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Vocational students' perspective towards digital role-play in enhancing speaking skills

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Abstract

Speaking is a challenging skill for students to acquire in Indonesia. This study seeks to investigate the perspectives of vocational students regarding digital role-play as an opportunity for enhancing their speaking skills. This study employed a qualitative method, utilizing a case study as the research design. This study was carried out at SMKN 1 Singosari, Malang. Four participants were involved in the study, consisting of two students categorized as high-achieving and two categorized as low-achieving, majoring in welding engineering for the academic year 2024/2025. The research used semi-structured interviews to gather the data. The findings of this study indicate that digital role-play engages vocational students and enhances their excitement for learning to speak English. Through the use of digital role-play, vocational students believe they can enhance their vocabularies and immediately evaluate their problems, including mispronunciation. As a result, digital role-play serves as an advantageous technique that can be utilized, enabling vocational students to enhance their English speaking skills.

Keywords: Case Study; Role-Play; Vocational Students; Speaking

Introduction

The ability to speak fluently in English is considered to be the most difficult skill that students in Indonesia should acquire. According to Safira & Azzahra (2022) in Center for Indonesian Policy Studies, the three most significant difficulties that students frequently face are grammar (1945 respondents), vocabulary memorization (1568 respondents), and pronouncing words (1367 respondents). Recently, the Directorate of Vocational School (Direktorat Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan) has taken steps to enhance students' proficiency in foreign languages, specifically English, in order to support the government's efforts to improve language skills. Because the ability to speak a foreign language has become a vital skill in this industry's era 4.0, it is essential to have a strong command of the language, especially for vocational students to

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be able to compete on an international level. Speaking is vital for individuals because, if we are not taught appropriately, we will not be able to understand what other people think and say (Brown, 2000:39). Speaking is an essential skill for students to acquire, especially in the context of learning a foreign language. According to Riki et al. (2024), speaking can be considered one of the most essential English skills that students should be able to master when they are studying a foreign language. A further point that he brought out was that speaking has a big influence on daily life, especially in the area of education.

As a consequence of this, suitable lessons in speaking skills need to be provided in the classroom. Teaching speaking, in particular in vocational schools, helps students become more prepared for job prospects after they graduate. Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) as a vocational education institution seeks to prepare students to work according to their fields. Students learn English for a variety of reasons, including the following: 1) They want to be a part of international companies, and 2) The capacity of students to speak, particularly in English, has become one of the essential abilities requested by many recruiters (Pahamzah et al., 2020). This is due to the fact that once students graduate from their vocational schools, they will be expected to have excellent communication skills in order to be considered for employment by the relevant companies.

Nevertheless, during the process of their English lessons, the students encountered a few difficulties with speaking. Learning English as a foreign language comes with its own unique challenges, particularly in situations where the classroom is the only environment in which students may practice their English (Hidayat, 2023). The areas of pronunciation are typically where students struggle the most when it comes to speaking in front of other students in the classroom. Inline with Arif et al. (2020) claimed that the students have difficulty pronouncing certain words since they are still unsure how to pronounce them properly. This leads to the students having difficulty saying particular words.

In order to accomplish the goals, the teacher needs to utilize suitable teaching techniques to attract the student's interest in the process of learning and teaching. The teacher's ability to innovate in teaching and learning might encourage the development of students' interests (Lumbangaol & Mazali, 2020). Role-play is an educational strategy for students to enhance their speaking ability. It provides students to be themselves, based on the creative and communicative contribution they bring to the classroom. According to Brown (2001), One of the most common pedagogical activities that is utilized in communicative language learning is role-play. Then, According to Hardi et al. (2023), stated that Role-play has been proven to be an effective method for enhancing students speaking abilities. Then, Arif et al. (2020) highlighted that

role play can be utilized in two ways: to improve overall oral fluency or to prepare students for specific situations, particularly in instances where the students are learning for specific purposes.

However, the current method of teaching and learning, which involves the utilization of role-play is still conventional and does not use technology in the current digital era. According to Rofii & Syarifah (2024) mentioned that the utilization of technology in the process of learning spoken English has become an important factor. By Integrating conventional role-play into digital role-play presents an innovative strategy for implementation in the classroom. The use of role-playing techniques in combined with the utilization of technology in the process of teaching and learning English will have a considerable impact on the learning process, particularly, related to the students' speaking skills (Ridayani & Purwanto, 2024).

