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Implementing Role Play in English Speaking Class: A Descriptive Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety remains a persistent barrier for Senior High School EFL students, limiting their ability to communicate effectively in English. This study explored implementation of role play as a teaching strategy to enhance speaking skills and reduce anxiety through real-life situational practice using AI character. Conducted at a Senior High School in Karawang, the study involved 26 students from class XI IPA 3, this study employed qualitative method and used a case study design. Researcher used triangulation method to collect the data including classroom video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Findings reveal that the integration of structured role play activities increased students' motivation, speaking fluency, and self-confidence. The data showed that 73.1% students agreed role play increased their participation in learning process, while 15 out of 26 students reported feeling confident during English speaking activities. In addition, 13 students reported improvements in their pronunciation, 6 students reported enhancements in their fluency, and 16 students recognized better mastery of vocabulary. Students responded positively to the interactive learning process. This study concluded that role play activities with a structured framework through real-life contexts is an effective learning method to enhance speaking skills and reduce anxiety for EFL students.

1. Introduction

Mastery of English has become essential for educational and professional advancement in this era of globalization. As a lingua franca, English serves not only as a medium of international communication but also as a fundamental skill for accessing academic, technological, and economic opportunities. Speaking skills are fundamental aspects of English language proficiency that plays a crucial role in facilitating significant personal and professional interactions. According to the British Council (2020), more than two billion people in the world will learn English

globally. In this context, people's ability to speak English fluently and confidently has become a major goal of teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Globalization has intensified the need for oral English competence, yet many students, especially in EFL contexts continue to face significant challenges in developing speaking proficiency. English has been integrated into the Indonesian education system from primary to secondary school levels and has become one of the core subjects assessed for national examinations (Jayanti & Norahmi, 2014; Yusny, 2013). However, the persistent difficulties in English speaking among Indonesian students have raised concerns about the effectiveness of current pedagogical strategies. Several studies have shown that the traditional teacher-centered learning methods continue to dominate classroom learning activities which can limit student engagement and communicative practice. As a result, students often become passive learners with minimal opportunities for meaningful interaction which undermines their ability to use English for real-life communication purposes (Ehsan et al., 2019; Suroso et al., 2021).

EFL learners' anxiety about speaking English represents a significant obstacle to achieving fluency in oral communication. The primary elements that contribute to this anxiety are fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties (Suparlan, 2021; Peng, 2025). Anxiety significantly impedes student participation and affects academic performance. Rogayan and Albino (2021) emphasized that heightened anxiety levels directly correlate with diminished academic motivation and reduced classroom engagement. In the context of speaking classes, students' fear of negative evaluation, limited practice time, and lack of interactive support further exacerbate this problem. To address these challenges, educators are increasingly encouraged to adopt student-centered and communicative teaching approaches such as role play, which provide learners with opportunities to simulate real-life scenarios.

Role play is recognized as an effective pedagogical method that fosters active learning, boosts student motivation, and reduces anxiety by creating a safe environment for language experimentation (Seli & Khasbani, 2021). Role-playing activities can engage in dynamic interactions and gain confidence when expressing themselves in English. In addition, this method is in line with constructivist learning principles that emphasize experiential learning through social interaction. The implementation of role play has been studied extensively in various EFL contexts. Previous research has generally confirmed its benefits in improving speaking performance, vocabulary acquisition, and learner autonomy.

For example, Guerrettaz (2014) found that role play helps bridge the gap between theoretical language input and practical use by immersing students in communicative and authentic learning contexts. Similarly, Wulandari (2019) highlighted its effectiveness in improving teacher quality and student development, indicating that role play encourages creativity and lowers affective barriers in language learning. However, despite these recognized benefits, the existing evidence leaves several instructional and contextual questions insufficiently examined.

First, many previous studies concentrate on students' perceptions and direct speaking outcomes without examining how role play is structured and scaffolded during instruction. Few studies have investigated in depth how role play affects students' emotional responses during communication and learning activities. Secondly, the teacher's role in managing and facilitating role play has received limited attention, particularly regarding strategies to support anxious students. Thirdly, most studies have not examined the long-term impact of role play implementation on students' confidence, fluency and engagement in the classroom.

