

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents about background of the research, research problems, objectives of the research, significance of the research, scope and limitation of the research, and definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Research

In our increasingly interconnected world, English has become the lingua franca of global communication. As an international language, English plays an important role in facilitating communication across diverse cultures, enhancing mutual understanding, and promoting global cooperation. It is indispensable in various aspects, including education, business, science, and technology, where proficiency in English opens doors to knowledge sharing, career advancement, and access to cutting-edge innovation¹. In this context, mastering English has evolved from a mere academic skill to a fundamental tool for participating in the global community and contributing to international dialog².

Among the four core language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, speaking proficiency holds particular significance as a direct indicator of one's ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

¹ David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

² David Graddol, *English Next: Why Global English May Mean the End of "English as a Foreign Language"* (British Council, 2006).

For students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), Speaking skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for everyday interactions in various global contexts. The ability to speak confidently and fluently in English is essential for participating in classroom discussions, delivering presentations, and engaging in collaborative projects, all of which are integral to academic achievement³. In the broader context, strong speaking skills enhance career prospects, as employers increasingly seek individuals who can articulate their ideas clearly and engage in meaningful conversations in English⁴. Consequently, the development of speaking skills is not merely an educational goal but a strategic investment in one's future, shaping opportunities for advancement in education, career, and social interaction.

In Indonesia, particularly at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar, students face several challenges in improving their English speaking skills. Classroom observations reveal that many students struggle with pronunciation, especially words containing difficult sounds such as the letter "R". This issue affects their overall fluency and their clarity to express themselves. For example, students often have difficulty pronouncing words correctly, which can lead to misunderstandings and hinder their confidence in speaking. In addition, a large number of students exhibit low self-confidence when asked to speak in front of their classmates. This lack of

³ Judit Kormos, *Speech Production and Second Language Acquisition* (Routledge, 2014).

⁴ Mingyue Liu, "The Effectiveness of Role-Play Activities in EFL Classroom," *English Language Teaching* 6, no. 2 (2013): 1–10.

confidence is often attributed to the fear of being judged or criticized, which hinders active participation in speaking activities. The combination of pronunciation challenges and self-doubt contribute to a wider gap in students' speaking ability, making it difficult for them to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Such problems not only affect their academic performance but also limit their potential to engage in meaningful conversations in English outside the classroom.

The challenge of improving speaking skills is further exacerbated by the limited opportunities for students to practice speaking in realistic contexts. At MTsN 2 Kota Blitar, traditional teaching methods such as memorization and repetition are commonly used in English language teaching. Although these methods help students acquire basic vocabulary and grammar, they often fail in preparing students for spontaneous and real-life conversations. In particular, students are rarely engaged in interactive or communicative activities that simulate actual speaking scenarios, which are crucial for developing practical language skills. As a result, students are not given sufficient opportunities to practice speaking confidently or in a way that reflects authentic communication. This lack of exposure to real-life speaking situations hinders their ability to build fluency and increases anxiety, which further contributes to the difficulties they face in mastering effective English speaking.

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexible and student-centered learning, provides a significant opportunity to

address the challenges students face in improving their speaking skills. The curriculum encourages educators to adopt teaching methods that actively engage students and focus on practical application rather than just theoretical knowledge. The flexibility in Merdeka Curriculum allows for the incorporation of interactive activities such as role-playing and real-life scenarios that align with students' interests and daily experiences. By fostering an environment where students are more directly involved in their learning, this curriculum supports the development of speaking skills in a more interesting, authentic and applicable way in the real world⁵. Therefore, the use of a student-centered approach in this framework can significantly improve students' speaking ability, making them more confident and capable of using English in various contexts outside the classroom.

One of the most effective methods to improve speaking skills within the framework of Merdeka Curriculum is role-playing with thematic scenarios. Role-play allows students to take on different roles in simulated real-world situations, providing a structured yet dynamic environment to practice their speaking skills. This method helps students feel more comfortable using English by mimicking actual conversations they may encounter in their daily lives. Thematic scenarios, which focus on real-world contexts such as ordering food at a restaurant or asking for directions, are valuable because they are not only engaging but also highly relevant. By

⁵ A Syarifuddin, "Kurikulum Merdeka: Konsep Dan Implementasi Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran* 3, no. 2 (2021): 45–52.

practicing in such scenarios, students can apply their language skills in a meaningful way, helping them improve their fluency and pronunciation⁶. Moreover, this interactive learning approach increases opportunities for students to experiment with language in a low-pressure environment, fostering their language proficiency and confidence in speaking.