This research integrates the use of role-play in a digital setting. Combining role-play and digital settings can provide a breakthrough in learning, for example using video. Utilizing role-play in a digital setting enhances effectiveness, and motivation, and offers a more comprehensive learning experience compared to conventional role-play (Ridayani & Purwanto, 2024). Additionally, it was stated that the integration of practical digital experience and technologies enables students to cultivate proficient English language skills, as well as obtain crucial soft skills necessary for their achievements in the industry.

Previous research has studied the use of role-play techniques in the English teaching and learning process to enhance speaking skills. Arif et al. (2020) explored the use of role-play in improving students' speaking skills. They explained that when they were practicing employing role-play, the students were not nervous about speaking English in front of the class because they made themselves into other characters. According to another researcher, Wafa (2022), role play is a great method for enhancing students' speaking skills. This is because it not only stimulates students to learn how to talk, but also increases their confidence in speaking and enhances their interactions with others. Hardi et al. (2023) identified three advantageous outcomes related to the use of role-play activities in enhancing students' speaking skills. It provides the potential to enhance pronunciation, foster vocabulary expansion, and enhance comprehension of grammar.

Despite the proven efficacy of the role-play technique in enhancing students' speaking skills and its numerous advantages as an effective tool for teaching English, there has been limited research on its types of role-play which is still use the conventional role-play and utilization among vocational high school students. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the perspectives of students, particularly vocational students, about the utilization of digital role-playing techniques to enhance vocational students' speaking skills.

Consequently, this research contributes to the development of new perspectives and knowledge for the readers. Furthermore, the research question can be formulated into two questions: 1) What is the vocational students' perspective on the use of digital role-play techniques to improve speaking skills? 2) What are the benefits of the use of digital role-play techniques to vocational students?

Method

By examining the objectives of these studies, which are to determine the students' perspective towards the use of roleplay and what are the benefits for the students when they use the digital role-play technique, the researcher employs a qualitative approach with a case study as the research design, According to Ary et al. (2010) A case study is a research method that focuses on examining a specific unit, such as an individual, group, organization, or program, with the objective of obtaining a comprehensive description and comprehension of that entity. The qualitative approach entails the formulation of relevant inquiries and methodologies, with data mainly gathered from participants. Subsequently, the researcher analyzes the data and draws conclusions regarding its significance.

The researcher employed purposive sampling methods to identify research participants. The selection of students was based on the classes that implemented role-play techniques during the academic year 2024/2025, which were directly related to the research's focus. The participants in this study consisted of 4 students, specifically 2 high-achieving (HA) & 2 low-achieving (LA) students from SMKN 1 Singosari, Malang majoring in welding engineering. The interview questions were asked to the entire sample of 4 student participants.

The question items for the structured interview were divided into two parts, namely perspective role play (1-4) and benefits of digital role-play (5-7):

Table. 1 Research Instrument (Adapted from Khadafie, M., 2022)

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No	Indicators	Statement	Item
1	Perspectives	How do you feel when the teacher employs digital role-play in the classroom?	1
		What obstacles do you encounter when digital role-playing?	2
		Do you gain a lot of experience of using digital role- play?	3
		Does digital role-play appropriate for the material provided?	4
2	Benefits	Does digital role-play technique makes you excited in learning English? Why?	5
		Does digital role-play technique is a great way in facilitating English speaking skill? Why?	6
		Does digital role-play assist you to improve your speaking skill in English? Why?	7

This research conducted semi-structured interviews, which were adapted from Kadafie (2023). The semi-structured interview was conducted in one session. The purpose of these interviews was to create a complete understanding and bring up the perspectives of students relevant to the topic. The researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants during the interview session, using a limited number of unstructured or open-ended questions designed to elicit the participants' responses Creswell (2017). Within the semi-structured interviews, the researcher conducted interviews with the students who participated and took part in the role-play session.

During the process of conducting semi-structured interview sessions, the researcher utilized audio recording as a tool. Once the data has been gathered, the researcher proceeds to analyze the qualitative data using a three-step process defined by Ary et al. (2010): The process has three main steps: 1) familiarizing and organizing the data, 2) coding and reducing the data, and 3) interpreting and representing the data. In the first step, the researcher carefully listened to the interview recording of the vocational students related to their perspective towards digital role-play in enhancing their speaking skills. Then, their answer was transcribed in the form of transcriptions into two languages: Indonesian and English. The next step involved the coding and reduction of data. Data triangulation was employed to analyze the data, which entailed the labeling of each relevant response that related to the topic and dimensions of this research. The last step involved the interpretation and representation of the data, which was presented in a specific perspective of vocational students' towards the utilization of digital role-play in enhancing their English speaking skills.

