

The Impact of Role-Playing Techniques on the Communication Skills of Junior High School Students in Ghana

*Abass Ali Hussam., Abdul-Majeed Saeed

Al-Faruq College of Education, Wenchi, Ghana

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication skills are essential for academic success and social interactions. However, many Junior High School (JHS) students in Ghana face challenges in expressing themselves in English due to linguistic limitations, personality factors, instructional approaches, and environmental influences. This study examines the impact of role-playing techniques on the communication skills of JHS students in Ghana. Using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, the study involved 30 randomly selected students from Nkwantakese D/A JHS. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and oral tests administered before and after the intervention. The study revealed that linguistic challenges, fear of ridicule, and inadequate teaching strategies significantly hinder students' ability to communicate in English. Role-play activities were implemented in a structured format; pre-role-play, role-play and post-role-play to enhance fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Findings indicated notable improvements: fluency increased by 18%, grammar by 27%, vocabulary by 32%, and pronunciation by 23%. These results suggest that role-playing is an effective pedagogical tool for improving English communication skills in JHS students. The study recommends integrating role-play into English instruction, fostering a supportive learning environment, and using multimedia resources to enhance language acquisition. Future research should explore the long-term impact of role-play on learners' communication proficiency across different age groups and educational settings.

Keyword: Role-Play, Communication Skills, Learners, Proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is a fundamental necessity in language learning, serving as the cornerstone for meaningful interaction in various aspects of life. Language acquisition is not merely about mastering linguistic content but about using the language effectively in authentic situations. Language and communication abilities are perhaps the most crucial aspects of social life, given the necessity of engaging with a diverse range of people [1]. This highlights the importance of ensuring that learners do not merely acquire theoretical knowledge of a language but develop practical communication skills. English has gained prominence as an international language and a lingua franca, facilitating global communication across different nations. In Ghana, English is institutionalized as the official language and is used extensively in governance, education, business, and administration. As such, it is a target language in Ghanaian schools, with policies like the Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Medium of Instruction (MTB-BMOI) allowing the use of local languages alongside English in early education. However, English becomes the sole medium of instruction at the junior high school level to ensure mastery of the language. It is a known fact that, target language acquisition is demonstrated by a speaker's ability to use a second language productively and meaningfully in a real communication setting. Consequently, educational policies worldwide prioritize developing students' communication skills to produce proficient English [2].

English holds significant prominence globally as an international language and lingua franca. Ghana, operates primarily on a 6-3-4-4 educational structure (Primary, Junior High, Senior High, University). Historically, Ghana's language-in-education policy has been complex and subject to considerable debate and shifts since the

colonial era, particularly concerning the medium of instruction in the initial primary years. Policies have oscillated between prioritizing Ghanaian languages and mandating English from the outset [3]. Current policies often involve a Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Medium of Instruction (MTB-BMOI) approach in the early years, aiming to leverage learners' L1 for improved knowledge acquisition [4] and a smoother transition to English, which typically becomes the sole medium of instruction by the junior high school level. The goal of target language acquisition is demonstrated by a speaker's proficiency in using a second language productively and meaningfully in real communication settings [5]. Consequently, Ghanaian educational reforms, such as the Standard-Based Curriculum and the Common Core Programme, emphasize core competencies including communication and collaboration, reflecting a commitment to enhancing learners' communicative abilities in English.

In response to the 2018 educational reforms outlined in the Education Sector Plan (2018-2030), Ghana introduced the Standard-Based Curriculum for kindergarten and primary schools in 2019 and the Common Core Programme for junior high schools in 2021[6]. These reforms emphasize core competencies, including communication and collaboration, reflecting the government's commitment to enhancing learners' communicative abilities. The curriculum includes strands like oral language, listening comprehension, English sounds, writing, and grammar, all designed to build learners' language competencies. Given that communication involves exchanging ideas, facts, feelings, and attitudes [7], it is essential to cultivate both oral and written communication skills. Oral communication, which includes verbal and non-verbal elements, is especially critical in educational settings. Verbal skills focus on spoken language use [8], while non-verbal skills encompass gestures and body language that influence communication.[9] notes that spoken communication is vital in professional settings, including meetings, interviews, and peer interactions.