Fourth, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) characters in implementing role play is still unexplored. AI-powered conversational agents offer new possibilities for individualized, flexible and immersive speaking practice. However, the potential of AI characters such as ChatGPT-4.0 in supporting real-life situational practice and reducing speaking anxiety remains largely untapped in empirical studies. Furthermore, although several studies have examined role play in various cultural contexts, few studies have addressed how classroom dynamics shape students' willingness to participate in speaking practice. The influence of culture on language anxiety and interaction patterns in the classroom is therefore relevant in realizing the positive impact of implementing role-playing.

Based on this gap, this study examines the implementation of role play with AI-driven real-life situational practice in English speaking class. This research describes how role play activities using an AI character on students' speaking performance and anxiety levels. It also explores students' experiences and responses to this teaching strategy, including their views on the benefits and challenges in the process of implementing role play with AI characters. Furthermore, this study discusses the role of the PECRA framework as a structured prompt to guide students in producing coherent English conversations. By incorporating PECRA into the teaching procedure, this study aims to build student interaction and provide clarity during AI-powered role-play activities. This structured guidance is intended to support learners in developing fluency during spontaneous speech production.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of AI technology, real-life situational practice, and a structured PECRA framework in role-playing activities. This study contributes a descriptive case study based on authentic classroom implementation rather than theoretical assumptions. This study also uses a qualitative approach with multiple data sources, including classroom video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires to ensure data triangulation and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Accordingly, the study aims to clarify how AI-supported role play is implemented in class and how students experience it in relation to speaking performance and speaking anxiety. Thus, this study provides insights to teachers, curriculum designers, and further researchers working on communicative language teaching in EFL contexts.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive case study design to explore the implementation of role play in English speaking class and to examine students' experiences in overcoming speaking anxiety through real-life situational practice. A descriptive case study provides an in-depth understanding of a real-life phenomenon within its actual context. As cited in Marsella (2018), Gall states that case studies serve to provide a detailed description, explanation, and evaluation of a phenomenon. This approach allows the researcher to explore the actions, perspectives, and responses of learners within a bounded system, which often involves a specific group.

The case study method is suitable for answering "how" and "why" research questions, particularly when the researcher has limited control over the events being studied (Yin, cited in Coulthard, 2016). This research involved role play activities in a natural classroom environment, which allowed for a comprehensive examination of the teaching and learning process, classroom interactions, and student affective factors associated with speaking anxiety. This study focused on eleventh-grade students at a Senior High School located in Karawang. Although the results are context-specific and not intended for generalization, efforts were made to enhance credibility. The results were obtained through data triangulation methods involving classroom video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires to strengthen the credibility of findings through multiple sources of evidence.

Site and Participants

This study was conducted at a Senior High School in Karawang, selected due to the presence of students who experience challenges in developing English speaking skills and exhibit anxiety in speaking activities. The participants were 26 eleventh-grade students from class XI IPA 3. The research took place in the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year and employed video recordings, interviews, and questionnaires for data collection. The implementation was carried out over five instructional learning sessions, guided by the Teaching and Learning Cycle framework. Following the first session, the teacher introduced the role play activity to activate students' background knowledge and presented vocabulary and expressions relevant to real-life scenarios. The second session focused on modeling conversations using structured prompts based on the PECRA framework. In the third session, students engaged in guided role play with peers and teacher support. The fourth session allowed students to perform role play independently and in groups using familiar real-life contexts. The final session was dedicated to review and assessment including reflection, feedback, and evaluation of students' speaking development. Interviews were conducted with ten students chosen based on active participation during the activities. Meanwhile, a total of twenty-six students from the same class filled out the questionnaire. All participants had previously engaged in role play practice involving both peer and group activities within structured speaking instruction.

Instrument and Learning Procedure

This study employed three primary instruments for data collection: video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. These instruments were used to explore the implementation of role play activities and students' experiences in overcoming speaking anxiety in the English speaking class. Students' verbal and non-verbal performance during role play activities was captured by classroom video recordings, documenting five instructional stages of learning based on the Teaching and Learning Cycle adapted from Widodo, H.P., & Rozak, R.R. (2016), starting from building knowledge of the field, modelling of the text, joint construction of the text, independent construction of the text, and concluding with review and feedback stages. These recordings provided detailed data on vocabulary use, pronunciation, fluency, and body language across various real-life scenarios such as ordering food, shopping at a store, and booking hotel rooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students who had actively participated in the discussion. The interviews examined students' responses, emotions, and difficulties during the role play activities. Open-ended questions allowed participants to share personal insights, offering an in-depth understanding of the learning process. The questionnaire was given to 26 students in class XI IPA 3 and consisted of nine closed-ended questions on a Likert Scale and one open-ended question. This study collected data on motivation, ease of interaction, confidence, and the use of the PECRA framework. These instruments formed a data triangulation method to ensure reliability and depth of findings by combining observational, experiential, and perceptual data sources.

