

Research Article

Enhancing Students' English Oral Communication Skills Through Role-Play Activities: A Case Study at Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment

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Abstract

Developing oral communication competence remains a persistent challenge for Vietnamese university students, particularly among non-English majors who often exhibit limited fluency despite years of instruction. This study investigates the effectiveness of role-play activities in enhancing students' English speaking skills at Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment (HUNRE). A quantitative case study design was employed with 56 first-year students at the A2 CEFR level. Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention speaking tests, assessed with an adapted analytic rubric, and a post-intervention questionnaire. Findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking performance after an eight-week intervention. Questionnaire results further indicated that students perceived role play as engaging, motivating, and beneficial for vocabulary development and communicative confidence. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, time constraints, and nervousness were also reported. The results highlight the dual nature of role play: while it fosters measurable gains in oral proficiency, its effectiveness depends on appropriate scaffolding, contextual preparation, and sufficient classroom time. The study contributes empirical evidence on role play in tertiary EFL contexts, offering practical implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and the integration of communicative tasks in general English courses. Future research should explore long-term effects and technology-enhanced role play to broaden its pedagogical impact.

Keywords

Communicative competence, role-play, action research, non-English majors, EFL teaching.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the development of communicative competence has become a central concern in second language education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts such as Vietnam. Among the four language

skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - speaking is widely recognized as both the most immediate and the most anxiety-inducing form of communication (Thornbury, 2005; Goh & Burns, 2012). Despite English being a compulsory

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subject across all levels of education, a persistent gap remains between learners' grammatical knowledge and their actual communicative competence. Many Vietnamese university students, especially those majoring in non-English fields, continue to struggle with oral fluency despite years of formal instruction.

Several factors contribute to this long-standing problem. The dominance of the grammar-translation method within Vietnam's exam-oriented system places excessive emphasis on accuracy and written forms, leaving limited space for communicative interaction (Ly, 2020). In many classrooms, speaking tasks still rely on scripted dialogues or artificial prompts that do not reflect authentic communication, while exposure to diverse English accents without adequate support can further hinder comprehension for lower-level learners. Moreover, speaking topics that are unrelated to students' personal experiences often fail to motivate them or sustain language retention. As a result, many students hesitate, rely on limited vocabulary, or revert to their first language when speaking. In addition, because English is rarely needed outside the classroom in Vietnam, opportunities for authentic communication remain scarce, further restricting oral proficiency development (Hinkel, 2018; Ly, 2020).

To address these issues, educators have increasingly adopted Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and learner-centered approaches that prioritize interaction, engagement, and meaningful language use. One widely endorsed technique within CLT is role play, which immerses learners in simulated real-life contexts that require them to use functional language while performing specific social roles. Prior studies have shown that role-play activities can improve learners' speaking proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence while reducing anxiety and fostering collaboration. These findings resonate with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis and Taguchi's (2007) research on pragmatic competence, both highlighting that low-anxiety, contextualized learning environments are conducive to language development.

Although the benefits of role play have been well-documented in EFL literature, most research in Vietnam has focused on younger learners or English majors at language-oriented universities. There remains a notable lack of empirical evidence on how role play may support non-English major students in public universities, where English instruction typically serves general educational purposes rather than professional specialization. At the Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment (HUNRE), for instance, little is known about how role-play activities might be implemented to enhance students' oral communication competence within general English courses.

To fill this gap, the present study investigates the use of role play as a pedagogical technique for improving the speaking

skills of first-year non-English major students at HUNRE. Specifically, it seeks to answer two research questions:

(1) To what extent do role-play activities enhance students' oral communication skills in English?

(2) What benefits and challenges are perceived by students when participating in classroom role-play activities?

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on communicative language teaching by providing empirical evidence of role play's pedagogical effectiveness in the Vietnamese higher education context. Beyond theoretical contributions, the findings are expected to offer actionable guidance for EFL instructors seeking to enrich speaking instruction through interactive, learner-centered approaches. The results may also inform curriculum designers and administrators interested in integrating communicative techniques into general English programs for non-English majors, thereby aligning classroom practices with learners' real-world communicative needs in the twenty-first century.