Despite the emphasis on communication in the curriculum, many learners struggle with effective language use. Several factors contribute to these difficulties, including limited vocabulary, lack of self-confidence, and insufficient exposure to the language in both academic and social environments [10]. Additionally, low self-esteem and anxiety can hinder students' ability to express themselves confidently [11] as well as Interference from students' mother tongues (L1) significantly impact pronunciation and fluency in English (L2) [12]. Again, many students grapple with weak foundational linguistic backgrounds even before entering JHS. Affective factors also play a critical role; low self-esteem [13], anxiety, and a pervasive fear of ridicule [14] often deter students from practicing English, especially in classroom settings. Furthermore, instructional approaches may contribute to the problem, sometimes focusing excessively on grammar drills rather than communicative competence [15], coupled with inadequate teaching materials or insufficient exposure to the language in varied contexts [16]. Environmental factors, such as unsupportive classroom atmospheres [17] and limited opportunities to use English outside of school, further impede progress. These challenges collectively hinder students' ability to participate effectively in discussions, ask questions, and engage confidently, impacting both academic and social development [18]. These and other challenges prevent learners from effectively participating in classroom discussions, asking questions, and engaging in peer-to-peer interactions, ultimately affecting their academic and social development. Emphasizing that good communication skills foster socialization, which is crucial for personal and professional growth [19], communication is a vital 21st-century skill, alongside creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. Since spoken language plays a dominant role in daily interactions, proficiency in communication is essential for students' linguistic and social development. Recognizing this, educational policies worldwide prioritize the enhancement of students' communication skills to produce proficient English speakers [20].

Given the increasing relevance of English both within Ghana and internationally, mastering the language is imperative for academic and professional success. Without the ability to communicate effectively, English becomes an underutilized resource with diminished societal impact. Addressing learners' communication difficulties requires a structured assessment of the challenges and the implementation of practical solutions. Role-play activities present a promising strategy for improving communication skills by providing learners with opportunities to engage in realistic conversational settings. Role-play enhances language acquisition by fostering active participation, increasing confidence, and promoting contextual language use. This study aims to assess learners' communication skills, identify the factors hindering effective language use, and explore the impact of role-play activities on improving students' proficiency in English communication on the Junior High

School Students. Through this research, the effectiveness of role-play as an instructional strategy will be examined to determine its role in bridging the communication gap and equipping learners with essential language skills for real-world interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Skills

Communication is an essential aspect of human interaction and plays a significant role in various institutions, including educational settings. Scholars have proposed several interrelated definitions of communication. [21] define communication as the process of transferring knowledge, thoughts, and perceptions between individuals [22]. Similarly, [23] describes communication as comprehension, self-expression, establishing eye contact, provoking conversation, oral praise, and the use of non-verbal behavior. Communication is a purposeful process involving the exchange of factual information, feelings, ideas, and needs among individuals using common symbols [24]. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines communication as the process of expressing ideas, emotions, or providing information [25]. The common theme across these definitions is the exchange of ideas and thoughts in a meaningful manner, incorporating both verbal and non-verbal elements. Communication comprises verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal components. The verbal component refers to spoken and written language, while the non-verbal component includes gestures, facial expressions, and other mannerisms. The paraverbal component consists of tone, speed, and volume of speech [26]. Language, particularly verbal communication, requires conscious effort, as noted by [27], who highlights that communication is influenced by values, behaviors, social status, education levels, experiences, and cultural backgrounds of both speakers and listeners. In the workplace, spoken communication is essential in various forms, including conversations, interviews, meetings, and conferences [28]. Non-verbal communication also plays a crucial role in conveying meaning. [29] defines it as behavior other than spoken or written communication that represents meaning. [30] asserts that almost anything can serve as a sign, and each sign can communicate multiple meanings. [31] distinguish spoken language as a medium for conveying external information, while non-verbal codes help establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. [32] identifies five primary functions of non-verbal behavior: expressing emotions, conveying interpersonal attitudes, accompanying speech, self-presentation, and performing rituals such as greetings.

