category, characterized by the ability to express ideas verbally, ask and answer questions, and tell stories coherently. This achievement exceeded the established success criteria.

When examined by indicator, improvement appeared to be consistent but gradual. The indicator for constructing simple sentences progressed the fastest because the children quickly imitated the speech patterns modeled by the teacher. The indicator for asking and answering questions strengthened in the second cycle as the number of speaking turns increased in longer scenarios. The indicator for telling a coherent story developed last, as it required more complex organization of ideas. The collaborating teacher noted that the use of simple props and costumes enhanced the imaginative atmosphere, making it seem as though the children were truly immersed in the situations they were acting out. This observation supports Piaget’s (1962) thesis that preoperational children develop through symbolic play, in which role-playing serves as a means of understanding their environment.

These findings are consistent with several verified studies. Triyaningsih (2016) reported an improvement in the speaking skills of kindergarten children through role-playing in a two-cycle action research design, while Winarti and Fitri (2022) demonstrated its effect on vocabulary acquisition. Khairani et al. (2023) and Lubis and Khadijah (2025) confirmed similar patterns in early childhood language development. Katemba and Grace (2023) demonstrated a similar mechanism in older learners, where role-playing links speaking practice with motivation and self-regulation. The consistency of findings across ages and contexts reinforces the claim that this method works by creating authentic communicative needs, which encourage children to produce language for purposes they understand.

Interpretation of these results requires caution. Classroom action research is oriented toward improving practices in a specific setting, so its findings are not intended to be generalized to a broader population. The sample size of fifteen children at a single institution limits the strength of the inferences. The teacher’s dual role as both the implementer of the intervention and the observer creates the potential for observational bias, and this study has not reported inter-observer reliability, which would strengthen the objectivity of the assessment. The percentage-based success criteria are also crude, as the “progressing well”

category combines the BSH and BSB levels without detailing the distribution within them. Confounding factors such as the children's natural maturation over the course of the intervention and variations in parental involvement at home were not controlled for. Awareness of these limitations does not invalidate the value of the findings but rather places them in proper perspective as promising contextual evidence.

Conclusion

The use of role-playing has been shown to improve the speaking skills of young children at KOBAR Ar-Rahima. The proportion of children categorized as "developing well" rose gradually from 27% in the pre-cycle to 60% in Cycle I and 87% in Cycle II, exceeding the 80% success criterion. The improvements were evident in speaking fluency, confidence in expressing opinions, the ability to ask and answer questions, and more coherent sentence construction. Play activities that simulate real-life situations provide children with a space to practice language skills in a fun, low-pressure environment.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce Vygotsky's view that language development arises from meaningful social interaction, as well as Piaget's thesis regarding the role of symbolic play in preoperational children. In practice, role-playing is worth adopting as a communicative language learning strategy, if teachers design structured yet flexible scenarios, take children's interests into account, and provide props that support their imagination. The two-cycle action model outlined here can be adapted by other teachers for similar classroom contexts.

The study's limitations, including a small sample size at a single institution, potential observer bias, and the lack of control for confounding factors, point to a clear need for further research. Future research could expand the number and diversity of settings, enhance inter-observer reliability, and provide a quantitative breakdown of outcomes by indicator. Testing the effects of role-playing on other aspects such as social skills, emotional intelligence, and conceptual understanding would also enrich the mapping of this method's benefits for the overall development of young children.

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