Role-Play as a Drama Technique: Assessing its Effects on Iraqi EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety and Speaking Ability

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Sections Info	ABSTRACT
Article history: Submitted: 30 April 2025 Final Revised: 10 May 2025 Accepted: 17 May 2025 Published: 27 May 2025 *Keywords:* Role-play Speaking anxiety EFL learners Oral proficiency	*Objective:* This study investigated the impact of role-play techniques on speaking anxiety and speaking ability among Iraqi EFL learners. *Method:* Using a mixed-methods design, 60 undergraduates were divided into experimental (role-play) and control (traditional instruction) groups. *Results:* Quantitative results significantly reduced speaking anxiety (mean change = -8.31, p < 0.001). They improved speaking scores (mean change = 5.17, p < 0.001) for the experimental group, while qualitative data highlighted enhanced confidence and fluency. Challenges included peer pressure and feedback needs. *Novelty:* The findings are supporting role-play as an effective pedagogical tool. Recommendations include structured feedback and diversified scenarios to maximize benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English in non-native contexts, especially in countries where mainstream English is not used in daily communication, is especially important for academic and professional reasons English is not widely used in daily life in many Asian Arab countries including Iraq in various cases, students experience significant challenges in learning four language skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading due to limited use of English for out-of-classroom reasons [1].

Speaking is one of the four basic skills required for effective communication in any language, especially when the speaker is not using their native language. Since English is commonly used as a means of communication, especially on the Internet, proficiency in English should be developed along with other skills to improve communication with native English speakers and other members of the international community. In the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Thailand, lecturers often question why most students cannot speak English confidently, especially when communicating with international people in real life. One possible reason for this could be a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes.

Workie states that foreign language learners often prompt feelings of stress, nervousness or anxiety while learning to speak the target language and claim to have mental block against learning. Also, [2]states that the anxiety in the process of language learning can be seen as a condition of apprehension and a vague fear. These feelings may exert a negative feeling and detrimental effects on learners when they come to communicate in the target language. [3] claim that the students who experience anxiety "tend to sit passively in the classroom, withdraw from activities that could increase their

language skills, and may even avoid class entirely". This means that anxious students avoid being called on to take part in the class and they are less likely to volunteer answers in spoken classes. This oral exhibition is often considered as a negative factor in learning English as it is usually taken for granted that language learning mainly relies on the amount of exposure to use the target language.

According to Nopiani, in speaking activities, there are two reasons why speaking skill is difficult for the students. First, the cause is the students are lack of motivations in learning English, another reason is caused by the inappropriate techniques used by the teacher in teaching speaking skill. Whereas, teaching English as a foreign language requires the use of effective learning methods, techniques, language games, or activities that promote the speaking skill. For overcome this situation there is an effective way that teaching speaking skill can be done through some various activities that can promote speaking skill.

[4] states that using drama techniques might help students feel less anxious and uncomfortable speaking English, making them better speakers. One of those drama techniques is the role -playing technique .Role-playing is one possible way to lessen negative emotions towards speaking in the classroom. [5] describes role play as being one of the classroom methods of teaching that inspires students to participate directly in the learning process of English. As a result, foreign language students utilize the target language in situations that are similar to real life, wherein stress and shy are removed.

There are quite many reasons in high favor of the use of Role-playing activity (RPA) in second language classrooms. RPA can provide motivation because they are enjoyable and entertaining for the learners. It integrates language skills in a natural way and help learners who have never experienced such encouragement before.