Results and Dicussion

Findings

This section explains the findings on vocational students' perspectives on the use of digital role-play techniques in enhancing speaking skills. The findings are divided into two sections: Students' perspectives and the benefits of digital role-play.

Vocational Students' Perspectives

This first section presents four findings related to digital role-play in enhancing vocational students' speaking skills. In the first findings, the researcher indicates that both high-achieving and low-achieving students report feelings of happiness and low-stress levels when the teachers utilize digital roleplay in the teaching-learning process. They are happy because they believe that it can make vocational students practice and enhance their English speaking skills. Moreover, by utilizing digital role-play in the classroom, they are able to experience what it is like to communicate with foreigners.

"I feel happy because I can interact with my friends and it feels like talking with foreigners."

Student 2 (High-achieving)

However, student 1 (HA) noted that he experiences some difficulty whenever the teacher employs digital role-playing. Since the teacher assigns the vocational students tasks to make a recording video of role-playing. Nevertheless, he discovered that role-playing generates his happiness because it helps him enhance his English speaking skills.

"I feel a little bit struggle because we need to make a video and record it. But then, I feel happy because I can train my speaking using English." Student 1 (High-achieving)

Second finding revealed that both high- and low-achieving students have expressed that they experience challenges while participating in digital role-play activities. The researcher found that, the majority of their challenges are related to pronunciation and difficulty comprehending the meaning of the sentence.

"My first struggle are I still lack in pronunciation and accuracy when speaking. Then I need to teach my friend that still has pronunciation with a local accent."

Student 1 (HA)

"My difficulty is when I remembering the sentence during role-play."

Student 4 (LA)

Based on the excerpts, student 1 (HA) additionally stated his struggle when he has to teach his friends because the majority of them still have local accents that influence their pronunciation while they are digital role-playing. Therefore, it is essential for him to teach his friends the proper pronunciation and proper accent.

Following interviews with four participants, the researcher noted that all of the vocational students received a significant amount of experience through the utilization of digital role-play during teaching and learning process. A variety responses were provided by high- and low-achieving students concerning their experiences with the use of digital role-play in the classroom.

"Yes, I gained experiences such as making role-play video and also learning some materials like offering & suggestion."

Student 2 (HA)

"Yes, I got experience by learning materials that I didn't know before."

Student 3 (LA)

According to the excepts, both student 2 (HA) and student 3 (LA) reportedly received a significant amount of experience in the utilization of digital role-play. Student 2 (HA) remarked that he is gaining new experiences in making a recorded video of role-play and he able to expand his materials that the teacher provides. In accordance with student 2 (HA), student 3 (LA) also got experience in learning new materials that he didn't know before.

In the fourth finding, it was determined that four of the participants were in agreement that digital role-play is suitable for the material that was provided by the teacher. The researcher noted that they provided a variety of reasons why digital role-playing is appropriate to the material.

"It is appropriate with the material because we get to learn new vocabulary in English. Besides, it's also useful because since it helps us practice our pronunciation in the correct one."

Student 1 (HA)

"Very suitable, because I prefer learning the material through role-play practice rather than writing on the board."

Student 2 (HA)

In accordance with the excerpts, student 1 expressed agreement that digital role-play is appropriate with the materials since it allows him to acquire English vocabulary and it also provides him with the opportunity to practice related the correct pronunciation. As following student 2, noted that he found that digital role-playing is great option and he prefer to participate in practical activities such as role-playing in the digital rather than writing on the board for the learning activities.

The Benefits of Digital Role-Play

In the second section, it presents three findings related to digital role-play in enhancing vocational students' speaking skills. The fifth finding shows that both high- and low-achieving students believed that the application of digital role-play made them more enthusiastic in learning English. High-achieving students mentioned that they feel excited because they are able to identify their errors in sentences and expand their vocabulary. Subsequently low-achieving students responded the same way that they were also excited since it can enhance their vocabulary.

"Yes, because I can expand my knowledge and my English vocabulary increased."