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis based on the six-step framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) to interpret the qualitative data collected from classroom video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The analysis began with familiarization, which involved repeatedly reviewing classroom video recordings, interview transcripts, and questionnaire responses to understand how students experienced role play in the English speaking class. The goal was to gain a holistic view of students' engagement, challenges, and progress throughout the learning process. Next, the coding phase identified and labeled significant units of data such as expressions of confidence, signs of anxiety, feedback on the PECRA framework, and responses to classroom activities. The codes were organized into categories according to their relevance to the research focus. The coded data were sorted into broader themes by examining patterns and relationships across data sources. Themes such as collaborative and independent practice, students' speaking confidence, and challenges in role play implementation were formed based on student experiences. In the fourth phase, all themes were reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and were consistent with the research objectives. In the fifth phase, each theme was defined and named clearly, providing focused interpretations of student behavior and responses. Finally, the themes were interpreted in a comprehensive report, offering meaningful insights into how structured role play supported students' speaking development and reduced their speaking anxiety. This process enabled a deeper understanding of how role play

was implemented in the English speaking class and how it influenced students' speaking performance, attitudes, and participation, thereby answering the central research questions effectively.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussions of the data obtained using triangulation methods such as classroom video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The results were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis yielded six principal themes that capture students' experiences, reactions, and challenges encountered while implementing role-playing with AI character in English speaking classes. The themes including: 1) Students' Motivation through Real-Life AI Role Play, 2) Collaborative and Independent Practice Strengthens Fluency and Speaking Skill, 3) Students' Self-Confidence and Speaking Anxiety, 4) Usability of PECRA Framework as Learning Support, 5) Technical Challenges in AI Role Play Implementation, 6) Students' Positive Response and Experience. The Results section presents empirical findings only, while interpretative analysis is provided in the Discussion section.

Results

Students' Motivation through Real-Life AI Role Play

The analysis of video recordings revealed that implementing AI character through real-life scenario role plays effectively stimulated students' enthusiasm and active involvement in classroom activities. The realistic settings combined with the novelty of technology fostered an innovative learning environment that sparked student curiosity and encouraged English language use. This interest was apparent from the students' frequent inquiries and enthusiasm for engaging in practical exercises during the lesson.

“Wow! It is great! It is amazing, I just found out that humans can talk to ChatGPT. Can't wait to practice.” (Stage 2 Video Recording Session. Modeling of The Text)
“We want to try a live group role play conversation using ChatGPT-4.0 character...” (Stage 3 Video Recording Session. Joint Construction of The Text)

Interview data supported this finding. Students expressed that AI-integrated role play activities were not only engaging and enjoyable but also offered a refreshing change from routine classroom practices. Many students were very excited and curious to explore this new learning method. Some students appreciated the AI character's ability to correct errors in pronunciation, which they felt could improve their learning progress. Others felt more at ease speaking English, as the AI provided a supportive and non-threatening learning atmosphere. Altogether, the AI-driven tasks succeeded in fostering motivation and raising students' interest in English speaking, illustrating that the integration of digital tools can positively impact learner engagement and participation.

Q: Could you describe your experience participating in the role-play activities using Artificial Intelligence during our English speaking classes?

“For me, it was very useful, especially since AI is becoming more common these days. I was surprised to learn that AI could be used to help us practice speaking English. It made me feel excited.” (S2)

“I felt happy because it was a new experience for me. I didn’t know before that we could have spoken interactions with AI characters like ChatGPT-4.0.” (S3)

“It was exciting! It was my first time being taught how to use AI, what it’s for, and how it can help with practicing English. Before this, I thought AI was always seen in a negative light.” (S5)

Q: Do you think Real life scenario role play practice through AI character motivated you to participate in discussion and learn more about English speaking?