RPA has a huge effect on the classroom atmosphere and dynamics, thus enables learners to become aware of ccommon mistakes in English. The use of RPA provides great opportunities for students to communicate with each other even if they have limited vocabulary. RPA encourages learners to communicate and express themselves. Furthermore, learners can develop their multiple intelligences through RPA. Students need to work together in a group and interact with others. Some teachers insistently continue teaching using traditional styles and they refrain from using RPA in their lessons. They are worried about how to control class, how to organize and how to build authority during RPA. If they try and see the effectiveness of RPA, they will implement RPA in their teaching process, Altun. Considering the aforementioned issues, the current study aims to investigate the effective use of role-playing techniques to decrease speaking anxiety. This study endeavors to explore how role-playing activities can positively impact learners' confidence in speaking English, their willingness to engage in conversations, their ability to express themselves fluently, and their overall speaking proficiency. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there were few studies done on Iraqi EFL learners to examine this technique. The findings of this study may offer practical guidance for teachers and syllabus designers looking to enhance the speaking abilities of Iraqi EFL learners through innovative teaching strategies and provide

valuable insights for educators on the benefits of using such methods to support EFL learners in overcoming speaking. Anxiety and improving their speaking proficiency, by assessing the outcomes of incorporating role-playing techniques in language learning.

The present study aimed to explore how role-playing could serve as an effective drama technique to alleviate speaking anxiety and improve oral proficiency among college EFL learners in Iraq. Some of the EFL teachers are still using passive learning. Where students are recipients of knowledge, they often sit and listen to lectures, which can lead to superficial understanding and limited retention of knowledge. This study can be particularly useful for EFL teachers to overcome passive methods of teaching and update active methods where students engage directly in the learning process rather than passively receiving information. Which led students to overcome their speaking anxiety and enhance their speaking proficiency.

Statement of the problem

Speaking anxiety is a significant barrier for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, affecting their oral communication skills and overall language proficiency. Factors contributing to this anxiety include fear of negative evaluation, where students worry about being judged by peers, and unpreparedness, which leads to increased nervousness during speaking tasks. Research indicates that a considerable number of learner's experience moderate to high levels of anxiety, which can hinder their motivation and willingness to participate in speaking activities, ultimately impacting their learning outcomes [6].

The weaknesses in English of students who join the universities as English language major or as English language learners have been described by [7] who points out that university students continue to make some basic errors in pronunciation, spelling, morphology, and syntax. They are also not able to express themselves "comfortably and efficiently either when dealing with academic topics or common every topic". Mukattash attributes this difficulty to the students' deficiencies in communication competence and self-expression and this situation is closely related to the methods of teaching. More recent studies on Iraqi EFL students' speaking anxiety reveal that Iraqi EFL learners are still facing the same problem [8].

Speaking anxiety is considered a challenge for Iraqi EFL students. Although they spent many years learning English in Iraq the emphasis is on vocabulary and grammar, and as such communication skills especially speaking is neglected during their study as English is considered a foreign language in Iraq where the aural and oral skills are not given much attention in schools.

Learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. learners must also acquire the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of structured inter-personal exchange, in which many factors interact therefore, it is difficult for EFL learners, especially adults, to speak the target language fluently and appropriately.

Thus, to provide effective guidance in developing competent speakers of English, it is necessary to examine the factors affecting oral communication as well as specific skills or strategies used in communication, Richards et al.

People are often anxious about their ability in a foreign language, especially in listening/speaking situations, which leads to a type of anxiety called "communication apprehension" (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991). This type of anxiety plays such a crucial role in FL speaking anxiety that even talkative people become silent in a FL class when they have communication apprehension [9]. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing EFL learners' speaking abilities.

Significance of the study

The significance of the present study lies in several areas. First of all, Role- playing techniques create a safe and encouraging space for students to practice speaking English without any hesitation. The results will give those students insights into overcoming such fear of speaking, increasing motivation, and improving language proficiency. On the other hand, the society will also be educated about this type of phobia to avoid negative judgments and discrimination, but rather give them ideas on how to help xenoglossophobic individuals. Also, role-playing activities equip educators with tools to engage students in interactive language practice. By offering structured role-plays, teachers can provide personalized feedback, address individual needs, and cultivate an environment conducive to developing speaking skills, including pronunciation. In addition, embedding role-playing techniques into language learning curricula enhances the design by providing engaging strategies that target speaking anxiety. Integrating such activities creates a dynamic learning atmosphere that encourages active language practice, builds confidence, and promotes effective communication skills development. As well as integrating role-playing activities in language learning contributes to the understanding of students' anxieties when communicating in English. It provides valuable insights into the various forms of anxiety experienced by learners during spoken interactions, offering a platform for students to navigate different roles and scenarios in a controlled environment. This process fosters confidence-building, reduces anxiety levels, and progressively enhances students' verbal communication skills.

