



Improving the Speaking Ability of Children with Speech Delay Using Role-Play Methods in Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the low speaking ability of early childhood students who experience delays in language development. One of the approaches used to address this issue is the role-playing method, as it provides space for children to express themselves verbally through enjoyable and imaginative activities.

This study is a Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted collaboratively in two cycles, each consisting of three meetings. The subjects of this research were three Group B children in an early childhood education institution who showed delays in speech development. Data collection techniques involved observation and documentation of children's activities.

The results of the implementation show a significant improvement in the children's speaking ability after the application of the role-playing method. The children appeared more confident, more willing to express ideas verbally, and more capable of forming simple sentences better than before. Thus, the role-playing method can be an effective alternative learning approach to support language development in children with speech delay.

INTRODUCTION

The period between birth and six years of age is the most formative stage for a child's physical, mental, and social development. Observing the surrounding environment helps children develop their auditory and visual senses during this period. Children's tendency to observe, listen, and talk about everything they see and hear is a strong indicator of who they are as learners in early childhood. Children often express their curiosity through speaking; however, each child's speaking ability varies. Some children exhibit strong communication skills, while others experience delays in speech development. When a child's communication and speaking abilities are still developing, they may become slow to speak.

Young children who experience speech delay often face challenges in optimally developing their speaking abilities. According to Sari & Sujono (2018), communication skills are essential for children to interact with their surroundings, learn, and build social relationships. A child's speech development can be stimulated through simple activities. Speech delay can hinder a child's overall development.

Children with speech delay often experience developmental barriers due to limited communication skills with the people around them. This lack of communication may lead to low confidence when interacting with others and their environment. Therefore, engaging and stimulating activities are needed to develop their communication skills, in addition to the stimulation they receive at home. In schools, one enjoyable method introduced to support children's development is the role-playing method.

Role-playing with peers is an excellent way for children to practice speaking with one another and strengthen their social skills. Students' imagination and emotions can be stimulated through role-play activities, helping them gain a deeper understanding of learning materials. This activity encourages children to develop their imagination and self-awareness as they act out fictional characters (Hamdayama, 2017). Through this method, observational skills, application abilities, and communication skills can be improved (Lufri et al., 2020).

The use of role-playing as a strategy to enhance children's verbal language abilities has been previously explored by Nuryati & Rengganis (2022), who found that role-play activities support improvements in children's speaking skills. In addition, research by Muliwana and Kautsar (2022) showed that role-playing helps children interact with peers and gradually increase their vocabulary.

Based on observations in a kindergarten environment, several children in Kindergarten Group A were identified as experiencing speech delays, with unclear word pronunciation. Out of 15 children in the class, three were found to have difficulties in speaking. Learning activities conducted previously involved the use of pictures or storybooks in a one-way instructional format. Therefore, the researcher introduced role-play activities, allowing students to actively participate so that they could practice speaking directly with their peers.

In light of the issues described above, the purpose of this study is to determine whether and how role-playing can help young children with speech delays develop their verbal communication skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Delay

One definition of speaking is the ability to use one's voice to express oneself to an audience (Rahmayanti, Nawawi, & Quro, 2017:22). Speaking, as stated by Tarigan (2015:3), is viewed as one of the essential elements of communication. Speaking means communicating with others in a manner they can understand, whether it involves ideas, thoughts, feelings, or one's inner expressions. According to Ani (2020), an individual's ability to articulate ideas, thoughts, and emotions through speech is a key component of effective communication. A speaker's ability to convey meaning depends on several factors, including language skills, psychological aspects, and the social environment. Ani (2020) also explains that speaking skills can be developed through continuous practice, such as increasing vocabulary, paying attention to sentence structure, and training intonation and expression during speech. In addition, environmental factors and social interaction play an important role in enhancing an individual's speaking ability.