2. Literature Review

Speaking is a complex and multidimensional skill that requires both linguistic knowledge and the ability to communicate effectively in real time. It engages learners in multiple cognitive, linguistic, and social processes simultaneously. Goh and Burns (2012) describe speaking as involving cognitive processing, language production, and social interaction that often occurs under time pressure. Thornbury (2005) distinguishes three core dimensions of oral performance: fluency, referring to the smooth and natural flow of speech; accuracy, indicating the correct use of linguistic forms; and appropriacy, the use of language that fits the communicative context. These components are particularly critical for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), who must progress from controlled classroom practice to spontaneous and context-appropriate communication. In Vietnam, many students still find speaking intimidating because of limited exposure to authentic conversation, minimal classroom interaction, and a persistent fear of making mistakes, all of which constrain oral proficiency development (Trinh & Pham, 2021).

Within Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), role play has become one of the most effective and widely used techniques to develop communicative competence. It places learners in simulated real-life situations where they assume specific roles and interact to accomplish a task using the target language. By engaging in such scenarios, students connect linguistic knowledge with interpersonal strategies and gain opportunities for authentic language use. The pedagogical value of role play lies in its ability to contextualize communication: well-designed situations reflect learners' real experiences and encourage them to adopt new perspectives,

negotiate meaning, and express themselves creatively. As a result, role play promotes not only speaking and listening but also reading and research skills, since learners often gather background information before performing.

Different types of role play have been identified based on the degree of learner autonomy. Krebt (2017) classifies them into fully scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted formats. In fully scripted role play, students memorize and perform prepared dialogues, a structure particularly suitable for beginners who require linguistic scaffolding (Tshering, 2022). Semi-scripted activities provide dialogue models with gaps to be filled using language drawn from real-life situations, effectively serving upper-elementary to intermediate learners (Yusuf & Setyamardani, 2020). Non-scripted role play, by contrast, offers only brief situational outlines or key words, prompting learners to construct their own exchanges; this form suits intermediate and advanced students capable of producing spontaneous language (Davies, 1990). The flexibility of these formats allows teachers to adapt tasks to learners' proficiency levels and communicative goals.

A substantial body of empirical research demonstrates the pedagogical benefits of role play. It has been shown to enhance vocabulary development, speaking proficiency, communication competence, social interaction, and learning motivation. Regarding vocabulary acquisition, Fahim and Sabah (2012) found that role play significantly improved university students' ability to learn and retain new words. Similarly, Alabsi (2016) reported that learners taught through role play outperformed those receiving traditional instruction, and more recent studies by Soori et al. (2023) and Sarwat et al. (2023) confirmed its positive and lasting effects on vocabulary retention compared with conventional teaching methods.

Evidence also supports role play's effectiveness in improving speaking skills. Neupane (2019) demonstrated that students taught through role-play activities achieved greater gains in speaking performance than peers taught with grammar-based methods. Wulandari et al. (2019) showed through classroom action research that role play effectively strengthened speaking ability, while Tandipayuk et al. (2023) found similar improvements in fluency, comprehension, and confidence among tourism students. Beyond discrete speaking subskills, role play fosters overall communication competence. Ashok (2015) highlighted its capacity to simulate real-life contexts that develop pragmatic awareness, and Ishak and Aziz (2022) confirmed improvements in fluency, comprehension, interaction, and communicative confidence. In a comparative analysis, Alghamdy (2022) showed that role play produced significantly higher gains in communication skills than traditional instructional approaches.

Research further indicates that role play contributes to the integration of language learning and social skill development.

By reducing anxiety and encouraging collaboration, it helps learners overcome affective barriers. Chaitanya and Raman (2013) found that role play increases participation and interaction between teachers and students, a result consistent with the findings of Lahbib and Farhane (2023). Other studies highlight additional interpersonal outcomes: Yu (2023) demonstrated that role play improves negotiation abilities, while Baca et al. (2020) reported broader enhancement of social competence. Motivation is another frequently cited benefit. Amir et al. (2021) observed that role play fosters intrinsic motivation, improves academic performance, and positively influences learners' attitudes toward language learning. In the same vein, Gusmuliana et al. (2021) showed that role play encourages students to express opinions freely and naturally, thereby increasing engagement and enthusiasm in English-speaking activities.

