

Students' Perception on Role Play in Improving English Speaking Skills at Bilingual Primary School

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Abstract: This study investigates sixth-grade students' perceptions of role play as a method for improving English speaking skills at Nurul Ilmi Bilingual Integrated Islamic School Bekasi (NIBIIS Primary). Employing a qualitative method, data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with seven students selected via purposive sampling based on varying levels of English speaking proficiency and participation. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model. The findings reveal three themes regarding students' perceptions: engagement in role play, building self-confidence, and challenges in role play. Most students held positive perceptions, reporting improvements in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as growing confidence over time. However, speaking anxiety and memorization difficulties were identified as common challenges. Two themes of influencing factors were identified: extrinsic factors, including teacher support, peer support, parental support, activity structure, physical classroom conditions, and time adequacy were determining the intrinsic motivation; and intrinsic factors, including self-regulated. These findings suggest that role play is a valuable speaking activity, though its impact on confidence is highly individual.

Keywords: Bilingual primary school, English speaking skills, role play, students' perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Improving English speaking skills is a key objective in bilingual education, especially in primary schools. Speaking skills, both in the native language (L1) and target language (L2), will develop naturally when students have frequent, meaningful exposure to the language in real communication. In other words, speaking skills develop when the students are involved in communication (Widiati & Mukminatien, 2019, p. 6.23). However, many students struggle to speak English because they lack adequate grammar knowledge, limited vocabulary, and inaccurate pronunciation. Psychological factors also play an important role and often prevent students from becoming confident and effective English (Qasim, 2021). Students often experience these difficulties due to limited ability to use a foreign language in addition to their mother tongue. Feelings of shyness and fear of making mistakes discourage them from participating in English conversations, and this situation is often reinforced by classroom environments in which teachers seldom use English during instruction (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022).

The challenges in speaking English are also observed in researcher's bilingual primary school, Bekasi where grade 6th students often hesitate to speak English, even speak though simple sentences. Students tend to avoid speaking voluntarily and only use English when asked by the teacher. These students often encounter various difficulties, including limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems and reduced fluency during speaking tasks.



Some learners also experience anxiety or embarrassment when required to speak in front of their peers, which decreases their participation in classroom interactions. Although the bilingual school provides chances to interact in English, it does not always guarantee that students feel comfortable speaking, especially in front of their classmates. To address these issues, it is necessary to implement creative instructional approaches that can support the development of students' oral skills. One strategy frequently used by teachers is role play, which gives learners opportunities to practice English in engaging and realistic communicative situations through role play.

Role play is an instructional activity when the students act out certain characters or positions within a given scenario, enabling the students to communicate with their peers while taking on different roles (Nurgiansah et al., 2021). This approach also helps students internalize the learning material by stimulating their imagination and appreciation (Amin & Sumendap, 2022, pp. 487–490). Furthermore, role play provides meaningful opportunities for practice speaking, sharpening their logical and critical thinking, and broadens their vocabulary. It also helps reduce anxiety and supports students in overcoming their fear of using English in front of others, allowing their confidence to grow gradually (Sari, 2025; Wijaya et al., 2024).

Many researchers have examined how role play influences the development of students' speaking skills. A study by Nurgiansah et al. (2021) at SMA PGRI 1 Kasihan Bantul also confirmed that role play helped create a more engaging learning atmosphere and supported improved academic performance. Agustina (2022) reported similar outcomes, with students' average scores rising from 57.1% on the pre-test to 66.1% on the post-test, indicating that role play can effectively foster participation and encourage learners to speak more confidently. Utami (2023) also observed a noticeable positive response from students during role play sessions. Learners appeared more motivated and found the activities enjoyable because they were conducted in a contextual and supportive learning environment. A further investigation by Octaviana et al. (2024) at SMAN 6 Kediri also documented marked development in students' speaking performance following the use of role play in the classroom. The method increased student participation, motivation, and overall engagement in class. A study by Marsevani et al. (2025) carried out at a well-known public senior high school in Batam demonstrated that role play boosted learners' confidence, fluency, and enthusiasm to participate. Their speech became more natural, and they demonstrated greater collaboration. However, these studies are implemented the role play method in high level context. Meanwile, this study tried to implement the activities in bilingual primary schools. In addition, students may have different perceptions and

experiences toward role play, depending on their participation and confidence levels.

