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The Effectiveness of Pair Work Strategy in Improving Students' Speaking Abilities of Eight Graders Through Role-Play in Factual Recount Text

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ABSTRACT

English occupies a central role as the most widely used international language, particularly in speaking contexts; however, many Indonesian EFL students continue to encounter difficulties in engaging in meaningful spoken communication. This study investigates the effectiveness of pair work and role-play as collaborative pedagogical strategies for improving students' speaking abilities in factual recount text at the junior high school level. A quantitative quasi-experimental design was employed, involving 60 eighth-grade students divided equally into a control group and an experimental group. The control group received conventional instruction, while the experimental group was taught through pair work combined with role-play activities. Data were collected via pre-test and post-test assessments evaluated using a speaking rubric adapted from Brown (2004). The findings indicated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group, with an independent sample t-test value of $p = .000$ and a large effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.801$). The post-test mean score of the experimental group reached 78.93, substantially exceeding the control group's post-test mean of 51.07. These results suggest that pair work and role-play foster active learner engagement, promote authentic interaction, and reduce speaking anxiety, thereby producing measurable gains in oral proficiency. It is recommended that teachers incorporate pair work and role-play as regular instructional strategies in EFL speaking classes.

Keywords: *Pair Work, Role-Play, Speaking Ability, Junior High School, Factual Recount Text*

INTRODUCTION

The sustained global expansion of English as an international language has intensified the demand for proficient English speakers across various professional and academic domains (Derakhshan et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2021). English serves as a primary language in every aspect of life, including the educational field. Since English is extensively spoken worldwide, it proves its domination as the global language in addition to the growth of generations and technological advancements (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). Given this global prominence, mastery of English is widely regarded as fundamental to accessing scholarly resources and participating in global discourse (Sejdiu et al., 2025). Indonesian EFL preservice teachers viewed English favorably as the most used spoken language that empowers them to adapt to a wide range of different cultural contexts and achieve a variety of objectives (Raja et al., 2022). A study by Mauliska and D'Angelo (2024) further affirmed that acquiring English proficiency is vital for Indonesian students, as it prepares them for global competition in the job market and fosters critical thinking skills. Additionally, students who speak fluently have the consequential chances to increase their competence through professional and educational opportunities (Siririmangkorn, 2021). Speaking is a complex ability that incorporates several sub-skills, including grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and the ability to construct logical sentences and conversation in real time. The development of speaking proficiency therefore requires far more than the acquisition of linguistic rules; it necessitates sustained engagement in meaningful communicative interaction and the strategic use of communication strategies (Yan et al., 2024).

In EFL contexts, speaking is widely acknowledged as an essential skill that enables learners to participate actively in real-life communication and develop confidence across various social and academic settings. In a spoken context, speaking takes an essential part in communicating ideas through verbal language (Andriani et al., 2021). Speaking has been described as the capacity to use spoken language to express, communicate, or exchange ideas, concepts, and thoughts (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Guebba, 2021). Additionally, Ilam et al. (2022) defined speaking as the ability to exchange information with others in a real-world setting effectively and appropriately. According to Su and Fatmawati (2019), a language learner is considered to have adequate speaking competency when they can speak English accurately and fluently. One of many important characteristics of speaking is that language deals with social circumstances and culture (Schmitt, 2023). Mastering spoken English is therefore critical for students' overall language development, as Ghafar and Raheem (2023) highlighted that it allows students to express themselves intelligibly in both social and academic settings. In language learning, speaking is seen as a complex linguistic competence as it involves the structured and purposeful oral expression of information, ideas, and opinions (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). Such proficiency is necessary for success in academic,

professional, and even personal settings, especially in environments where English is the main language of communication. The increasing importance of English-speaking skills in global education has been well documented in bibliometric analyses of the field, which confirm a sustained growth in scholarly attention toward oral communication development in EFL and ESL contexts (By & Veng, 2024). In brief, speaking plays an important part in language learning, considering its frequent use as the most accurate indicator of a student's general competency and highlights how well they can utilize the language in real-life situations.