“Yes. I was a bit surprised at first, but it made me curious too.” (S4)

This was supported by data from questionnaire results, which showed that 26.9% of students strongly agreed and 46.2% agreed that using AI characters in speaking activities increased their motivation to participate in discussions and develop their English-speaking skills. A visual summary of students’ responses concerning the impact of AI-assisted role play on their speaking motivation is presented in Figure 1.

How motivated were you to participate in discussions on these topics? (Seberapa termotivasi kamu untuk berpartisipasi dalam diskusi tentang topik-topik tersebut?)
26 responses

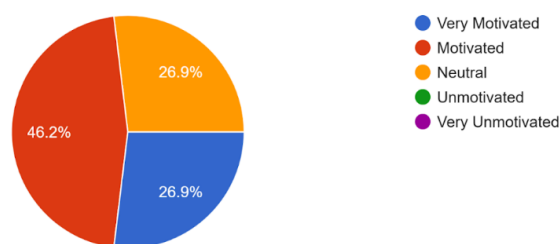


Figure 1. Collaborative and Independent Practice Strengthens Fluency and Speaking Skills

The classroom video recordings demonstrated that combining group-based and independent role play activities significantly contributed to students’ improvement in English fluency and speaking skill. Through a structured and sequential learning process beginning with modeling of the text, moving to guided practice, and culminating in independent and group discussions, students gradually developed confidence using English in real-life situations. The PECRA framework played an important role to organize the flow of the conversation, helping learners articulate their thoughts more clearly and systematically.

Students English Role Play practiced using ChatGPT-4.0 and PECRA Framework individually with middle-length conversation ordering food at a restaurant topic. (Stage 2 Video Recording Session. Modeling of The Text)

Students Group Role Play practiced using ChatGPT-4.0 and PECRA Framework with long conversation shopping at a store topic. (Stage 3 Video Recording Session. Joint Construction of The Text)

Interview responses support this source of classroom video recordings data. The students reported both collaborative and individual practice helped them to strengthen their fluency and vocabulary acquisition. They highlighted the benefits of role-playing with AI characters consistently, while role-playing with peers provided a sense of learning and social encouragement. These elements were seen as important in building speaking competence.

Q: Did you find it easier to practice English with the AI character or with your classmates? Why?

“The group session with the AI was the most fun for me. It felt like role-playing with friends while also exploring the AI and learning new vocabulary.” (S4)

“I preferred the one-on-one session with the AI because it felt more comfortable and i can practice my speaking fluency.” (S5)

Q: What aspects of the AI role-play did you find most helpful for learning to speak English?

“The direct feedback and correction were very helpful. It also helped me build my vocabulary and practice speaking.” (S5)

This was supported by the questionnaire results, in which 13 students reported improved pronunciation, 6 students indicated increased fluency in speaking English, and 16 students reported improved vocabulary use in English speaking. The specific aspects of speaking skills perceived to have improved after participating in AI-supported role play activities are illustrated in Figure 2.

What aspects have improved after the Role Play learning process with ChatGPT-4.0? (Aspek apa saja yang meningkat setelah proses pembelajaran Role Play dengan ChatGPT-4.0?)
26 responses

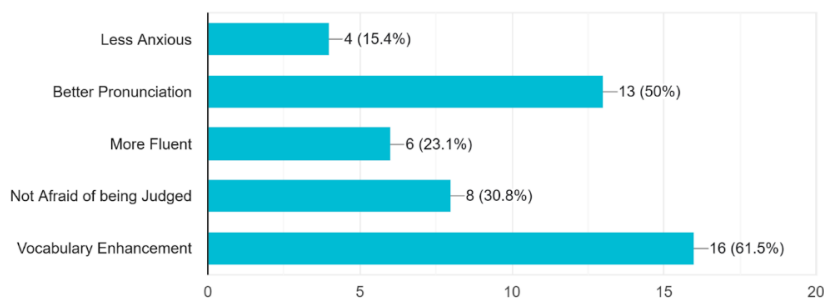


Figure 2. Students’ Perceived Improvements in Speaking Skills after ChatGPT-4.0 Supported Role Play

Students' Self-Confidence and Speaking Anxiety

The classroom video recordings revealed that the implementation of role play activities with AI character played an important role in boosting students' self-confidence and reducing their speaking anxiety. Students began with simple conversations and progressively moved towards complex conversations, including both individual and group role play activities involving AI characters through the PECRA framework. Students became increasingly enthusiastic as they engaged in guided speaking practices within a supportive and safe environment. The teacher's encouragement, step-by-step instruction, and the use of real-life scenarios combined with the presence of a non-judgmental AI partner, helped minimize their fear of making mistakes. Many students struggled with pronunciation, but repeated practice contributed significantly to their confidence.