Consequently, this study aims to explore sixth-grade students' perceptions of the use of role play activities for enhancing their English speaking abilities at a Bilingual Primary school. Based on those objectives, this research formulated two research questions: (1) How did students perceive the role-play activities in English classes? and (2) What factors influenced students' perceptions during the role-play activities in the English class?

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative method to explore the students' perceptions of the use of role play as a method for improving their English speaking abilities. This design was selected because it allows the researcher to explore and interpret the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences (Creswell, 2018).

This study was conducted at Nurul Ilmi Bilingual Integrated Islamic School Bekasi (NIBIIS Primary), Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia from April 2026 to May 2026. The data were collected from sixth-grade students of NIBIIS Primary Bekasi who took part in English role play sessions. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling based on two inclusion criteria: varying levels of English speaking proficiency and different degrees of participation during role play activities, ranging from highly vocal to more passive students. To safeguard the identities of the informants, the researcher employed initial pseudonyms (e.g., AL, AJ, FJ, JA, and so forth). Data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the students' perceptions. During the interview phase, the researcher conducted sessions lasting between 30 and 40 minutes with each informant, utilising a smartphone's audio recording function alongside a designated interview guide. Furthermore, whilst executing the observations, the researcher employed field notes and an observation checklist.

The data were analyzed using the model by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, interview recordings were transcribed and observation notes were reviewed. Relevant information concerning students' perceptions of role play, including aspects of confidence, participation, and speaking practice, was then highlighted and coded. In the data display stage, the coded findings were organized into narrative descriptions and supported by tables to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying them against the data to ensure that the findings accurately reflected students' perspectives and experiences (see Rustan et al., 2025). To ensure data validity, the researcher triangulated the previously analysed data to verify the reliability of the analytical findings.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results are organized into two parts related to the research questions. The first part presents findings on students' perceptions of role play, and the second part discusses the factors that influence those perceptions.

Students' Perception of Role Play in Improving English Speaking Skills

Based on the analysis of observation notes and interviews, three themes emerged regarding students' perceptions of role play: engagement in role play, building self-confidence, and challenges in role play.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of role play activities

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Engagement in Role Play	Active Participation	Willingness to participate, Reluctant to participate, Engagement during performance, Distracted performances, Language Initiative
	Affective Response	Enjoyment, Satisfaction after performing, Positive attitude toward role play
Building Self Confidence	Perceived Effectiveness	Perceived language improvement
	Confidence Levels	High speaking confidence, Low speaking confidence, Higher confidence in role play than other activities, Higher confidence in other activities
Challenges in Role Play	Emotional Response	Pushing through anxiety, Perceived progress over time
	Anxiety	Speaking anxiety, Fear of negative peer reaction, audience as anxiety triggers
	Performance Difficulties	Challenges in memorizing dialogue, Challenges in pronunciation, Low perceived challenges

Source: Data processing result by the reserchers, 2026

Theme 1: Engagement in Role Play

Most students showed willingness to participate in role play by volunteering when the teacher asked for participants, raising their hands enthusiastically. Students also showed engagement through maintained eye contact and patience in waiting for their partners' turns. However, not all students participated with the same level of enthusiasm. Some students needed encouragement before joining the activity, and one student was observed to be easily distracted during performances, occasionally losing focus mid-activity. In addition, some students took initiative to expand their vocabulary by adding words beyond the assigned dialogue, such as using phrases like "May I pay with QRIS?" suggesting that role play created opportunities for creative language use. This aligns with Sari, p. (2025, p. 36), who notes that role play actively involves students in the learning process, especially when they are required to speak in English.

Most students enjoyed the role play activity, as evidenced by their smiles during

performances and positive responses afterward. Most students enjoyed the acting component specifically, finding it engaging to take on different characters and interact with peers in English. As AL stated: "I like role play more than other activities." Most students also expressed satisfaction after completing their performances, looking relieved and happy after finishing.