Despite these advantages, implementing role play poses certain challenges. Some learners perceive it as artificial or irrelevant, which may diminish their engagement. Teachers, particularly those working with large or mixed-ability classes, often require additional training to manage role-play tasks effectively and to provide balanced feedback. In Vietnam, structural constraints - such as exam-oriented curricula, limited class time, and a focus on written accuracy - further restrict the use of interactive methodologies like role play (Trinh & Pham, 2021). These constraints underscore the necessity of careful scenario design, adequate scaffolding, and context-appropriate adaptation to ensure pedagogical effectiveness.

Overall, previous research provides strong evidence for the effectiveness of role play in enhancing language learning outcomes, but important gaps remain. Most Vietnamese studies have concentrated on primary and secondary school contexts or on English majors at specialized universities, while research involving non-English major students in public higher education is scarce. At the Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment (HUNRE), for instance, little is known about how role play can be integrated into general English courses for first-year non-English majors to improve oral communication competence. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the effectiveness of role-play activities in developing speaking proficiency among HUNRE students and aims to offer pedagogical insights and practical recommendations relevant to similar EFL settings in Vietnam.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative case study design to examine the effectiveness of role-play activities in improving the English-speaking skills of first-year non-English major students at HUNRE, a public university located in Phu Dien Ward, Hanoi. The setting represents a typical Vietnamese

tertiary EFL environment in which English is taught as a compulsory subject for non-English majors. The participants were 56 first-year students enrolled in a general English course with a proficiency level equivalent to A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). They were selected through convenience sampling because they were in classes taught by the researcher during the semester of the study. Their limited prior exposure to communicative speaking tasks made them appropriate candidates for the role-play intervention.

To assess changes in speaking performance, two role-play-based speaking tests (a pre-test and a post-test) were administered over an eight-week period. Each test required students to perform communicative tasks such as ordering food in a restaurant, asking for directions, or responding to a customer complaint. Performances were rated using an analytic speaking rubric, which includes five components: fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension. Fluency was defined as the smoothness and continuity of speech; vocabulary as the range and appropriateness of word choice; grammar as the accuracy and complexity of syntactic structures; pronunciation as clarity and comprehensibility; and comprehension as the ability to understand and respond appropriately. Each component was scored from 0 to 2 points, yielding a total maximum of 10 points per student. This rubric provided a standardized means for comparing pre- and post-test results across subskills.

A post-intervention questionnaire was distributed immediately after the speaking post-test to gather students' perceptions of the role-play activities. All items were closed-ended and measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The questionnaire was adapted from a prior study on role play by Nhac (2025) and modified to suit the current research context. It sought to identify students' perceived benefits and challenges, such as increased confidence, improved motivation, and task difficulty.

The eight-week implementation followed three phases. In Week 1, students completed the speaking pre-test under controlled conditions. The researcher and an independent co-rater evaluated performances separately to enhance scoring reliability. During Weeks 2 to 7, role-play tasks were integrated into regular speaking lessons. Each lesson consisted of a warm-up, guided practice of target language structures, and a main role-play activity performed in pairs or small groups. In Week 8, the post-test was administered using the same procedure as the pre-test, followed immediately by the questionnaire.

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. For the speaking tests, descriptive statistics - including mean scores, standard deviations, and score distributions - were computed to provide an overview of

students' performance in fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension. A paired-samples t test was then conducted to determine whether the mean differences between pre- and post-test scores were statistically significant, allowing the researcher to assess the overall impact of the role-play intervention on speaking performance (Field, 2018). Questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics such as mean values and percentages to summarize learner perceptions. The responses were grouped into thematic dimensions (confidence, motivation, task difficulty, and interaction) to identify overall patterns. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire items.