The use of topics that match students' daily experiences can help reduce the barrier between classroom learning and real-life language use⁷. This approach encourages students to step out of their comfort zones, as it mirrors authentic conversations, thereby enhancing their engagement and confidence in speaking. As they practice in these relatable situations, students begin to view speaking English as a natural skill rather than a daunting task, leading to improved self-assurance in their ability to communicate.

Research consistently supports the effectiveness of role-play in increasing students' motivation and confidence in speaking. The students who participated in role-play activities reported higher levels of motivation and greater willingness to speak English in class⁸. Similarly, the effectiveness of role-play in creating a supportive and engaging learning environment where students feel more comfortable expressing themselves⁹.

These findings underscore the role in motivating students and increasing

⁶ Jeremy Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 4th ed. (Pearson Longman, 2007).

⁷ Scott Thornbury, "How to Teach Speaking.," 2005.

⁸ Hsiao-Tung Huang, "The Effect of Role-Play on EFL Learners' Speaking Skills," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 1, no. 5 (2008): 678–84.

⁹ Andrzej Kusnierek, "The Role of Role-Play in Language Learning: A Study of EFL Learners," *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 2, no. 3 (2015): 1–10.

their willingness to speak. However, despite these promising results, there is still limited research that specifically examines the effectiveness of role-play in improving speaking confidence in Indonesian EFL classrooms, especially in junior high schools such as MTsN 2 Kota Blitar. This gap in research calls for further exploration of how role-play can be applied to better support students in this context.

In addition to motivating students, role-play plays an important role in creating a supportive learning environment where students feel more comfortable expressing themselves. The interactive nature of role-play allows students to practice English in a non-threatening atmosphere, encouraging them to step out of their comfort zone and speak without fear of judgment. This supportive atmosphere fosters a sense of security, which is important for students who are apprehensive about speaking in front of their peers. As students engage in this activity repeatedly, their confidence grows, making them more likely to actively participate in class and communicate more freely in real-life situations. Ultimately, role-playing not only improves language skills but also fosters self-confidence, which is crucial for students to develop their speaking proficiency over time.

Despite the promising findings on the benefits of role-playing, there are still significant research gaps, especially in the context of Indonesian EFL classrooms. Most studies on role-play and thematic scenarios focus on broader contexts or higher education settings. However, there is limited research examining the effectiveness of role-play with thematic scenarios

specifically on speaking skills in Indonesian junior high schools, such as MTsN 2 Kota Blitar. This gap in research highlights the need for further investigation on how this method can be adapted to the unique challenges and needs of high school students in Indonesia, especially in improving their confidence and speaking fluency.

This study is crucial as it aims to fill the gap in research on the use of role-play with thematic scenarios in junior high school EFL classrooms. By focusing on relatable real-life situations, thematic role plays provide students with practical opportunities to practice speaking English in contexts that reflect their daily lives. This approach not only helps build students' confidence in speaking but also fosters a more engaging and supportive learning environment, ultimately contributing to their improved speaking proficiency.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of role-play with thematic scenarios on the confidence and speaking skills of grade 7 students at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar during the 2024/2025 academic year. Specifically, it addresses challenges such as difficulties in pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and anxiety when speaking in public. Through role-playing activities based on real-life scenarios, the study seeks to create a supportive environment where students can practice English meaningfully and contextually, enabling them to communicate effectively both inside and outside the classroom.

This research adopts a quantitative approach to measure the effectiveness of this teaching method. Pre- and post-intervention assessments will be conducted to evaluate changes in students' confidence, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and speaking fluency¹⁰. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into how thematic role-play can be effectively implemented in EFL classrooms to enhance students' speaking proficiency and self-confidence.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to offer valuable insights into how role-play with thematic scenarios can enhance students' confidence and speaking skills in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly in Islamic junior high schools (MTs). By addressing the common challenges students face, such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and public-speaking anxiety, this study aims to develop more effective and engaging teaching strategies tailored to their needs. Integrating role-play into English lessons can make learning more interactive, enjoyable, and directly applicable to real-world communication. Furthermore, by focusing on relatable real-life scenarios, this research aligns with the goals of modern educational practices, emphasizing relevance, accessibility, and practical language use for students.

The expected outcomes of this study include measurable improvements in students' speaking abilities, increased confidence in using

¹⁰ John W Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2014).