All students also perceived role play as beneficial for their English speaking development. The most commonly reported areas of improvement were pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. As FY specifically noted: "My pronunciation has gotten better, for example, saying 'together'. I used to say 'tugeder,' now it's 'together.'" This is consistent with the findings of Octaviana et al. (2024), which show that role-playing enhances student participation and engagement, as well as improves their fluency and vocabulary development.

Theme 2: Building Self-Confidence

Students demonstrated varying levels of speaking confidence during role play. Some students spoke clearly with appropriate volume throughout the performance, while one student spoke with low volume and occasionally stuttered. Confidence levels also varied in relation to other classroom activities. Some students reported feeling more confident during role play, while others expressed feeling more confident in other activities, such as storytelling or presentation. As JA stated during the interview: "I might be a bit more confident in other activities." This variation reflects the individual nature of confidence development and indicates that role playing alone may not always be effective in boosting students' confidence in speaking. This is consistent with Octaviana et al. (2024), who found that some students disagreed that role play contributed to better speaking skills and greater confidence, mainly due to difficulties in maintaining fluency and feelings of shyness.

Despite feeling nervous, some students demonstrated the ability to push through their anxiety and complete their performances. Students also reported feeling more confident and capable compared to when they first began role play in grade 3, suggesting a perceived sense of growth over time.

Theme 3: Challenges in Role Play

Although the overall response was positive, several students admitted to feeling nervous during the role play activity, mainly because they were being watched and recorded by the audience. As expressed by AR during interview: "I'm nervous because there are people watching and I'm being filmed." Anxiety was especially heightened during semester-end performances in front of parents, where students felt more exposed. One student also expressed fear of negative reactions from peers, worrying about being laughed

at if they made mistakes: "I don't mind performing in front of friends, but if they laugh at me, that's not okay."

Beyond anxiety, memorizing dialogue was another challenge commonly reported by students. As AL noted: "I don't like having to memorize the text." Some students also reported challenges in pronouncing certain words correctly during performance. One student expressed this most strongly, noting that she found the activity difficult overall and had low enjoyment as a result: "Speaking is hard, especially the pronunciation." However, one student (FY) reported low perceived challenges, stating: "There's nothing really difficult. It's fine." This contrast suggests that perceived difficulty in role play is highly individual and may be influenced by personal confidence and preparation habits. Despite these challenges, most students managed to complete their performances. This is consistent with Marsevani et al. (2025), who found that role play boosted learners' confidence, fluency, and enthusiasm to participate.

Factors Influencing Students' Perception of Role Play

The analysis identified two themes of factors influencing students' perceptions: extrinsic factors and intrinsic factors (Table 2). According to Baharuddin & Rustan (2025), both these factors have been contributing to students' motivation in English learning context.

Table 2. Factors Influencing Students' Perception of Role Play

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Extrinsic Factors	Teacher Support	Teacher encouragement and feedback
	Peer Support	Peer encouragement during performance, Observational learning from peers
	Parental Support	Encouragement from parents
	Activity Structure	Topic preference, Rehearsal behaviour, Effective preparation strategy
	Environment and Time	Physical classroom environment, time adequacy
Intrinsic Factors	Self-regulated	Self-reliance, Vocabulary preparation

Source: Data processing result, 2026

Theme 1: Extrinsic Factors

Teacher support emerged as a key factor influencing all students' experiences. Observations revealed that the teacher provided vocabulary scaffolding before performances and gave encouraging verbal feedback such as "good job!" and "great!" during practice. All students acknowledged the role of their teacher in helping and motivating them. As AR stated: "The teacher helps me and motivates me." One student specifically noted a need for additional teacher guidance. This indicates that teacher support plays a crucial role in building students' self-confidence and motivation during role play activities.

Beyond teacher support, peer support was also identified as a significant factor shaping students' role play experience. Most students reported that encouragement from classmates increased their confidence before and during performances. The supportive classroom atmosphere, where all students clapped after each performance, contributed positively to participants' willingness to perform. Furthermore, all students noted learning from watching peers perform before their own turn. As FL reflected: "I became more confident from watching my friends." This finding is consistent with Utami (2023), where learners appeared more motivated and found the activities enjoyable because they were conducted in a contextual and supportive learning environment.