Communication skills are fundamental in language studies, particularly in English language teaching, which emphasizes the four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing [16]. Speaking is particularly crucial in practical communication, as emphasized by [33], who likens its importance to fundamental human abilities such as seeing and walking. Holtgraves [34] describes speaking as speech or utterances intended to be recognized by the listener, while Lucanus [35] argues that strong communication skills facilitate socialization and relationship-building among students. Effective communication requires both verbal and non-verbal abilities, with role-playing activities aiding in the development of these skills through the integration of dialogue, body movements, facial expressions, and gestures [36].

Factors Hindering Learners' Communication Skills

Communication skills are fundamental to academic and professional success, yet many Ghanaian basic learners face significant challenges in acquiring and developing these skills. These challenges can be categorized as verbal and non-linguistic barriers, which impact students' ability to communicate effectively. Addressing these obstacles requires a comprehensive approach that integrates pedagogical strategies, environmental adjustments, and psychological interventions. One of the primary barriers to effective communication among learners is a lack of motivation. According to Saputra [37], many students struggle with speaking tasks due to disinterest or fear of making mistakes. Motivation plays a crucial role in language acquisition, as students who lack enthusiasm often exhibit minimal participation in speaking activities. Moreover, Hashim [38] highlight the impact of limited vocabulary and low self-confidence on second language acquisition, further hindering learners' willingness to engage in verbal communication.

In addition to motivation, anxiety and self-perception significantly influence students' communication skills. Thornbury [39] discusses affective factors such as self-consciousness and emotional responses toward

speaking situations, which can either facilitate or inhibit communication. Arias Caiza [40] identifies motivation, attitude, and anxiety as critical factors in second language learning, noting that excessive anxiety leads to avoidance behaviors, while low anxiety levels may result in complacency. Azlan and Zakaria [41] assert that self-esteem is a key determinant of students' confidence in speaking, as learners with low self-esteem often hesitate to express themselves for fear of criticism. The influence of the first language on second language acquisition is another significant challenge. Harbord [42] noted that many students revert to their mother tongue both inside and outside the classroom, limiting their exposure to the target language. This phenomenon, known as language interference, affects learners' ability to develop fluency in the second language. Bahkobckh [43] suggested that frequent exposure to English media such as music, movies, and radio programs can enhance students' confidence and improve their communication skills. Additionally, effective task design incorporating interactive speaking activities can create an immersive learning environment that encourages language use.

Fluency and accuracy are key components of effective communication. [44] define accuracy as the correct use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, while fluency refers to the ability to speak at a natural pace with minimal hesitation. Many Ghanaian students struggle with both aspects, which affects their overall communication ability. Housen [45] emphasizes that fluency is not necessarily about using complex vocabulary but rather about conveying meaning effectively with simple words. Lickley [46] argues that fluency allows individuals to communicate ideas smoothly without frequent pauses, which helps prevent communication breakdowns. Environmental factors also play a significant role in shaping students' communication skills. Susanti [47] emphasizes that the learning environment, including classroom conditions and teacher-student relationships, influences language development. [48] argue that a supportive environment fosters confidence and encourages participation, whereas poor classroom conditions and rigid teaching methods can hinder language acquisition. Odiljonova [49] suggests that educators should create interactive and engaging learning spaces to enhance students' communication skills. Socio-cultural factors further influence language learning, as students from communities where English is not widely spoken may have limited opportunities to practice the language. Bersch & Lund [50] highlight the importance of integrating real-life communication scenarios into the learning process to bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical language use.