Despite the recognized importance of speaking, many students continue to find meaningful oral communication challenging. The main challenges students face in acquiring speaking skills mostly come from overcoming language anxiety and lack of confidence, which frequently occur as a result of receiving unfavorable feedback and fear of making mistakes. The majority of students, particularly EFL students who are non-native speakers, struggle with pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and grammar, which might lead them to hesitate and self-doubt while expressing their thoughts in an academic setting (Puspita et al., 2023). Other challenges arise as students have limited prior knowledge of vocabulary and a lack of experience with formal academic discourse, making it difficult for them to properly communicate complex ideas (Fajriani & Patawang, 2022). Furthermore, most of the students struggle to appropriately employ academic conventions and construct their thoughts coherently. The scarcity of opportunities to practice speaking in a supportive and low-anxiety environment compounds these difficulties, as students may receive insufficient constructive feedback and lack access to authentic communicative interactions (Usman & Mahmud, 2024). These interconnected factors contribute to a cycle of avoidance, wherein students refrain from active classroom participation, thereby impeding the development of their oral proficiency. To address these challenges, teaching speaking skills to junior high school students necessitates the implementation of engaging and developmentally appropriate pedagogical strategies, such as collaborative tasks. An instructional strategy may be deemed effective when it enables teachers to fulfill stated learning objectives and foster meaningful student participation (Maulidar et al., 2019; Nugrahaeni, 2022).

In response to these challenges, the present study incorporates pair work and role-play as pedagogical strategies. Pair work is a collaborative learning approach in which two students work together to complete a task, share ideas, or solve problems. It has been defined as a distinctive organizational and instructional framework that enables two learners to achieve specific learning objectives within a structured activity (Saltz & Heckman, 2020). Tamala and Wulandari (2021) found that pair work effectively reduces speaking anxiety by encouraging interaction and creating opportunities for students to practice language in a low-stakes environment, with less-anxious peers assisting others with vocabulary and pronunciation. It also helps lower the emotional filter, as learners often feel more at

ease talking to a peer than speaking in front of class (Jatmiko, 2017; Ky Nhan, 2024). Additionally, Mulya (2016) and Putri et al. (2024) established that incorporating pair work in speaking classes is pedagogically valuable, as it promotes active interaction, enriches learner engagement, and provides sustained opportunities for meaningful conversation. Alongside pair work, role-play offers learners opportunities to engage with simulated real-life scenarios, enabling them to experiment with vocabulary, language structures, and expressive forms within an interactive and contextually meaningful setting. Role-play functions as a student-centered strategy that promotes participation and authentic use of language in context (Puspita et al., 2023). Furthermore, Henisah et al. (2023) demonstrated how well role-play works to create a supportive learning environment by meeting the criteria for vocal performance and active participation. Similarly, Yoniswan (2020) revealed that role-play effectively helped students become more proficient speakers, as evidenced by the fact that average scores increased from the first to the second cycle. These strategies offer the students a supportive and pleasant learning environment to practice speaking while encouraging meaningful communication and promoting critical thinking as well as problem solving, thereby improving their general language proficiency.

What distinguishes the present study from prior research is its explicit focus on the combined application of pair work and role-play within the specific context of factual recount text among eighth-grade Indonesian EFL learners, a combination and contextual focus that has not been sufficiently examined in the existing literature. While previous studies have investigated pair work or role-play in isolation, relatively few have explored how these strategies interact synergistically within a structured text-type framework at the junior secondary level. This study therefore addresses a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this combined approach in a context that is both pedagogically relevant and underrepresented in prior research. The study addresses the following research question: Is the implementation of pair work strategy through role-play activity effective in improving eighth graders' speaking ability in factual recount text?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study utilized a quantitative method, employing a quasi-experimental design in seeking the effectiveness of pair work and role-play in improving students' speaking abilities in a secondary EFL classroom (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). A quasi-experimental design is a research method in which the independent variable is manipulated without the random assignment of participants to treatment groups, and in which complete control over the independent variable is not exercised (Ary et al., 2019). The study involved two intact groups, namely a control group and an experimental group,

consistent with the nature of quasi-experimental research in which groups are pre-existing rather than randomly formed, such as intact school classes (Ary et al., 2019). A pre-test and post-test were administered to both groups to measure and compare students' speaking performance prior to and following the treatment period. The control group received conventional instruction throughout the treatment period, while the experimental group participated in speaking activities structured around pair work and role-play tasks based on factual recount text.