In addition to peer support, some students mentioned that encouragement from parents positively contributed to their motivation. However, parental presence as an audience during semester-end performances simultaneously increased anxiety for several students, who reported feeling more nervous when being watched or filmed by parents. This dual effect, where parental involvement both supports and creates pressure, suggests that the context and nature of audience presence play an important role in shaping students' emotional experience during role play.

Regarding activity structure, topic preference was identified by most students as influencing their experience. While some students were indifferent to the scenario, others had specific preferences such as news anchoring, hospital settings, and office environments. Students generally found familiar or preferred topics easier to perform. As AL noted: "It's easier because I already know it." This aligns with Agustina (2022) who found that when lessons incorporate interesting topics, students often become more eager and more willing to take part in activities when role play is used. All students also recognized rehearsal as a key factor in successful performance. Students who practiced aloud before performing were observed to deliver more fluent role plays. One student demonstrated an especially structured preparation approach: three minutes brainstorming, four minutes writing the script, and three minutes practicing aloud, resulting in a confident and well-organized performance.

Finally, physical environment and time adequacy were also identified as influencing factors. Students reported that adequate classroom space allowed for freedom of movement and more natural use of gestures during performance. Regarding time, students noted that having sufficient preparation and performance time reduced pressure. As one student expressed: "Time matters; when you're not in a rush, you feel more relaxed."

The presence of extrinsic factors, such as teacher support, peer support, activity structure, environment, and time in Table 2 were mediating the emergence of motivation

within the social context. Furthermore, these factors were contributing to the development of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Theme 2: Intrinsic Factors

Some students demonstrated self-reliance in their approach to role play, indicating they did not heavily depend on external validation to perform. As FY explained: "It's no big deal. If my friends want to support me, they can if not, that's fine too." Some students also demonstrated intrinsic motivation, being motivated by their enjoyment of acting, or a desire to improve her speaking skills. One student also demonstrated vocabulary preparation as a personal strategy, writing down key words and phrases before performing to feel more prepared and confident. In contrast, one student reported having no strong motivation for role play. These individual differences suggest that personal disposition and intrinsic motivation significantly shape students' engagement with and perceptions of role play activities.

The factors such as self-reliance and vocabulary preparation are manifesting as a form of self-regulated learning, which is continuously functioning as a factor that influences the formation of intrinsic motivation. The interviewed students are predominantly indicating a profound interest in English Learning. According to Ryan & Deci (2017), intrinsic motivation is a behavior performed out of genuine interest, which is autonomous and intentional, regardless of external rewards, as previously asserted by AF, who emphasized, "If my friends want to support me, they can if not, that's fine too." This implies that the absence of social recognition is not posing a problem for the student while they are participating in the role-play.

CONCLUSION

This study explored sixth-grade students' perceptions of role play as a method for improving English speaking skills at NIBIIS Primary Bekasi. Overall, the findings indicate that most students held positive perceptions toward role play, recognizing its value as an engaging and meaningful speaking activity despite the challenges they encountered.

Regarding students' perceptions, three themes emerged: engagement in role play, building self-confidence, and challenges in role play. Most students demonstrated willingness to participate, enjoyed the activity, and perceived role play as beneficial for their pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary development. However, confidence levels varied across participants, and speaking anxiety remained a common challenge, particularly when performing in front of an audience. These findings suggest that while role play supports speaking development, its impact on confidence is highly individual.

Regarding the factors that influenced students' perceptions, two themes were identified extrinsic factors and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors are included teacher support, peer support, parental support, activity structure, and physical classroom conditions, all of which shaped students' self-confidence and their motivation during role play. Intrinsic factors such self-regulated also played a significant role, with individual differences in motivation and independence influencing how students approached and experienced the activity. Parental presence was found to have a dual effect, serving as a source of motivation for some students while simultaneously triggering anxiety during formal performances.

Future research may consider examining teachers' perspectives on implementing role play in bilingual primary school settings and explore the effectiveness of role play across different grade levels to provide a broader understanding of its role in English speaking development.

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