Role-Playing

Children, especially those in their early years, regularly engage in play. Play is an integral part of learning in various educational settings, including early childhood education. For children, play is not merely an activity; it is also a learning process. Besides supporting their growth, children enjoy participating in various activities. The idea that play is essential for child development reinforces this understanding. When children play, they use their imagination and physical abilities to create something new, whether playing individually or with others. According to Scott G. Eberle (2014:219), play encompasses aspects of intelligence, competence, pretend-play, imagination, competition, and joy – each representing selected elements from a broad spectrum of meaningful paradoxes.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), specifically a collaborative CAR design. One key characteristic of action research is its implementation within the classroom setting. Suhardjono (2020, p. 57) states, "Based on the objectives of action research, CAR is a part of action research with a specific purpose related to classroom instruction." Classroom Action Research is recognized as a form of research conducted directly in the classroom, as noted by Suharsimi (2020, p. 2).

RESEARCH RESULT

This study, which consisted of two cycles with three sessions in each cycle, demonstrates that the role-playing approach effectively helps preschool children with speech delay improve their speaking abilities. This is evidenced by a significant increase in speaking-skill assessment scores from the pre-cycle stage

to the third meeting of Cycle II, where children's performance progressed from the category of "emerging with assistance" to "emerging" more independently.

Several factors explain why role-play successfully supported children with speech delay in enhancing their speaking skills:

1. Role-Playing Encourages Children to Use Language Actively

During role-play activities, children are able to express ideas, engage in conversations, and use their voices in various ways. Through these activities, vocabulary use and sentence structuring are practiced in real-life contexts. This aligns with Sujiono's (2011) view that role-playing enables children to articulate thoughts and emotions through organized verbal discourse.

In the findings of this study, children such as H, B, and K demonstrated improvements across indicators of language comprehension, language expression, and the use of language in social contexts after participating in structured and enjoyable role-play activities.

2. Role-Play Situations Make Children Feel Safe and Motivated to Speak

Children with speech delay often become passive or hesitant to communicate due to anxiety or previous negative experiences. In a role-play context, they do not feel as if they are being "interviewed" or "tested"; instead, they feel engaged in an imaginative and non-threatening environment. This is consistent with Lev Vygotsky's theory (as cited in Berk & Winsler, 1995), which states that social interaction within play contributes significantly to children's language development.

The researcher observed that subject H, who initially struggled to produce sounds, began speaking spontaneously when acting as a painter and a firefighter. This indicates that natural, play-based approaches can reduce emotional barriers and enhance children's confidence to communicate.

3. Role-Playing Provides a Real Context for Communication

In role-playing activities, children do not merely repeat or memorize words; instead, they speak according to the character, tools, and situations they directly experience. For example, when acting as heroes, children were invited to mix colors as part of a "rescue mission" and then verbally explain the results. Such activities strengthen the connection between concrete experiences and verbal expression, thereby enhancing the meaningful use and functionality of the child's language.

This aligns with Piaget's perspective (as cited in Santrock, 2008), which explains that children learn language more effectively when activities involve sensorimotor engagement, direct exploration, and meaningful contexts. The increase in language expression scores and social language use in this study serves as evidence of the effectiveness of this approach.

4. The Presence of Social Support and Two-Way Interaction

During role-play activities, the teacher not only provides instructions but also engages in active, dialogic interaction with the children—offering praise, guiding them as they speak, and giving them time to respond. Children also communicate with their peers during role enactments. This support acts as an

important stimulus that encourages children with speech delay to speak more confidently.

As explained by Hurlock (2000), consistent and meaningful social interaction can enhance motivation and expand children's vocabulary. Observations in this study revealed that children produced more utterances when given adequate time, a safe environment, and positive responses from those around them.

These findings reinforce previous studies and align with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter II. As described:

- According to Dwi Retnaningsih (2011), role-playing contributes to children's language development.
- Dadan Suryana (2021) emphasizes that role-playing involves the introduction of new vocabulary for early childhood learners, making it one of the effective methods to enhance their speaking abilities.
- Nuryati (2022) stated that speaking skills are vital in human life, and enjoyable learning methods such as role-playing attract children's interest to communicate.

Therefore, there is strong theoretical support for the benefits of play in language development, and the improved observation scores reinforce the effectiveness of the role-playing strategy in enhancing the speaking skills of children with speech delay.