Research Question

Based on the background of the study, the following research questions will be addressed in this study to gain a deeper understanding of the primary subject matter.

1. How do role-play techniques impact speaking anxiety among undergraduate EFL students in Iraq?
2. How do role-play techniques the speaking ability of undergraduate EFL students in Iraq?
3. What are the attitudes of Iraqi undergraduate EFL students about the effectiveness of role-play techniques on their speaking ability and speaking anxiety?

Research Hypothesis

1. **Ho** The role-play technique has no impact on the speaking anxiety of Iraqi EFL learners.

2. **Ho** The role-play technique has no impact on the speaking ability of Iraqi EFL learners.

Theoretical Framework

Learning theory is defined as a descriptive explanation of how learning occurs most effectively when one person influences others. It provides an overview of the outcomes resulting from the interaction between teaching methods and the psychological conditions of students, aiming to facilitate learning. Specialization in learning theory enables students to develop more conceptual thought patterns, optimize brain function, set methodical goals with clarity, and exhibit greater eagerness to learn from diverse sources when completing assignments [10].

In 1986, Horwitz and Cope conceptualized Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as a multifaceted construct encompassing self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors related to language acquisition in educational settings. Their theoretical framework meticulously examines the mechanisms underlying anxiety disorders, highlighting key concepts, principles, and the primary proponents of this paradigm. This theory marked a significant shift in anxiety research, particularly in the context of foreign language learning. By integrating extensive research on anxiety disorders, the framework elucidates the complex manifestations of anxiety and its impact on psychological well-being. It emphasizes the interplay of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions in shaping individuals' anxiety experiences and coping mechanisms. The framework also underscores the role of genetic predispositions, environmental factors, and psychological determinants in the development and persistence of anxiety disorders. Clinically, it serves as a foundation for assessing, diagnosing, and treating anxiety, though it has faced criticism for potentially oversimplifying the intricate dynamics of anxiety.

Before this framework, the relationship between anxiety and foreign language performance was unclear, prompting the development of tools like the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure FLA. Empirical evidence and student testimonials highlighted the distinction between FLA and general classroom anxiety, emphasizing the importance of self-concept and self-expression in language learning. Subsequent studies by [11] reinforced these findings, establishing a clear link between FLA and language proficiency. The FLCAS, with its 33-item assessment of anxiety dimensions, remains a cornerstone in language anxiety research. However, debates persist regarding the causal relationship between FLA and learning difficulties, the components of language anxiety, and the validity of the FLCAS [12], [13], enriching academic discourse on anxiety in language learning.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) posits that individuals acquire new behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory integrates cognitive processes, behavior, and environmental influences, introducing key concepts such as observational learning, self-efficacy, and reciprocal determinism. Bandura, a prominent psychologist, expanded behaviorism by incorporating cognitive elements like attention, memory, and motivation. Observational learning involves mimicking others, self-efficacy reflects confidence in task execution, and reciprocal determinism explains the dynamic

interaction between personal factors, behavior, and environment. SLT has profoundly influenced psychology and education, shaping teaching methods, behavioral interventions, and social skills programs, despite criticisms of overlooking individual differences and biological factors.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT), supported by scholars like Betz and Green & Peil, introduces triadic reciprocality, depicting behavior as an ongoing interaction among personal factors, behavior, and environment. SCLT builds on SLT, emphasizing observational learning and cognitive processes, such as goal-setting and self-regulation [14]. It highlights the role of cognitive attributes, like outcome expectations, in behavior modification and offers insights into intervention strategies across contexts.

Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model, based on five hypotheses (Acquisition-Learning, Monitor, Natural Order, Input, and Affective Filter), asserts that language acquisition occurs naturally through comprehensible input rather than formal instruction. The model stresses meaningful interaction, distinguishes between acquired and learned knowledge, and acknowledges affective factors like motivation and anxiety. While influential in language teaching, it has been criticized for oversimplifying learning processes and neglecting sociocultural variables [15].

Theoretical Background to the Study

[9]examined the correlation between anxiety and academic performance among Spanish and French learners, finding that higher anxiety levels corresponded with lower performance. Ying studied Taiwanese high school students, revealing that challenging assessments increased anxiety and hindered language proficiency. [16] reported similar findings among American learners of Japanese, linking anxiety to poorer academic outcomes. Saito & Samimy highlighted the negative impact of FLA on Japanese learners across proficiency levels.

[17] found that Croatian EFL learners with higher anxiety exhibited longer speaking pauses and reduced fluency. [18] demonstrated the effectiveness of role-play in Chinese EFL classrooms, emphasizing cultural considerations. Tsiplakides & Keramida identified peer evaluation and low self-esteem as key anxiety sources among Greek students. Layachi and [19] affirmed role-play's benefits for speaking skills and confidence.

Mahmoodzadeh linked anxiety to interlanguage systems, particularly meaning, among Iranian learners. Yahya identified fear of negative feedback as a major anxiety source among Palestinian students. Tum & Kunt highlighted anxiety's impact on non-native teachers' performance. Öztürk & Gürbüz noted pronunciation and error fear as anxiety triggers in Turkish learners.

Salem Al Dylar found gender differences in anxiety and fluency among Arab learners. Gkonou correlated classroom anxiety with speaking and writing anxiety in Greek learners. [20] reduced speaking anxiety using drama techniques. Wang & Roopchund explored question-asking anxiety among Chinese learners. Hammad & Ghali identified high speaking anxiety among Gaza EFL teachers.

A study was conducted [5] to examine the effect of role-play as a classroom activity on Iraqi EFL students' speaking ability. The present study tried to determine the effect of using role-play activities in speaking classrooms and improve speaking ability in Iraqi EFL students at the intermediate level. The participants are 60 intermediate language students in Baghdad, Al-Rusafa second randomly selected. Then, they were divided into experimental and control groups. Twenty questions were administered to both groups as a pre-test of speaking and the participants were asked to answer them orally. The experimental group was taught speaking instead of the targeted role-play activity while the control group was taught speaking for the existing methods. After 15 sessions of teaching, the post-test of speaking was administered in which the participants in both groups were asked to answer the post-test questions. The results indicated that the means of the two groups were significantly different which means that using role play activity affects speaking ability.

Empirical Background to the Study

[2] identified negative self-evaluation and limited linguistic ability as anxiety sources among Kurdish learners. Rafada & Madini highlighted teacher impact and peer pressure as anxiety causes for Saudi learners. Krebt demonstrated role-play's effectiveness for Iraqi EFL students. Chiyembekezo et al. noted role-play's benefits and challenges in Malawi. Aulia (2019) found role-play enhanced speaking skills despite grammar and confidence issues.

Böttger & Költzsch explored xenoglossophobia and advocated supportive learning environments. Workie reported speaking anxiety among Ethiopian EFL students. [21]confirmed role-play's efficacy in reducing anxiety. Sahara & Nurcholis (2022) identified fear as the dominant cause of glossophobia. [22] reinforced role-play's positive impact on speaking proficiency and anxiety reduction.

Types of Speaking Anxiety

Classifying speaking anxiety into trait, state, and specific situation types offers a nuanced perspective on how learners experience and cope with fear in EFL contexts [16], [23]. Trait anxiety reflects a student's inherent tendency toward nervousness, while state anxiety arises from immediate, situational pressures. Specific-situation anxiety, on the other hand, is tied to particular events like exams or presentations. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for addressing the root causes of anxiety, as each type demands tailored pedagogical interventions to reduce its adverse effects on language proficiency [24], [25].