The study involved two intact classes of eighth-grade students from one Islamic junior high school in Mojokerto, with a total of 60 participants. These participants were divided equally, with 30 students assigned to the control group and 30 to the experimental group. The participants were selected purposively rather than randomly, as the study made use of pre-existing class groups. The primary instrument used to collect data was a speaking test administered in the form of a pre-test and a post-test. Both assessments were designed to measure students' speaking ability across relevant dimensions, and the resulting scores were evaluated using a speaking rubric adapted from Brown et al. (2019). This rubric provided a standardized basis for assessing speaking performance in a consistent and systematic manner.

The quantitative data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were evaluated, calculated, and interpreted numerically. The speaking scores for both groups were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software through an independent sample t-test. This statistical procedure was selected because it enables a simultaneous comparison of the mean scores of two independent groups within a single calculation, thereby providing a reliable measure of the significance of the difference between the control and experimental groups' performances.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this section are derived from the data collected throughout the research process. Based on the speaking scores obtained from both groups, the analysis revealed a significant improvement in the speaking abilities of students in the experimental group following the implementation of pair work and role-play.

Descriptive Statistics

The first step in data analysis involved computing descriptive statistics for both the control and experimental groups. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Post-test Scores

Group	N	Mean Pretest	Mean Post-test	SD Pretest	SD Post-test
Control	30	48.67	51.07	9.459	11.001
Experimental	30	52.80	78.93	9.419	9.273

Source: Author's Analysis (2026)

As shown in Table 1, the control group recorded a mean pre-test score of 48.67 and a mean post-test score of 51.07, indicating a modest gain of 2.40 points. The experimental group, by contrast, recorded a mean pre-test score of 52.80, which increased to a mean post-test score of 78.93 following the treatment, reflecting a substantial improvement of 26.13 points. This marked difference in gains between the two groups provides initial evidence of the effectiveness of pair work and role-play in improving students' speaking abilities.

Independent Sample t-test

The independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean scores of two groups to determine the significance of the difference. The data collected from the pre-test and post-test of both control and experimental groups were calculated using an independent sample t-test. The test results are summarized in Table 2.2.

Table 2 Independent Sample t-test of Post-test

Group	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control Group	-10.608	.000
Experimental Group	-10.608	.000

Source: Author's Analysis (2026)

As indicated in Table 2, the significance value (2-tailed) was .000, which is lower than the threshold of .05. This result indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the control and experimental groups. The independent sample t-test value for the pre-test was 0.095, which exceeded the .05 significance level, confirming that the two groups were not significantly different in terms of their speaking ability prior to the intervention. Following the treatment, however, the t-test yielded a p-value of .000, demonstrating that the intervention brought about a significant difference between the groups.

The effect size was used to determine the extent of the speaking performance of students after being given the treatment. The effect size was calculated using the Eta Squared formula by (Pallant, 2010). Based on the results above, the t-value was found to be -10.608, with a total of 60 participants. The formula was calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Eta squared} &= \frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N_1 + N_2 - 2)} \\ &= \frac{-10.608^2}{-10.608^2 + (30 + 30 - 2)} \\ &= \frac{112.56}{140.56} = 0.801 \end{aligned}$$

Criteria:

.01 = Small effect

.06 = Moderate effect

.14 = Large effect

Based on the conventional criteria for interpreting Eta Squared values (.01 = small effect; .06 = moderate effect; .14 = large effect), an Eta Squared value of 0.801 is classified as a large effect. This result confirms that pair work and role-play exerted a substantial practical impact on eighth-grade students' speaking performance in factual recount text.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of pair work and role-play significantly improved students' speaking abilities in factual recount text. The experimental group showed a substantial improvement, with the mean score increasing from 52.80 in the pre-test to 78.93 in the post-test, while the control group exhibited only a marginal gain from 48.67 to 51.07. This considerable disparity in post-test scores between the two groups, in conjunction with the statistically significant t-test value and large effect size, provides robust evidence that pair work and role-play constitute effective pedagogical strategies for developing oral proficiency among junior high school EFL learners. Implementing pair work and role-play as educational learning strategies in speaking classes encouraged the students to actively participate in the learning process as it offers enjoyable learning environment where the students can practice speaking freely with no fear of judgment from others. In contrast, the control group only gained fairly increased mean score in the pretest of 48.67 to the mean score in the posttest of 51.07, with p value of .000. It showed that the control group still gained a small improvement, lower than the mean score of the experimental group, although they did not receive the treatment. It suggested that the students who received pair work and role-play had better result as they can practice speaking with peers in a safe environment.