Student 3 (LA)

Additionally, Student 4 mentioned that he feels challenged in learning English because of using digital role-play.

"Yes, because I feel more challenged when learning English using digital role-play.

Student 4 (LA)

According to the interview results, the majority of the vocational claimed that digital role-play can help them enhance their English speaking skills. Both high-achieving and low-achieving students have noted that can help them practice speaking English and understanding the meaning of certain contexts.

"Yes, because it can helps practices me and my friends to speak in English."

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Student 1 (HA)

On the other hand, one of the low-achieving students stated that digital role-play has not facilitated him in enhancing speaking English. The reason is that he continued to struggle with understanding a few while vocabularies while doing the digital role-play.

"Not yet, because there are still a few vocabularies that I didn't understand."

The last finding showed that both high- and low-achieving students remarked digital role-play assisted them in enhancing English speaking skills. The reasons why it can assist them are because it can increase their vocabulary, especially specific vocabulary that is related to their major. Additionally, student 1 mentioned that it can enhance his pronunciation and minimize mispronunciation.

"Yes, because previously my English was not very good, as there were some pronunciations that were wrong."

Student 1 (HA)

Discussion

In this section. The researcher analyzes the results of vocational students' perspectives on the use of digital role-play in enhancing speaking skills. The research results are utilized to support the discussion. There is a further explanation regarding the theories related to the research findings. The researcher divided the discussion into two sections: Vocational students' perspectives and the benefits of digital role-play.

Vocational Students' Perspectives'

The first section discusses vocational students' perspectives on the use digital of role-play. The researcher found that all of the vocational students with high-achieving and low-achieving feel happy when the teacher employs digital role-play in the classroom. There are several reasons why students with high-achieving and low-achieving feel happy when the teacher employs digital role-play activities in the teaching and learning process. First, the vocational students stated that they feel not stressed when they doing it. In line with (Henisah et al., 2023) the implementation of role-play to the students can make learning enjoyable and stress-free. Second, the students stated that the implementation of digital role-play made them a little struggle because they needed to make a video recording of role-play. This finding is cons with

the previous study by Ridayani & Purwanto (2024) mentioned that combining role-play with various media can help students develop English skills and more interactive. Despite of the struggle, the students feel happy because they could practice speaking using English. According to Rusgiani (2022) The utilization of role-play technique has the potential to enhance students' comprehension and motivation in the process of learning. Since the students are able to practice speaking, which allows them to develop their speaking skills.

However, during the implementation of digital role-play, both high-achieving and low-achieving vocational students encountered obstacles when they doing digital role-play. According to Wulandari et al. (2021) The students' problems when employing role-play are different from others because of their interests. One of the high-achieving vocational students mentioned that their challenge in digital role-playing is a lack of pronunciation. Along with these results, Arif et al. (2020) indicated that the students had difficulty pronouncing particular words since they were still unsure of how to pronounce them. On the other hand, low-achieving students also encountered obstacles when they digital role-played in the classroom. Low-achieving vocational students mentioned that he got problems when remembering the sentence during digital role-play. It is in line with the result of the previous study by Romadhona et al. (2023) the students found it difficult to memorize the scenario while role-playing because they could not read the word correctly.

Despite the struggle that all of the vocational students encounter, digital role-play techniques give both high- and low-achieving vocational students various experiences. It is because of the realistic and active communication when they employ digital role-play in the classroom. High-achieving students mentioned that they got an experience to do a digital role-play by making a video as an assignment. This finding is supported with the previous study by Ridayani & Purwanto (2024) that integrating role-play and multimedia technology are more effective, motivating, and provides a more realistic experience than traditional methods. Subsequently, the low-achieving students also experience new experiences by becoming aggressive characters during the digital role-play. According to Hardi et al., (2023), Role-play methods enhance students' creativity in presenting their ideas and feelings. They also indicated that students can acquire the ability to utilize language in a more various and expressive way.

According to the experience that high- and low-achieving students acquired, it indicates that digital role-play is appropriate to the material given by the teacher. Based on both high- and low-achieving students, they mentioned that digital role-play is appropriate to the material with various answers. For instance, high-achieving students stated that digital role-play is appropriate because they prefer learning the material through role-play practice rather than writing on the board. This is in line with the results from the previous study by Wicaksana et al. (2020) Role-play is exciting to be used because students were getting bored with the reading and

answering questions activities. The other low-achieving students mentioned that digital role-play is appropriate to the material because they can easily understand the material that is given by the teacher during the teaching-learning process. However, this finding is cons with the previous study by Wulandari et al. (2021) The students have problems by using role-play such as they could not master the material.