This methodological framework provided a basis for evaluating both the effectiveness of role play as a teaching strategy and students' perceptions of its pedagogical value in a Vietnamese tertiary EFL context.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Findings from the Pre-test and Post-test

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Pre-test and Post-test

Test	N	Mean	SD
Pre-test	56	7.02	0.56
Post-test	56	7.35	0.59

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference in students' speaking performance before and after the intervention. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test scores. As shown, the mean score for the pre-test ($M = 7.02$, $SD = 0.56$) was lower than that of the post-test ($M = 7.35$, $SD = 0.59$). The increase of approximately 0.33 points suggests a trend of improvement in students' speaking performance after participating in the course activities.

In addition, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores. The results indicated a strong positive correlation ($r = .65$, $p < .001$), which means that students who performed better on the pre-test tended to also achieve higher scores on the post-test. This consistency reinforces the reliability of the findings.

Table 2: Paired-samples T-test results

Mean Difference	95% CI (Lower, Upper)	t	df	p
-0.33	-0.46, -0.20	-5.16	55	< .001

The paired-samples t-test further revealed that the difference between the two tests was statistically significant, $t(55) = -5.16$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from -0.46 to -0.20, which does not include zero, indicating that the improvement was not due to chance. The mean difference of -0.33 confirms that students' speaking skills significantly improved following the intervention.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that the teaching approach employed in the general English course had a positive and meaningful effect on enhancing the speaking skills of first-year students. The increase in scores from pre-test to post-test provides strong evidence that the instructional activities were effective in fostering students' oral performance.

4.2. Findings from the questionnaire

4.2.1. Benefits of role-playing activities

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of students' perceptions of the benefits of role-playing activities

No.	Statement	Mean	SD
A1	I find role-playing activities engaging and enjoyable.	3.77	0.467
A2	Role-playing activities improve my English speaking ability.	3.73	0.556
A3	Role-playing helps me better understand how to use English vocabulary in context.	3.46	0.808
A4	My overall communication skills improve through role-playing.	3.54	0.785
A5	I feel more confident when participating in role-playing tasks.	3.69	0.699
A6	Feedback from teachers after role-playing tasks is useful for my learning.	3.73	0.447
A7	I gain additional knowledge when engaging in role-playing activities.	3.66	0.668
A8	My vocabulary and knowledge of English terminology expand through role-playing.	3.84	0.417

A9	Role-playing activities strengthen my critical thinking and problem-solving skills.	3.68	0.636
A10	I feel more motivated and excited to learn English through role-playing.	3.77	0.504

Table 4: Reliability statistics of students' perceptions of the benefits of role-playing activities

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.847	10

To evaluate students' perceptions of the benefits of role-playing activities, ten items (A1 - A10) were analyzed. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics. The mean scores ranged from 3.46 to 3.84 on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating that students generally expressed agreement with the positive impacts of role-playing. The lowest mean score was reported for item A3 ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.81$), suggesting that students were relatively less confident about the extent to which role-playing enhanced their ability to use vocabulary in context. By contrast, the highest mean score was observed for item A8 ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.42$), highlighting that students strongly agreed that role-playing helped expand their vocabulary and knowledge of English terminology. Other high mean scores were recorded for items A5 ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.70$) and A10 ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.50$), indicating that role-playing increased their confidence and motivation in learning English.

According to Table 4, the reliability analysis demonstrated that the internal consistency of the scale was high, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .847 for the ten items, which indicates that the instrument was reliable for measuring students' perceptions of the benefits of role-playing activities.

Taken together, these results suggest that students perceived role-playing as an effective and beneficial strategy for enhancing speaking skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary development, motivation, and confidence, although improvements in contextual vocabulary use were reported with slightly less certainty.

4.2.2. Challenges of role-playing activities

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of students' perceptions of the challenges of role-playing activities

Code	Statement	Mean	SD
B1	My English proficiency is not strong enough to perform well in role-	3.68	0.61

	playing tasks.		
B2	I lack the specialized vocabulary needed for role-playing.	3.77	0.50
B3	I do not have enough background knowledge to handle role-playing situations effectively.	3.70	0.66
B4	I feel nervous and lack confidence when taking part in role-playing activities.	3.66	0.64
B5	Preparing for role-playing tasks requires too much time and effort.	3.52	0.69
B6	The time allocated in class for role-playing activities is insufficient.	3.73	0.59

Table 6: Reliability statistics of students' perceptions of the challenges of role-playing activities

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.869	6

To examine the challenges students encountered when engaging in role-playing activities, six items (B1 - B6) were analyzed. Table 5 displays the descriptive statistics. The mean scores ranged from 3.52 to 3.77, indicating that students generally agreed that role-playing posed certain difficulties. The highest mean score was reported for item B2 ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.50$), suggesting that a majority of students perceived a lack of specialized vocabulary as the greatest challenge in participating in role-playing activities. Similarly, relatively high means were observed for B3 ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.66$) and B6 ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.59$), indicating that insufficient background knowledge and limited classroom time were also considered significant obstacles.