"It is quite difficult to pronounce the English word." (Stage 1 Video Recording Session. BKOF)

"...Can't wait to practice." (Stage 2 Video Recording Session. Modelling of The Text"

Interview responses confirmed that the AI character helped students reduce their anxiety and became more confident to speak English. The students said that interacting with the AI characters felt safe, as the characters did not criticize or shame them. This was an important factor in reducing their anxiety.

Q: Were there any moments during the role play where you felt anxious? Could you explain what made you feel that way?

"I didn't feel pressured at all while speaking English with the AI character." (S1)

"No, it was actually great. I got to learn how to use AI for speaking practice." (S5)

Q: Do you think role play using Artificial Intelligence character helped improve your confidence in speaking English?

"I felt more comfortable because the AI doesn't judge my speaking ability." (S1)

Supporting the interview data, the questionnaire results showed that out of 26 students, 7 reported feeling very confident during English role-play activities with the AI character, 8 felt confident, 9 reported neutral feelings, and only 2 students still experienced low confidence. These questionnaire results illustrate the positive impact of implementing role play with an AI character as a strategy to create a more comfortable and supportive language learning environment. The distribution of students' self-reported confidence levels after completing the AI-supported role-play activities is presented in Figure 3.

After completing the role play learning experience through ChatGPT-4.0, how confident are you in speaking English? (Setelah menyelesaikan pengala...rcaya diri kamu dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris?)
26 responses

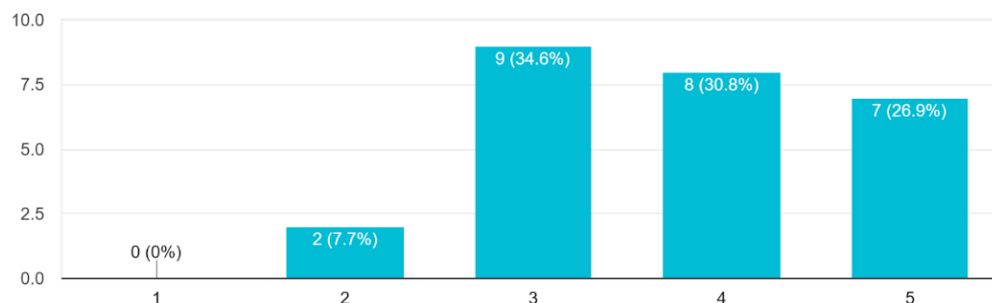


Figure 3. Students' Confidence in Speaking English after Completing Role Play through ChatGPT-4.0

Usability of PECRA Framework as Learning Support

The classroom video recordings indicated that the PECRA framework provided a clear and structured foundation for guiding students during AI-integrated role play activities. The teacher introduced the framework consisting of Purpose, Expectation, Context, Request, and Action, systematically and demonstrated its use in several real-life conversation scenarios. Students then applied the framework during role play activities with ChatGPT-4.

Teacher demonstrated Ordering Food at a Restaurant role play practice using AI character ChatGPT-4.0 and PECRA framework. (Stage 2 Video Recording Session. Modeling of The Text)

Students Group Role Play practiced using ChatGPT-4.0 with PECRA Framework (Stage 3 Video Recording Session. Joint Construction of The Text)

Through this staged learning process beginning with peer conversations and advancing to individual and group practice, students began to internalize the PECRA framework and use it independently. These findings suggest that the framework served as a reliable support tool, enabling students to develop their English speaking skills through well-structured role play tasks. Interview responses reinforced this finding. The students felt that the PECRA framework really helped them to speak more confidently and logically. The framework guided them to maintain the flow of the conversation.

Q: How did the teacher's support during the role play activities?

"The delivery of the material was organized, starting with explanation about role play itself, then how to make the correct prompt before jumping into practice." (S3)

"The instructions were clear and PECRA framework to create prompt also easy to create." (S5)

This was supported by the questionnaire results, which showed that 80.8% (21 out of 26) of students understood how to create a prompt using the PECRA framework after the teacher's explanation. The distribution of students' responses regarding their understanding of how to create prompts using the PECRA framework is illustrated in Figure 4.