1. Trait Anxiety

This is described as a "more permanent predisposition to be anxious in any situation," reflecting an aspect of personality or character. Students with trait anxiety often feel nervous and fearful across various contexts, not limited to speaking classes [26].

Example from the study: Students who habitually feel nervous in all classes, even after practice, due to ingrained fear or worry.

2. State Anxiety

Defined as "apprehension experienced at a particular moment in response to a specific situation," combining trait and situational factors [26].

Example: Anxiety arising when students must speak spontaneously without prior preparation, such as during impromptu tasks like role-playing or problem-solving discussions.

3. Specific-Situation Anxiety

Refers to anxiety triggered by particular events, such as tests or performances. This type is persistent and context-dependent [26].

Example: Students feeling intense nervousness during exams (e.g., midterm role-plays), especially in individual performances like monologues, despite being comfortable in collaborative tasks.

EFL teachers should look at what impacts collaborative learning to make their teaching as effective as possible [27].

Types of Role Play

1. Scripted Role-Play

Definition: Predefined scenarios with specific dialogue and actions, often used to practice language skills or rehearse professional interactions.

Example: Students act out a dialogue from a textbook to practice vocabulary and grammar [28].

2. Improvisational Role-Play

Definition: Unscripted, spontaneous acting based on a given scenario or theme, encouraging creativity and adaptability.

Example: Students improvise a conversation between characters from a literary text to explore themes [29].

3. Simulation Role-Play

Definition: Realistic, immersive scenarios mimicking professional or real-life contexts (e.g., medical consultations, business negotiations).

Example: Nursing students simulate patient interactions to practice empathy and clinical skills [30].

4. Process Drama

Definition: Extended, collaborative role-play where participants co-create a narrative, often used to explore complex social or literary themes.

Example: Students develop a role-play based on a folkloric story to understand cultural perspectives [31].

5. Pedagogical Role-Play

Definition: Structured to achieve specific learning outcomes, such as language acquisition or critical thinking.

Example: Role-playing historical events to deepen understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, Heathcote.

6.   Therapeutic Role-Play

Definition: Used in counseling or psychology to explore emotions, behaviors, and interpersonal dynamics.

Example: Clients role-play conflict resolution to practice coping strategies [32].

RESEARCH METHOD

Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design. The first two research questions were explored quantitatively using a quasi-experimental design, and the third question was explored qualitatively using a survey design. The study was conducted with Iraqi TEFL students at the BA level.

Participants

This research utilized a Quasi-experimental design and involved 60 Iraqi learners experimental group (30) and a control group (30) of undergraduate students aged (20 to 23), majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the College of Education, University of Kufa, Najaf, Iraq. All participants were native Arabic speakers. They were selected non-randomly by the researchers through the convenience sampling method.

Table 1. The demographic information of the participants.

No.	The year of the study	Age
60	Sophomore	20-23

Instrument

To meet the objectives of the present study, the following instruments were used:

1.   Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), adapted from [9], was used to measure speaking anxiety. This scale consists of 33 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." These items focus on three major components of classroom anxiety: fear of communication, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation see appendix (A). The questionnaire was piloted with a cohort of 10 students and validated by five experts from Kufa University, College of Education, who hold PhDs in English Language Teaching and have over 15 years of teaching experience. Cronbach's Alpha was used to estimate the reliability of the test.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the Speaking Anxiety Scale in this study.

Table 2. Reliability statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.860	.865	33

The result showed that the reliability of this scale was estimated to be .865, which is quite satisfactory.

2.   Speaking Test (Pretest-Posttest)

The speaking test was adopted from Lancaster University's Speaking Assessment Interview Questions. The test level ranged from A2 to C2 on the CEFR scale. It was selected based on expert opinions and modified according to the suggestions of jury members to include 9 sections, each containing 3 open-ended questions. Each section took 5 minutes for participants to complete See appendix (B). The test was piloted with a cohort of 10 students and validated by five experts from Kufa University, College of Education, who hold PhDs in English Language Teaching and have over 15 years of teaching experience. Cronbach's Alpha was used to estimate the reliability of the test.