By contrast, the lowest mean was recorded for B5 ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.69$), showing that while some students felt that preparing for role-playing tasks required excessive time and effort, this challenge was perceived as less critical compared to vocabulary and knowledge-related difficulties.

The reliability analysis (Table 6) of the six items revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .869, indicating very high internal consistency. This demonstrates that the items in Section B consistently measure students' perceptions of the challenges associated with role-playing activities.

4.3. Discussion

The findings of this study provide convergent evidence

from both quantitative performance data and learner perceptions, demonstrating the pedagogical effectiveness of role-playing activities in enhancing students' speaking proficiency while revealing several implementation challenges. The statistically significant increase in post-test scores compared with pre-test results indicates measurable progress in students' oral communication skills following the eight-week intervention. Specifically, the paired-samples t test revealed that mean post-test scores ($M = 7.35$, $SD = 0.59$) were significantly higher than mean pre-test scores ($M = 7.02$, $SD = 0.56$), $t(55) = -5.16$, $p < .001$. This improvement supports the assumption that communicative, interaction-based instruction—such as role play—facilitates meaningful gains in fluency, accuracy, and overall oral competence. The result is consistent with previous studies reporting that role-play techniques lead to notable advances in students' spoken performance across diverse EFL contexts (Wulandari et al., 2019). These findings collectively strengthen the argument that structured communicative activities can transform classroom interaction into authentic language use, enabling learners to internalize linguistic forms through practice rather than rote memorization.

In addition to the objective gains observed in test performance, the questionnaire data highlight learners' positive perceptions of role play as both a motivational and linguistic learning tool. High mean ratings for items related to vocabulary development (A8, $M = 3.84$) and motivation (A10, $M = 3.77$) suggest that students regarded role play as an engaging method that simultaneously expanded their lexical repertoire and sustained interest in speaking practice. These perceptions echo prior evidence that interactive, task-based activities enhance vocabulary acquisition and learner engagement (Fahim & Sabah, 2012; Alabsi, 2016). The alignment between performance outcomes and self-reported experiences indicates that role play not only produces quantifiable improvements but also fosters affective conditions conducive to language learning—namely enjoyment, confidence, and sustained effort. Such dual effects affirm that communicative approaches address both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of oral language development.

Nonetheless, students' reflections also expose several challenges that may constrain the full potential of role play. Among the perceived difficulties, the lack of specialized vocabulary (B2, $M = 3.77$), insufficient background knowledge (B3, $M = 3.70$), and limited classroom time (B6, $M = 3.73$) emerged as prominent concerns. These findings mirror structural limitations identified in prior research on Vietnamese EFL contexts, including time constraints, exam-oriented curricula, and restricted exposure to authentic language use (Nguyen, 2024; Phan & Phan, 2023). Affective challenges were also evident: the relatively high score for lack

of confidence (B4, $M = 3.66$) reflects anxiety related to speaking performance—an issue long recognized as a major obstacle to communicative competence (Goh & Burns, 2012; Thornbury, 2005). These results suggest that while students appreciated the interactive nature of role play, they still required linguistic preparation and psychological support to participate effectively. Without appropriate scaffolding, learners may focus on the performance pressure rather than the communicative purpose of the activity.