Did you understand how to create a prompt using PECRA Framework? (Apakah kamu mengerti bagaimana cara membuat prompt menggunakan Kerangka Kerja PECRA?)
26 responses

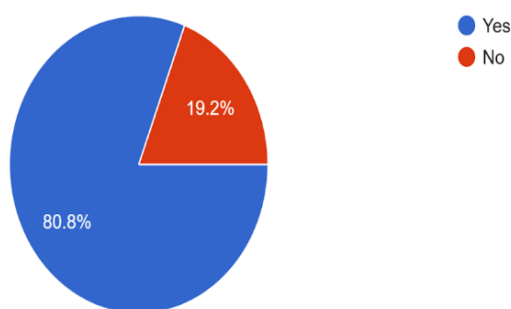


Figure 4. Students' Responses on Their Understanding of the PECRA Framework for Prompt Creation

Technical Challenges in AI Role Play Implementation

While the integration of ChatGPT-4.0 into classroom role play activities was largely met with enthusiasm, classroom video recordings revealed several technical issues that affected the implementation of role play with ChatGPT-4.0. One of the technical issues is when a student cannot load AI character on her phone due to compatibility issues. The teacher addressed this problem by offering their own phone, showcasing adaptability and a readiness to resolve such limitations. This mirrors technological limitations such as varying device capabilities, unreliable internet connections, and restricted application access.

"We want to try a live group role play conversation using ChatGPT-4.0 character, but i think there is a problem with my handphone. I don't like because the ChatGPT character does not appear." (Stage 3 Video Recording Session. Joint Construction of The Text)

Despite these setbacks, students continued to show strong interest and motivation to use AI character, suggesting that technical difficulties did not significantly deter their engagement. However, these challenges highlight the importance of having reliable infrastructure, teachers who are prepared to solve problems in real-time, and backup plans to ensure the seamless integration of AI into speaking activities, especially those that require live interactive communication. These responses reveal that technical difficulties remain a barrier to smooth interaction during AI role play.

Q: What challenges did you face while interacting with the Artificial Intelligence character during the role-play activities? How did you overcome it?

“The first time I tried, I struggled to access the Voice Character AI because I hadn’t logged in properly. As a result, the voice feature didn’t appear.” (S1)

Q: What challenges did you face during your role play experience through ChatGPT-4.0 Character?

“My main technical issue was the login process...” (S5)

The video recording data and interview results were also strengthened by questionnaire data triangulation, which reported that 46.2% of students faced limited usage challenges because communicating with the AI character ChatGPT was only possible 15 times per day per account. In addition to these challenges, 38.5% of students also experienced login difficulties (account access), 26.9% faced audio connection issues, 23.1% encountered internet connection problems, and 7.7% felt nervousness due to difficulties in forming sentences or creating prompts. A visual summary of the various challenges faced by students during their role-play experience through ChatGPT-4.0 is illustrated in Figure 5.

What challenges did you face during your role play experience through ChatGPT-4.0 Character? (Tantangan apa yang kamu hadapi selama bermain peran menggunakan ChatGPT-4.0?)

26 responses

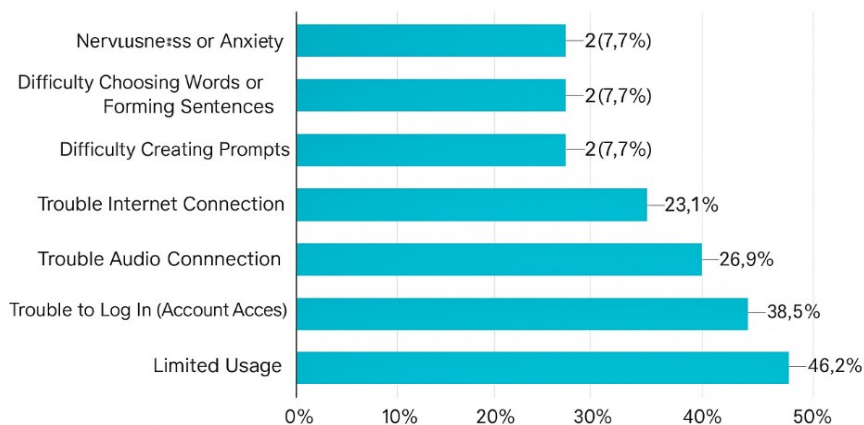


Figure 5. Students’ Reported Challenges during Role-Play Activities through ChatGPT-4.0