In this study, the interrater reliability for the speaking test was estimated using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The value of .89 indicates a strong positive correlation between Rater 1 and Rater 2.

Table 3. Correlations.

	Rater 2	
Rater 1	Pearson Correlation	.891**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Table 4. A 100-point speaking test score distribution.

Aspect	Weight (%)	Score (out of 100)
Fluency and Coherence	25%	25
Pronunciation	20%	20
Grammar and Accuracy	20%	20
Vocabulary Range	20%	20
Interaction	15%	15
Total	**100%**	**100**

3.   Focus Group Interview

To explore Iraqi EFL learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of poetry recitation on their speaking ability, a focus group interview was conducted in a classroom. Ten students (five males and five females) participated, with each interview lasting approximately 40 minutes. The researchers asked two experts from Kufa University, College of Education, to assess the appropriateness of the interview questions.

Interview Questions:

1.   "Did role-play help you feel less nervous about speaking English? Can you share an example of when you felt more or less nervous?"
2.   "Do you think role-play improved your English speaking? For example, did it help you speak more fluently or use better words?"
3.   "Did you like using role-play in class? Why or why not?"
4.   "Was there anything difficult about role-play? How can we make it better?"

5. "Should we use role-play in English classes? Why or why not? Is there anything else you want to say about role-play?"

4. The Quick Placement Test

The Quick Placement Test (QPT), developed by the University of Cambridge, was used to assess the English proficiency level of EFL learners, Syndicate, 2001. In this study, the researcher used the paper-and-pencil version of the test. According to the test manual, participants were classified as (A2).

5. Drama Textbook

"Dr. Faustus" a play by Christopher Marlowe was used to examine its impact on language acquisition, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills in English learners. It functioned as a textual tool to assess how exposure to Early Modern English influenced students' vocabulary development, syntactic awareness, and reading fluency.

Procedure

To conduct this study, the researchers obtained permission from the head of the Department of English at the University of Kufa, Faculty of Education, as well as from the instructor of drama. Before beginning data collection, the instructor spoke to the students and confirmed that all 60 undergraduate sophomore English major students in the evening study were willingly participating in the study.

After obtaining the necessary permissions, the students were administered a placement test (paper and pen) to measure the level of difficulty of the speaking test, as well as to assess the trial/experiment system. Following this, they took an oral speaking test, and their phone numbers were added to a Telegram group.

A questionnaire measuring anxiety was developed, consisting of 33 items on a five-point Likert scale. This questionnaire was translated into Arabic and sent to the participants via the Telegram group (pre-scale). The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire within a week to ensure accuracy in their responses, allowing for valid and reliable results to measure anxiety levels among Iraqi EFL students.

Afterward, 30 students were assigned to the experimental group, which engaged in role-playing activities and the researchers took notes on their reflections, while another 30 students formed the control group, who followed traditional methods of teaching drama without role-play. After six weeks of the experiment, an oral speaking test was conducted for a second time as a post-test. The questionnaire was also sent again to both groups (control and experimental) through the Telegram group (post-scale).

Finally, 10 students from the experimental group were chosen by lot for an interview. This proved to be very motivating for them, as it provided an opportunity to express their thoughts toward the technique. The interview was conducted as an open discussion in a semi-circle format in an empty classroom. The interviewees were informed that their voices would be recorded for the benefit of the researchers. During the interviews, the interviewers (researchers) also maintained a diary to document observations. SPSS version 26 was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Role play and speaking anxiety (First question)

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for pre- and post-speaking anxiety.

Group	N	Pre-Test Mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD	Mean Change (Post - Pre)	95% CI for Mean Change
Experimental	30	**113.73**	11.53	**105.42**	10.21	-8.31	-11.24, -5.38
Control	30	**112.85**	10.87	**111.92**	10.45	-0.93	-2.45, 0.59

The descriptive statistics reveal that the experimental group experienced a significant reduction in speaking anxiety, with a pre-test mean of 113.73 decreasing to a post-test mean of 105.42, resulting in a mean change of **-**8.31. The 95% confidence interval of **-**11.24 and -5.38 suggests that this reduction is statistically significant. Conversely, the control group showed only a minimal decrease in speaking anxiety from a pre-test mean of 112.85 to a post-test mean of 111.92, with a mean change of -0.93. The confidence interval -2.45, 0.59 indicates that this change is not statistically significant.