Role-Play in Language Learning

Among the various strategies used to improve communication skills, role-play is one of the most effective techniques for language acquisition. It enables learners to actively engage in contextualized communication, allowing them to practice real-life scenarios in a controlled environment. Lowenstein [51] defines role-play as a dramatic technique in which participants improvise behaviors to illustrate authentic situations, reinforcing their ability to adapt language use in different contexts. The Richards [52] describes it as acting out a character in training or therapy, highlighting its broader applications beyond language learning. Abdul Rahman [53] emphasized the role of role-play in preparing students for public communication by enhancing their confidence and fluency in spoken language. Additionally, explains that role-play enables learners to engage in realistic conversations, such as market interactions and workplace discussions, thus fostering practical language use and cultural awareness. The use of role-play in language learning is widely supported by research due to its benefits in improving verbal proficiency, enhancing critical thinking, and fostering creativity. According to Topîrceanu [54], role-play creates an interactive learning environment that enhances motivation and engagement among students. By simulating real-world interactions, learners are encouraged to actively apply vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, Zainuddin [55] argues that role-play helps develop problem-solving skills by requiring students to think on their feet, respond appropriately to conversational cues, and negotiate meaning effectively.

There are three main types of role-play: fully scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted. Fully scripted role-play involves memorizing dialogues from textbooks and is particularly suitable for beginners who need structured linguistic support [56]. Semi-scripted role-play allows students to modify conversations within a given framework, providing a balance between structure and creative expression [57]. Non-scripted role-play, in contrast, provides students with keywords or situational prompts, requiring them to construct their own

dialogues and responses. This type of role-play is ideal for intermediate to advanced learners as it fosters spontaneity and adaptability in communication. Moreover, Siew & Abdullah [58] suggest that non-scripted role-play helps students develop critical thinking and decision-making skills, as they must navigate conversations without relying on pre-written dialogue. Instructors play a crucial role in facilitating role-play activities by providing clear guidelines, relevant scenarios, and constructive feedback. According to Kaygısız [59], teachers should ensure that role-play exercises align with students' linguistic proficiency and learning objectives. Effective implementation requires careful planning, including the selection of topics that resonate with learners' interests and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, incorporating technology, such as video recordings and online simulations, can enhance the role-play experience by allowing students to review their performances and identify areas for improvement [60].

The Use of Role-Play in Language Learning

Role-play is a widely recognized technique in language learning, as it enhances both accuracy and fluency—two essential components of speaking skills [61]. It provides students with an opportunity to practice real-life communication in a controlled yet dynamic environment, making language learning more interactive and engaging. The effectiveness of role-play lies in its ability to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, allowing learners to improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, and conversational abilities in an immersive manner. Jackson [62] identifies four key aspects of role-play implementation: observation, reflection, interaction, and planning. Observation allows students to learn from their peers, identifying effective communication strategies and common mistakes. Reflection helps them assess their performance and make necessary improvements. Interaction fosters active engagement with the language, enabling students to respond spontaneously and build confidence. Finally, planning ensures that learners structure their dialogues effectively, helping them focus on coherence and fluency.

Teachers play a crucial role in guiding role-play activities by creating an authentic learning environment that promotes meaningful communication. By designing scenarios that reflect real-life situations—such as ordering food in a restaurant, conducting a job interview, or seeking medical advice—teachers help students develop the ability to use language in practical contexts. Serikovna [63] emphasizes the importance of using scripts to provide structure while allowing students the flexibility to adapt dialogues based on their understanding and creativity. This balance between structure and spontaneity ensures that learners gain confidence in their language abilities while maintaining a natural flow of conversation. Despite its advantages, role-play can present challenges, particularly in large classroom settings where managing multiple groups simultaneously may become chaotic. Saad [64] acknowledge these difficulties but assert that structured implementation, such as assigning clear roles, providing guided instructions, and setting time limits, can mitigate these challenges. Additionally, teachers can use peer assessment and feedback mechanisms to ensure that all students remain engaged and benefit from the activity.

METHODOLOGY

Research design refers to the overall plan, structure, and strategy developed to obtain answers to research questions while controlling variance [65]. Zikmund [66] defines it as a master plan specifying the methods and procedures for data collection and analysis. This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, aimed at addressing specific challenges encountered by students in the learning process. CAR is particularly effective in solving classroom-based problems, such as students' difficulties in developing speaking skills. It follows a cyclical process where the researcher identifies a problem, formulates a plan, implements the plan, observes the effects, and reflects on the results [67]. The goal of action research in education is to enhance learning quality and improve student performance [68]. CAR integrates both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. According to [69], qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of social and cultural phenomena, whereas quantitative research identifies general trends within a population.