Students’ Positive Response and Experience

The classroom video recordings showed that students consistently responded positively to role-play activities with AI character. Once real-life scenarios were introduced, particularly with the involvement of AI characters and the PECRA

framework, students showed significant enthusiasm and engagement. Their active involvement and spontaneous expressions underscored a true interest and enjoyment. The combination of structured instructional support and imaginative use of familiar topics created a learning environment in which students felt confident speaking English. Although occasional technical challenges occurred, students remained eager to continue practicing, showing strong intrinsic motivation, and appreciation for the opportunity to explore innovative learning tools. This experience not only improved their speaking skills but also transformed their overall responses of English learning.

“Wow! It is great! It is amazing...” (Stage 2 Video Recording Session. Modeling of The text)

“3 times we have practiced role play, it is fun!...” (Stage 5 Video Recording Session. Review and Feedback)

The interview results showed that students embraced AI-enhanced role play positively. The learning strategy provided emotional safety and encouraged participation, helping to boost confidence and reduce fear of speaking English in front of others.

Q: How do you feel about using AI role-play character for practicing English speaking in the future? Would you like to continue using it? Why or why not?

“I feel happy because the learning method make me feel free to speak English with AI. I’ll definitely keep using it. I want to continue learning and practicing English through AI because I enjoy it.” (S2)

“I’m interested and really enjoyed the experience, so I’ll definitely keep using AI for practicing English.” (S5)

“It was such a fun learning experience. Because it’s so accessible, i plan to continue practicing English with AI.” (S4)

This finding was also supported by the results of the open-ended responses in the questionnaire which reflected students' agreement and enjoyment of the AI role-play experience. The majority of students expressed feelings of enjoyment, excitement, and increased comfort in speaking English. Several responses revealed increased self-confidence and a reduction in anxiety, with students noting they could speak without fear of being judged. Students also appreciated the real-time corrective feedback by AI character and found the tool valuable to improve vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. While one student reported a neutral stance and another raised concerns regarding data privacy, the overall response was overwhelmingly favorable. Students emphasized that implementing role play with AI character made the learning process become more dynamic and engaging, while also allowing for repeated and supportive practice.

Q: Could you describe your feeling, thoughts, and experiences after the role play activities through ChatGPT-4.0 character?

“I am very happy because I can practice speaking English so that I can become more fluent without fear of being judged for my mistakes.”

“I am quite happy to be able to have a conversation with Ai, and if I mispronounce a word, it will automatically explain what is wrong.”

“I feel very happy, and my vocabulary has increased after the Role Play activity with ChatGPT-4.0”

Discussion

The results indicate that the implementation of AI-supported role play in real-life scenarios was associated with increased student motivation, improved fluency, and reduced speaking anxiety. This study found that learners were more motivated learning with AI-supported role play, which matches the findings of Zahro et al. (2025). They discovered that using interactive digital media helps students get more involved in speaking activities because it makes learning less boring and more enjoyable. While these outcomes are broadly consistent with previous research on role play in EFL contexts, the present study suggests that the integration of AI may introduce additional dimensions, such as novelty and perceived technological relevance, that contribute to learner engagement. The use of authentic scenarios (e.g., ordering food, booking hotel rooms, and shopping) appeared to position English as a functional communication tool rather than solely an academic subject. This interpretation resonates with Katemba and Grace (2023), Ruslan (2020), and Phoeun (2021), who emphasize the motivational value of contextualized and immersive tasks. However, it is also possible that the heightened enthusiasm observed in early sessions reflects a novelty effect related to the introduction of AI technology, rather than a stable shift in long-term motivation. Thus, although more than 70% of students reported increased willingness to speak, further investigation is needed to determine whether such motivation is sustained beyond the initial implementation phase.