Research Limitations

This study aimed to improve the speaking abilities of early childhood learners with speech delay through the implementation of the role-playing method. However, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. Limited Number of Research Subjects

This study involved only three children identified as having speech delay. This small sample size is insufficient for generalizing the findings to the broader population of early childhood learners with similar challenges. The results are more characteristic of a case study and specific to the individual traits of the participating children.

2. Short Duration of Implementation

The study was conducted over a relatively short period, consisting of only two cycles with three sessions each. This limited timeframe does not allow for the observation of long-term changes in speaking ability, meaning the long-term impact of the role-playing method remains uncertain.

3. Diverse Individual Factors Among Children

Children's speech development is influenced by various factors, such as the severity of the speech delay, personality traits, family background, and the intensity of home stimulation. In this study, external factors such as parental support and the home environment were not deeply controlled or examined, which may have influenced the effectiveness of the intervention.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the two cycles of classroom action research lead to the following conclusions:

1. **The process of improving the speaking skills of children with speech delay through the role-playing method occurs gradually and systematically.**

The implementation of role-playing activities was carried out using various interesting and child-relevant roles, such as shopkeeper, hero, painter, and firefighter. Activities were organized systematically through stages of introduction, core activities, breaks, and closing, and were adjusted to the needs of children with speech delay. This approach provided opportunities for children to practice speaking in a joyful, pressure-free environment. Observations showed that in each session, there was a progressive increase in speaking ability scores – from “emerging with assistance” to “emerging independently.”

2. **The role-playing method is proven effective in improving the speaking skills of children with speech delay in kindergarten.**

From the pre-cycle to Cycle I and subsequently Cycle II, all indicators of speaking skills increased based on observational findings. The three subjects demonstrated improvements in language comprehension, language expression, use of language in social contexts, and other aspects supporting verbal communication. As a result, role-playing may serve as an engaging and instructive alternative to traditional speech therapy approaches for children with speech difficulties.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of this study, several important implications arise in the context of early childhood education, particularly for children experiencing speech delay:

1. **Implications for Early Childhood Teachers (PAUD Teachers)**

Teachers play a strategic role in identifying and supporting children with speech delay. This research indicates that the role-playing method can be an effective and applicable instructional strategy to support language development in children with speech delay. Teachers need to actively design contextual and appealing role-playing activities aligned with children’s interests to encourage natural verbal expression during play.

2. **Implications for Early Childhood Education Institutions (Kindergarten / PAUD Centers)**

Early childhood institutions need to provide adequate facilities and time for role-playing activities within daily learning programs. The findings of this study show that interactive and enjoyable learning approaches, such as role-playing, positively affect children’s communication abilities. Therefore, curricula

and lesson planning should allocate more space for role-playing activities as part of strengthening children's language development.

3. Implications for Parents

Parents, as primary educators at home, can utilize role-playing as a medium to stimulate the speaking skills of children with speech delay. Through simple role-playing activities conducted at home, parents can help children learn new vocabulary, express ideas, and practice verbal interaction. This study provides evidence that enjoyable, non-pressuring methods are more effective than forced verbal practice, which may create psychological barriers.

4. Implications for Future Researchers

This study may serve as an initial reference for researchers who wish to develop learning models for children with speech delay. Future studies are encouraged to expand the number of subjects and the research setting, as well as explore other forms of play-based methods. Further research may also investigate the influence of visual media, assistive technologies, or integration with other fields such as music or art to support children's speaking development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study results and field findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For Early Childhood Teachers (PAUD Teachers)

Teachers are encouraged to use the role-playing method regularly and with variation during learning activities, especially for children experiencing speech delay. Teachers should create an enjoyable, non-pressuring atmosphere and model appropriate language during role-playing so that children feel motivated to speak naturally.

2. For Future Researchers

Since the sample size and duration of this study were limited, future researchers should refine the findings by expanding the sample size, extending the duration of the study, and integrating role-playing with technology, media, or other sensory-based techniques.

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