The Benefits of Digital Role-Play

The second section discusses the benefits of digital role-play. First of all, digital role-play technique makes vocational students excited in learning English. Based on the interview results on vocational students, digital role-play can make vocational students excited in learning English. They mention various answers related to their feelings towards it in learning English. For instance, high-achieving vocational students mentioned that digital role-play makes them excited because they can learn words in English that they didn't understand before. This is because, when they are doing digital role-play, the students learn new vocabulary related to their majors. This is consistent with the earlier research that was conducted by Hardi et al. (2023) they stated that role-playing encourages students to utilize various kinds of vocabulary in appropriate context, which results in enhancing their speaking fluency and expanding their vocabulary. In addition, low-achieving students also mentioned that the digital role-play technique makes them excited in learning English. The reason why they feel excited is because they feel more challenged when they are learning English using digital role-play. This finding is supported with the previous study by Lake et al. (2022), which stated that the students enjoyed performing roleplay because of its challenging nature as seen from their performance.

Secondly, digital role-play technique indicates that it can facilitate most of the vocational students in speaking English. According to the data, the majority of the vocational students believed that role-playing is an excellent method for enhancing their English speaking skills. The majority of the vocational students claimed that digital role-play can help them engage in English conversations with their classmates. For instance, high-achieving students stated that digital role-play can help in practicing English conversations with their friends. This is aligned with a previous study by Kong (2024) stated that role-play simulates real-life situations, allowing learners to communicate using English as they would in genuine social interactions. On the other hand, low-achieving students believed that digital role-play was not yet enough to enhance English speaking skills. Since there were still a few vocabulary words that they did not comprehend. However, This finding is cons with the findings in the previous study by Wulandari et al. (2021) they mentioned that role-play can makes students expanding unfamiliar vocabulary by collaborative learning.

Lastly, The application of digital role-play in the teaching and learning process turns out can assist vocational students in enhancing English speaking skills. Both high- and low-achieving students agreed that digital role-play can assist them in learning English. According to high-achieving students, the reasons role-play can assist them in learning English because they can understand specific vocabularies that are related to their major. This statement is also supported by low-achieving students statements that digital role-play helps them to understanding vocabulary words in English. These results match with the findings of a previous study that was carried out by Lestari (2020), which said that students can enhance their pronunciation and expand their vocabulary by participating in role-play activities.

All of the findings indicate that implementing the use of digital role-play activities among vocational students is advantageous to the enhancement of their speaking abilities. The vocational students are excited to participate in this digital role-play because it is an excellent opportunity for them to learn about the correct pronunciation, expand their vocabulary, and improve their digital skills abilities like making a video. However, not all students consider themselves suitable with digital role-play activities due to different learning styles.

Conclusion

In accordance with the objectives of the research, the purpose of this study is to study the perspectives of vocational students to the utilization digital of role-play. It has been proven that the employment of digital role-play in this research has a beneficial influence on vocational students. Vocational students seem to experience excitement during digital role-play activities. They indicated that participating in digital role-play activities provides various benefits and experiences that assist in the enhancement of their English speaking skills. Although they encounter various obstacles, vocational students are capable of resolving their problems. For instance, they can immediately evaluate their mistakes such as mispronunciation. Not only that, vocational students also perceive that digital role-play is a great way to facilitate their English speaking skills, as it can expand their vocabulary. Furthermore, the digitalization of roleplay through video assignments provided by the teacher stimulates more creativity among the vocational students. On the other hand, not all vocational students consider digital role-play as an effective technique for enhancing their English speaking skills due to different learning styles. Yet, digital role-play remains an appropriate technique to be implemented, as it allows most vocational students to engage in the learning process while practicing their English speaking skills.

The goals of this research were to address the preferences of vocational students, the majority of them prefer to participate in practical activities such as role-playing than concentrate on theoretical concepts. In addition, the motivations and challenges that students face when it comes to role-playing are not the primary focus of this research. As a result, the researcher suggests conducting further studies on digital role-play at other educational institutions, with more focus on the motivation and challenges faced by the students. Since it is essential to understand the students' motivation and problems regarding with digital role-play in order to enhance their English speaking skills.

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