The combination of collaborative and independent practice within a structured instructional sequence also appears to have contributed to students' fluency and vocabulary development. These findings align with Yumna et al. (2026), who reported that Guessing Games foster behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in EFL classrooms. Viewed through CLT, Sociocultural Theory, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, interactive activities promote meaningful communication, collaborative learning, and reduced speaking anxiety. From a sociocultural perspective, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, the progression from teacher modeling to peer-supported and independent performance reflects a gradual shift in responsibility. Comparable findings were reported by Sormin et al. (2025), who highlighted that AI-based MALL supports both independent practice and collaborative learning, allowing students to develop speaking skills at their own pace while maintaining engagement. The Teaching and Learning Cycle provided systematic scaffolding that may have facilitated internalization of linguistic patterns. These observations are consistent with Communicative Language Teaching principles (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) and the value of integrating collaborative and autonomous learning (Phoeun, 2021). In addition, the PECRA framework functioned as a structured

scaffold that may have reduced cognitive load during spontaneous speech production (Brown & Lee, 2015). Nevertheless, it should be considered that structured frameworks can also constrain spontaneity if over-relied upon, and future research could explore how learners transition from scaffolded prompts to more flexible communicative performance.

The findings further suggest that AI-supported role play was associated with reduced speaking anxiety and increased confidence. The increase in students' speaking confidence found in this study is consistent with Al Farizy et al. (2025), who reported that AI-based speaking practice allows learners to practice without fear of judgment, thereby fostering greater confidence in oral communication. Students' gradual increase in participation, despite initial pronunciation difficulties, may reflect the impact of a structured and supportive environment. This interpretation aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, both of which emphasize the importance of low-anxiety learning conditions. Students described the AI character as non-judgmental, which may have contributed to their willingness to speak. However, it is important to acknowledge that interaction with an AI differs from interaction with human interlocutors, and reduced anxiety in AI-mediated contexts does not automatically guarantee similar confidence in real-life face-to-face communication. In this respect, the findings are broadly consistent with Sofroniou (2022), while also raising questions about the transferability of AI-supported confidence to authentic social settings.

Despite the generally positive responses, technical challenges highlight structural constraints in AI integration. Issues such as login failures, limited usage quotas, internet instability, and audio problems interrupted several activities. These findings reinforce earlier observations by Warschauer and Healey (1998) and Levy and Stockwell (2006) that technological infrastructure significantly shapes the success of CALL implementation. Teacher responsiveness played a crucial role in minimizing disruption, supporting Hubbard's (2009) view of the interconnected pedagogical and technological dimensions of digital learning. At the same time, these challenges suggest that AI-supported role play may widen disparities in contexts where device access and internet stability are limited, indicating that institutional readiness is a critical factor in sustainable implementation. Sormin et al. (2025) similarly reported that technical barriers can influence learners' experiences with AI-based MALL, underscoring the need for adequate preparation and support.

Overall, the findings suggest that students responded positively to AI-integrated role play and valued opportunities for realistic speaking practice and real-time feedback. The improvement in students' speaking fluency observed in this study supports previous findings that role play activities provide learners with repeated opportunities to practice oral communication in meaningful contexts, leading to more continuous and confident speech production (Yani et al., 2026). These patterns are also broadly aligned with Krashen's (1982) emphasis on low-anxiety environments and with Huang and Hung's (2018) findings on digital role play and participation. Nevertheless, minor concerns regarding data privacy and technical

limitations indicate that enthusiasm should be interpreted alongside ethical and practical considerations. Consequently, while AI-supported role play appears pedagogically promising, its effectiveness depends on contextual readiness, careful instructional design, and critical awareness of its limitations.

4. Conclusion

This research examined the integration of real-life role play with AI characters, supported by the PECRA framework, significantly improved students' motivation, fluency, confidence, and overall speaking performance in English language learning. The study found that situational role play activities provided authentic contexts that encouraged student participation, reduced anxiety, and fostered both collaborative and independent speaking practice. Through scaffolded instruction, aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, students gradually transitioned from guided to autonomous learning, gaining confidence and developing communicative competence. The structured use of the PECRA framework functioned as a scaffold to organize students' speech production and support interaction during role play activities. Although technical challenges such as device compatibility and internet access were encountered, students generally responded positively to AI-assisted role play. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the limits of a context-specific descriptive case study and cannot be generalized beyond similar settings. Future research may explore long-term impacts on speaking proficiency, the transfer of AI-supported confidence to face-to-face communication, privacy considerations, and broader implementation in diverse educational contexts. Overall, AI-integrated role play appears to be a promising instructional strategy when supported by adequate infrastructure and careful pedagogical design.

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