Table 6. Paired samples t-test for speaking anxiety.

Group	t-value	Df	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental	-5.67	29	< 0.001	0.72
Control	-1.32	29	0.198	0.09

The paired samples t-test results for the experimental group show a t-value of **-**5.67 with a p-value less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant reduction in speaking anxiety. The Cohen's d of 0.72 suggests a medium effect size, demonstrating that the treatment period had a meaningful impact. In contrast, the control group had a t-value of **-**1.32 and a p-value of 0.198, indicating no significant change in speaking anxiety. The negligible Cohen's d of 0.09 further confirms the lack of effect in the control group.

Table 7. Independent samples t-test for post-test speaking anxiety.

Comparison	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental vs. Control (Post)	2.45	58	0.017	0.63

The independent samples t-test comparing the post-test speaking anxiety scores of the experimental and control groups reveals a t-value of **2.45** and a p-value of **0.017**, indicating a statistically significant difference. Cohen's d of **0.63** suggests a moderate effect size, showing that the experimental group experienced significantly lower levels of speaking anxiety compared to the control group post-intervention.

Role play and speaking ability (second question)

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for pre and post-speaking test.

Group	N	Pre-Test Mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD	Mean Change (Post - Pre)	95% CI for Mean Change
Experimental	30	**22.56**	3.45	**27.73**	4.12	5.17	(4.10, 6.24)
Control	30	**22.30**	3.30	**22.50**	3.40	0.20	(-0.50, 0.90)

The mean change (Post-Pre) for the experimental group is 5.17, with a 95% confidence interval of (4.10, and 6.24), indicating a statistically significant improvement in speaking performance.

In contrast, the control group showed a mean change of 0.20, with a confidence interval of (-0.50, 0.90), suggesting no significant improvement.

Table 9. Paired samples t-test for speaking anxiety.

Group	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental	5.17	9.23	29	< 0.001	1.68
Control	0.20	0.52	29	0.61	0.10

The paired samples t-test results indicate that the experimental group experienced a significant improvement in speaking anxiety, with a mean difference of 5.17, a t-value of 9.23, and a p-value less than 0.001. The large Cohen's d of 1.68 suggests a substantial effect of the intervention. Conversely, the control group showed a mean difference of 0.20 with no significant change (p-value = 0.61), indicating that the treatment period was effective only for the experimental group.

Table 10. Independent samples t-test for post-test speaking anxiety.

Comparison	Experimental Mean	Control Mean	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental vs. Control (Post)	27.73	22.50	4.75	58	< 0.001	1.24

The independent samples t-test results indicate a significant difference in post-test speaking anxiety scores between the experimental and control groups, with the experimental group scoring higher (Mean = 27.73) compared to the control group (Mean = 22.50). The t-value of 4.75 and p-value less than 0.001 confirm this significance, while Cohen's d of 1.24 reflects a large effect size, demonstrating that the experimental intervention had a positive impact on speaking performance compared to the control group.

The learners' perspectives on role-play techniques (Third question)

Table 11. Extracted themes of EFL students' perceptions of role –play techniques.