English, and reduced fear of speaking in front of others. Role-playing activities designed around realistic contexts will help students practice English in meaningful ways, fostering greater comfort and fluency in everyday conversations. Additionally, the supportive and interactive nature of these activities is expected to boost student motivation and encourage active participation in classroom discussions. This study also aims to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication by providing practical opportunities to apply speaking skills. In the long term, the findings may serve as a foundation for improving English teaching methods in similar educational contexts across Indonesia, contributing to the broader goal of enhancing English proficiency at the national level.

B. Research Problems

Given the difficulties faced by 7th grade students at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar in speaking English confidently, this study seeks to investigate the potential of using role-play with thematic scenarios to address these issues. Specifically, the research focuses on answering the following question:

1. Is there a significant effect of thematic role-play scenarios on the speaking proficiency of 7th grade EFL learners at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar?
2. Does the use of thematic role-play scenarios improve the speaking confidence of 7th grade students?

C. Objectives of the Research

Based on the research problem, the objectives of this research are:

1. To investigate the significant effect of thematic role-play scenarios on the speaking proficiency of 7th grade EFL learners at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar.
2. To determine whether the use of thematic role-play scenarios improves the speaking confidence of 7th grade students.

D. Research Hypothesis

Based on the research problem and objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated to be tested in this study:

1. Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): The implementation of thematic role-play scenarios significantly improves the speaking proficiency of 7th grade EFL learners at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar.
2. Null Hypothesis (Ho): The implementation of thematic role-play scenarios does not significantly improve the speaking proficiency of 7th grade EFL learners at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar.

E. Significance of the Research

This study is expected to contribute to the field of English language teaching in several significant ways:

1. For Teachers: The findings may provide practical insights into how role-play with thematic scenarios can be effectively integrated into classroom teaching. This method supports the Merdeka Curriculum, encouraging

teachers to create more interactive and student-centered learning environments that can improve students' speaking confidence and overall engagement.

2. For Students: By participating in role-play activities, students can discover more enjoyable and meaningful ways to practice speaking English. This method allows them to gradually overcome their fear of speaking in front of others, reducing anxiety and building their confidence as they practice real-life communication scenarios.
3. For Educational Institutions: The results of this study may serve as a reference for schools or educational institutions aiming to adopt innovative and student-centered teaching methods. Role-play activities can contribute to more dynamic and engaging classroom environments, ultimately improving language learning outcomes.
4. For Future Research: This study can provide a foundation for further investigations into role-play or other communicative teaching methods in different educational settings or with learners of varying age groups. It highlights how such methods can be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by EFL learners in Indonesia.

F. Scope and Limitation of the Research

This research explores the use of thematic role-play scenarios to improve speaking proficiency among 7th grade EFL learners at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar during the 2024/2025 academic year. The choice of 7th grade is significant as it is a crucial period in students' language development, when

they transition from basic language skills to more complex communication. This age group is particularly sensitive to issues of self-esteem and confidence, making it important to address these factors early in their educational journey.

The study focuses on how thematic role-playing can enhance students' speaking proficiency and build their confidence through meaningful communication. It also aims to provide teachers with strategies to integrate thematic role-play sustainably into their teaching practices for long-term improvements.

However, the research is limited to speaking proficiency and does not examine other language skills such as writing, listening, or reading. It is conducted at MTsN 2 Kota Blitar, and the findings may not be generalizable to other schools with different contexts. The study does not compare thematic role-play with other teaching methods, focusing on the unique benefits and challenges of this approach.

G. Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity, the following key terms are defined as they will be used in the study:

1. **Role-Play:** A teaching method in which students act out roles in simulated scenarios. This approach encourages students to practice language skills in a realistic and engaging context, helping them reduce anxiety and build confidence in speaking English.
2. **Thematic Scenarios:** Contextualized situations or narratives that are relevant to students' lives and experiences. These scenarios are designed to make the role-play more relatable and meaningful, enhancing the learning experience by connecting language use to real-world situations.
3. **Speaking Confidence:** The level of self-assurance a student feels when communicating verbally in English. This includes the ability to express ideas clearly and effectively without excessive hesitation or fear of making mistakes.
4. **English as a Foreign Language (EFL):** A field of study focused on teaching English to non-native speakers in countries where English is not the primary language. This context often involves specific challenges related to cultural and linguistic differences.