The study was conducted at Afigya-North district, with a total student population of 114. 30 Junior High School students of Nkwantakese D/A JHS was selected using simple random sampling. A combination of qualitative and quantitative instruments was employed to ensure data validity and reliability. These included observation, interviews, and tests. The researcher observed students' communication patterns in and outside

the classroom. Key observations included the preference for using their native language, Ashanti Twi, to answer questions, reluctance to communicate in English, and a tendency to remain silent during class discussions. Interviews were conducted in focus groups of six learners to ascertain their perspectives on using English for communication. Open-ended questions facilitated an in-depth understanding of the challenges they faced.

The intervention was structured in three phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention. Prior to implementing the intervention, students were tested orally using market-related communication scenarios. The evaluation focused on fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical accuracy. Scores were recorded to establish a baseline for measuring improvement. The intervention followed a structured roleplay strategy, divided into three stages: before roleplay, during roleplay, and after roleplay. Before the roleplay, students selected the setting (a local market scene) and characters (food sellers, buyers, and passersby). They discussed potential dialogues and interactions, using semi-scripted roleplay to provide a basic conversational framework while allowing flexibility for natural speech. Registers commonly used in market transactions were introduced and explained. During roleplay, students performed their roles with minimal teacher intervention. To ensure engagement and prevent fatigue, the activity was limited to 15–20 minutes. Despite occasional disruptions, teacher support and peer feedback helped maintain motivation. After role play, students engaged in reflective discussions based on recorded performances. Peer and teacher feedback facilitated self-assessment and recognition of areas for improvement. The recordings provided learners with an opportunity to analyze their own communication styles and identify progress areas. On the final day of the intervention, students underwent another oral test, similar to the pre-intervention assessment, to evaluate improvements in fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Scores were recorded to measure progress.

Both pre- and post-intervention assessments were scored using four categories: fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Each category carried a maximum score of 25, with deductions made for errors.

- **Fluency:** Assessed based on the ease of conversation and the ability to express five different responses appropriately.
- **Grammar:** Evaluated based on subject-verb agreement and tense usage.
- **Vocabulary:** Measured by the use of contextually appropriate words and expressions.
- **Pronunciation:** Assessed through the correct articulation of words used in the roleplay context.

Data analysis was conducted using percentage tables to identify factors affecting learners' communication skills. Percentage differences between pre- and post-intervention scores were calculated to assess the effectiveness of the roleplay strategy in improving learners' communication abilities.

DISCUSSIONS

Write conclusion and recommendation from the below analysis in a paragraph form as well as the study implication for future study. The primary aim of this study is to examine learners' communication skills, identify the challenges impeding their ability to use English for real-life communication, and analyze the impact of role-play activities in addressing these challenges. A sample size of thirty (30) learners participated in the study, with data collected through observations, interviews, and tests. The data was analyzed using tables and percentages

Factors Hindering the Improvement of Learners' Communication Skills

One of the key research questions sought to determine the factors affecting the communication skills of learners at Nkwantakese D/A JHS. Table 1 below presents the findings from the interviews conducted with the participants. During the interviews, learners were asked to identify the factors that hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. They were also given the opportunity to rate these factors based on their level of impact. Linguistic features, including vocabulary and grammatical structures, were identified as the most significant barrier to effective communication. All participants acknowledged that they struggled with selecting appropriate vocabulary and applying correct grammatical structures in conversations. This was further confirmed through observations, where learners exhibited difficulty in determining suitable tenses and