Extracted Themes	Percentage
Reduction in Speaking Anxiety	30%
Improvement in Language Skills	25%
Engagement & Enjoyment	20%
Challenges & Suggestions	25%

1. **Reduction in Speaking Anxiety (30%)**
   Code: Confidence Boost (15%)
   Excerpts:
   "It made me more confident, especially when playing complex roles." **(Student 3)**
   "I felt less nervous when focusing on the character's emotions." **(Student 5)**
   Code: Comfort in Peer Settings (15%)
   Excerpts:
   "I felt more comfortable, even in front of my peers." **(Student 7)**
2. **Improvement in Language Skills (25%)**
   Code: Fluency & Vocabulary (10%)
   Excerpts:
   "Helped with vocabulary and fluency; learned new expressions." **(Student 1)**
   Code: Pronunciation & Tone (10%)
   Excerpts:
   "Practiced speaking in different accents and styles." **(Student 6)**
   Code: Emotional Expression (5%)
   Excerpts:
   "Conveyed emotions more effectively through dialogue." **(Student 3)**
3. **Engagement & Enjoyment (20%)**
   Code: Fun & Interactive (10%)
   Excerpts:
   "It was fun and interactive; liked acting out scenarios." **(Student 9)**
   Code: Educational Value (10%)
   "Engaging and educational; explored characters' motivations." **(Student 3)**
4. **Challenges & Suggestions (25%)**
   Code: Need for Feedback (10%)
   Excerpts:
   "More feedback on pronunciation and public speaking fears." **(Student 10)**
   "Thinking on the spot was challenging; feedback would help." **(Student 3)**
   Code: Peer Pressure (10%)
   Excerpts:
   "Felt overwhelmed by pressure to perform well." **(Student 8)**
   Code: Request for More Scenarios (5%)
   Excerpts:
   More role-play scenarios would be great." **(Student 8)**

The findings suggest that role-play is a highly effective pedagogical tool for enhancing English communication skills among EFL students. The significant reduction in speaking anxiety and improvements in language skills underscore the potential benefits of this approach. However, to optimize its impact in the classroom, educators should actively address the identified challenges, including the provision of constructive feedback and the introduction of diverse role-play scenarios.

Discussion

The findings of this study agree with and extend previous research on the effectiveness of role-playing techniques in reducing speaking anxiety and improving oral proficiency among EFL learners. The significant reduction in speaking anxiety observed in the experimental group (mean change = -8.31, $p < 0.001$) corroborates the work of Krebt, who demonstrated that role-play actively engages learners and reduces stress in language classrooms. Similarly, Atas (2015) found that drama techniques, including role-play, fostered a supportive environment that diminished anxiety, mirroring the confidence boost reported by participants in this study (30% of interviewees).

The improvement in speaking ability (mean change = 5.17, $p < 0.001$) resonates with [19] findings, where role-play enhanced fluency and vocabulary usage. Participants in this study highlighted similar gains, particularly in pronunciation and emotional expression (25% of responses), reinforcing the utility of role-play for contextualized language practice. Notably, the control group's minimal improvement (mean change = 0.20, $p = 0.61$) underscores the limitations of traditional methods, as criticized by Nopiani, who attributed low speaking proficiency to passive teaching approaches.

However, challenges such as peer pressure (10% of interviewees) and the need for feedback (10%) echo Mahmoodzadeh's observation that anxiety persists when learners fear negative evaluation. These results suggest that while role-play mitigates anxiety, its efficacy depends on structured implementation, as advocated by [33], who emphasized the importance of supportive environments.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This study demonstrates that role-playing techniques significantly reduce speaking anxiety and enhance oral proficiency among Iraqi EFL learners, validating their integration into language curricula. The experimental group's marked improvement contrasts with the stagnation of the control group, highlighting the limitations of passive learning. **Implication :** Educators are encouraged to adopt role-play as a dynamic, student-centered strategy to foster communicative competence. The findings support the incorporation of interactive methods into EFL instruction to promote confidence and fluency, offering a practical framework for reshaping traditional pedagogical practices. **Limitation :** While learners reported increased confidence and fluency, challenges like peer pressure and feedback gaps indicate areas for refinement. These factors suggest that despite its overall efficacy, role-play may present obstacles that need to be addressed to maximize its benefits for all learners. **Future Research :** Future

research should explore longitudinal effects and culturally tailored role-play scenarios to optimize outcomes. Investigating how such interventions evolve over time and adapt to learners' sociocultural contexts can provide deeper insights into their sustained impact and broader applicability.

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