Taken together, the quantitative and perceptual findings provide a coherent understanding of how role play functions as a pedagogical intervention. The improvement in test scores confirms its measurable impact on speaking proficiency, whereas the positive attitudes reported by students illustrate its motivational and affective value. At the same time, the reported challenges emphasize that successful implementation depends on careful instructional design. Effective role-play tasks require pre-teaching of key vocabulary, contextual briefings to build background knowledge, and adequate classroom time for rehearsal and reflection. These adjustments align with communicative and task-based learning principles that stress learner preparation and support as prerequisites for meaningful interaction. Hence, while the present study validates role play as an effective method for promoting oral proficiency among non-English major students in Vietnamese higher education, it also highlights the necessity of strategic planning to sustain its effectiveness and transferability to similar EFL contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of role-playing activities in enhancing first-year non-English-major students' speaking skills in a general English course at a Vietnamese public university. Findings from both performance data and learner perceptions converge to confirm the pedagogical value of role play in EFL instruction. The paired-samples t test revealed a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking performance, with post-test scores surpassing pre-test results, indicating measurable gains in oral proficiency when role play is systematically incorporated into classroom practice. These quantitative outcomes provide empirical support for the integration of communicative, interactive techniques in tertiary English teaching.

In addition to objective improvements, the questionnaire results underscored students' positive perceptions of role-playing. Learners reported that such activities expanded their vocabulary, increased motivation, and boosted confidence in speaking - all affective and linguistic gains consistent with prior research emphasizing role play as an effective communicative strategy for fostering engagement and fluency. Nevertheless, participants also identified notable

challenges, including limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, time constraints, and nervousness, which can restrict the full potential of role play if left unaddressed.

Taken together, these findings highlight the dual nature of role play as both a highly beneficial and a pedagogically demanding technique. Its success depends on addressing linguistic, psychological, and structural barriers within classroom implementation. Several pedagogical implications emerge from this conclusion. Because lack of specialized vocabulary was the most frequently cited difficulty, instructors should provide lexical scaffolding through pre-teaching, word banks, or glossaries prior to performance. To mitigate challenges related to background knowledge, role-play scenarios should be authentic, contextually relevant, and supported by preparatory materials such as short readings, videos, or visual cues. In terms of classroom management, adequate time allocation for rehearsal, performance, debriefing, and feedback is essential to ensure that students not only act but also reflect on their communicative choices. Addressing affective factors is equally important: teachers should cultivate a psychologically safe environment that normalizes mistakes, encourages peer collaboration, and rewards progress.

Teacher professional development also plays a critical role in sustaining the pedagogical quality of role-play instruction. Training workshops can help instructors design culturally appropriate tasks, manage group dynamics, and apply formative assessment effectively. At the curriculum level, the findings suggest that systematic integration of role-play activities into general English courses could enhance communicative competence among learners who have limited exposure to authentic English use outside the classroom. By embedding role play within course syllabi, universities can move toward a more balanced, learner-centered model of language instruction aligned with twenty-first-century communication needs.

Although this study offers empirical and pedagogical contributions, certain limitations warrant acknowledgment and open avenues for further investigation. The research involved a single group of 56 first-year students within one institutional context, which restricts the generalizability of results. Future studies should therefore involve larger and more diverse samples across universities and regions to capture contextual variability. The intervention's relatively short duration also limits conclusions about long-term retention and sustained motivation; longitudinal research could examine whether the observed improvements persist over extended periods.

Moreover, this study focused exclusively on role play. Comparative research examining the relative effectiveness of other communicative methods - such as debates, simulations,

or project-based learning - would provide a broader understanding of how different techniques support oral proficiency. Future work could also employ qualitative instruments such as classroom observations, learner diaries, or in-depth interviews to gain richer insights into students' experiences and the mechanisms through which role play influences speaking development. Because confidence and anxiety emerged as salient factors, subsequent studies should explore the mediating role of affective variables - such as speaking anxiety, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate - in shaping learning outcomes. Finally, with the increasing integration of digital technologies in education, future research could investigate how technology-enhanced role play, including virtual simulations and AI-supported dialogues, affects speaking performance and motivation compared with traditional in-person activities.

Overall, the present study substantiates the pedagogical value of role play as an effective, learner-centered technique for improving oral proficiency in EFL contexts. It contributes empirical evidence and practical guidance to ongoing efforts to promote communicative competence among Vietnamese learners of English and provides a foundation for further exploration of interactive methodologies in both physical and digital classrooms.

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