structures for specific contexts. (20) students must master accuracy and fluency, with accuracy referring to the correct use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The findings of this study align with this assertion, as 29% of learners indicated that linguistic challenges were a major hindrance to their communication skills. Personality factors, such as fear and anxiety, were the second most reported challenge. Twenty-five (25) out of thirty (30) learners stated that they refrained from using English in crowded areas like classrooms or canteens due to fear of ridicule. This aligns with Brown's assertion that affective factors, including motivation, attitude, and anxiety, influence second-language acquisition. Zakaria in his accession to the topic as mentioned earlier, further support this by stating that low self-esteem can lead to a lack of confidence in one's ability to communicate. Approximately 24% of learners cited personality factors as a major hindrance to their communication skills. Instructional methods and materials also emerged as a significant factor affecting learners' communication abilities, with 19% of respondents identifying this as a challenge. Learners reported difficulties arising from how they were taught and the materials used in their English language instruction. Susikaran argued that speaking has been undervalued in English language instruction, often reduced to drills and memorization of dialogues. Zhang also suggests that frequent exposure to English through music, movies, radio, and multimedia platforms can enhance language skills. The study confirms that ineffective teaching methods and materials contribute significantly to learners' struggles with English communication. Environmental factors were identified by 17% of learners as a hindrance to their communication skills. Similarly, a tense classroom atmosphere and lack of motivation were cited as barriers to language acquisition. Language shift, the incorporation of a non-native language, was another factor affecting learners' communication skills. In Ghana, English is the official language, yet many learners struggle to transition from their native language to English. The influence of the first language often interferes with English communication. Interference is a primary reason why students fail to develop fluency [70]. The study found that 11% of learners experienced difficulties due to language shift.

Table 1: Factors Affecting Learners' Communication Skills

Factors	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Language Shift	12	11
Linguistic Features (Grammar/Vocabulary)	30	29
Personality Factors (Fear/Anxiety)	25	24
Environmental Factors	18	17
Instructional Factors (Methods/Materials)	20	19
Total	105	100%

Effect of Learners' Communication Skills on Their Learning

Another research question sought to determine the impact of learners' communication skills on their overall learning experience. Table 2 below presents the responses from learners regarding their participation in peer discussions and classroom interactions. The findings revealed that majority (77%) of the respondents indicated that poor communication skills significantly affect learners' engagement in classroom activities. Furthermore, 70% of the respondents confirmed that limited English proficiency discourages students from participating in peer discussions and answering questions. This suggests that improving communication skills positively impacts classroom interactions and overall learning outcomes

Table 2: Effect of Communication Skills on Learning

Questions	Yes	No
Do you avoid peer discussions due to inability to speak English?	70%	30%
Do you avoid answering questions in class due to poor communication skills?	77%	23%

Effect of Role-Play Activities on Learners' Communication Skills

To assess the impact of role-play activities on learners' communication skills, a test was administered before and after an intervention. The test consisted of four sections—fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation—each scored out of 25 marks. Table 3 presents the results. The findings revealed a significant

improvement in learners' communication skills following the role-play intervention. Fluency improved by 18%, grammar by 27%, vocabulary by 32%, and pronunciation by 23%. This confirms that role-play activities effectively enhance English communication skills. Saad and Mansor highlighted that role-playing allows learners to use the target language in a non-threatening environment, facilitating improved fluency and confidence. Similarly, [71] asserted that role-play introduces new language functions and strengthens learners' vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. Lindsay & Knight [72] emphasize the need for extensive practice, encouragement, and corrections to achieve fluency. Role-play, combined with word cards, significantly enhances oral proficiency, grammatical accuracy, articulation, and vocabulary [73].

Table 3: Effect of Role-Play on Communication Skills

Criteria (25 Marks Each)	Scores Before Intervention	Scores After Intervention	Score Difference	Percentage (%) Difference
Fluency	15	19	4	18
Grammar	10	16	6	27
Vocabulary	8	15	7	32
Pronunciation	7	12	5	23
Total	40	62	22	100

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings indicated that poor communication skills significantly hinder learners' classroom engagement and participation in peer discussions. However, role-play activities proved to be an effective intervention, leading to notable improvements in fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Based on these findings, it is recommended that educators integrate role-play exercises into English language instruction to create an interactive and supportive learning environment. Additionally, teaching methods should be tailored to enhance learners' confidence, with a focus on vocabulary development, grammar accuracy, and frequent exposure to English through multimedia resources. Schools should also encourage a more inclusive and motivating classroom atmosphere to reduce anxiety and fear associated with speaking English. Future research should explore the long-term impact of role-play activities on communication skills, assessing their effectiveness across different proficiency levels and age groups.

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