Hereafter, the calculation showed that an independent t-test value in the pre-test was 0.095, which was higher than 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference in pre-test scores between the two groups. Additionally, an independent t-test value in the post-test was lower than 0.05, which was 0.00, meaning that there was a significant difference in post-test scores between the two groups. The calculation implied that the intervention, the implementation of pair work and role-

play in speaking classes, successfully improved students' speaking ability in factual recount text, since all the calculations presented positive results. It was proven that the intervention increased students' engagement, engaged their prior knowledge, and guided their speaking ability, resulting in better communication proficiency. This findings proposed that the experimental group's significant improvement from pretest to posttest and the significant difference between the independent value in posttest was sufficient to be considered statistically significant. Subsequently, an Eta Squared value was found to be 0.801, indicated as a large effect, showing that pair work and role-play had a real effect in improving eighth- grade students' speaking ability in factual recount text.

These findings are consistent with those of Rianti et al. (2022) and Saltz and Heckman (2020), who highlighted the pedagogical advantages of pair work in improving students' speaking performance, noting that it provides opportunities for learners to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and develop confidence, thereby reducing anxiety and promoting communicative fluency. Similarly, Aji and Irawan (2023) reported that role-play significantly enhanced speaking proficiency, with nearly half of the students in the experimental class achieving scores above the minimum competency threshold. The implementation of role-play encouraged students to participate actively, practice linguistic structures, and express emotions across a variety of simulated contexts.

The outcomes of the present study further align with those reported by Fajriani and Patawang (2022), who found that pair work improved students' speaking abilities and motivation, with 85% of students in the experimental group achieving a 'fair' rating on the post-test with a mean score of 78.00, exceeding the control group mean of 76.00. Marsevani and Habeebanisya (2022) likewise reported a positive effect of pair work on speaking performance, with post-test scores improving progressively across two action research cycles. These studies collectively reinforce the notion that pair work supports collaborative task completion, motivates autonomous learning, and provides a safe communicative space for learners to rehearse and refine their oral skills. Mulya (2016) also similarly demonstrated the value of pair work in speaking classes, finding that the t-score of 2.56 exceeded the t-table value of 2.00, confirming its effectiveness in promoting meaningful interaction and active learner engagement. The oral presentation practices associated with student-centered activities in EFL settings have also been found to enhance speaking confidence and communicative competence when students receive adequate support and structured speaking opportunities (By & Veng, 2024).

The present study found that collaborative speaking activities encouraged students to engage actively in meaningful communication, fostered learner autonomy, and enhanced self-confidence. The statistically significant gains observed from pre-test to post-test in the experimental group, combined with the significant between-group difference in post-test performance, provide sufficient

empirical grounds to conclude that the intervention was effective. Taken together, the consistent improvements in speaking performance across multiple studies support the recommendation that pair work and role-play be integrated as a combined instructional strategy in EFL speaking classes, given their demonstrated capacity to develop oral communicative competence within student-centered, real-world contexts. Future studies may consider examining the long-term retention effects of these strategies across different text types and levels of schooling to further extend the evidence base.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the implementation of pair work and role-play as instructional strategies brought about significant improvement in students' speaking abilities within an eighth-grade EFL classroom. The experimental group achieved a post-test mean score of 78.93, compared to a pre-test mean of 52.80, representing a gain of 26.13 points. The independent sample t-test revealed a significance value of .000 in the post-test, which is below the .05 threshold, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups following the intervention. Furthermore, the Eta Squared value of 0.801, classified as a large effect, confirms that pair work and role-play exerted a meaningful and substantial impact on students' speaking development in the context of factual recount text. These findings indicate that pair work and role-play afford students structured and supportive opportunities to practice and apply spoken English in a directed manner, thereby facilitating genuine gains in communicative competence. On the basis of these results, the researchers recommend the integration of pair work and role-play as consistent instructional strategies in EFL speaking classes at the junior high school level. Future research is encouraged to explore the effectiveness of these strategies across different text types, proficiency levels, and educational contexts to broaden the generalizability of the findings.

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