Teaching Speech Acts in EFL Classroom: The Effect of Role Play in Developing Learners' Fluency and Confidence Among 8th Grade

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

ABSTRACT   **Original Research Article**

Grounded in Speech Act Theory and sociocultural perspectives on language learning, this study investigates the impact of illocutionary speech-act–based role-play instruction on speaking fluency and self-confidence among Palestinian eighth-grade EFL learners. Despite the centrality of speaking competence in communicative language pedagogy, classroom practices in many EFL contexts, including Palestinian schools, continue to prioritize grammatical accuracy and rote memorization over pragmatic functionality and spontaneous interaction. This imbalance often results in learners' limited ability to perform context-appropriate speech acts and to communicate with fluency and confidence. Adopting a qualitative quasi-experimental design, the study involved 33 eighth-grade students in a structured instructional intervention that integrated explicit speech-act instruction with scaffolded and creative role-play activities. Data were collected through diagnostic and achievement speaking tests, teacher observation rubrics assessing fluency, pragmatic appropriateness, and confidence, audio recordings, and reflective field notes. Findings revealed substantial improvements in learners' oral performance across three interrelated domains: (1) increased fluency characterized by reduced hesitation, improved turn-taking, and enhanced prosodic control; (2) strengthened self-confidence evidenced by clearer voice projection, improved body language, and heightened willingness to participate; and (3) greater pragmatic appropriateness reflected in more accurate and socially acceptable use of requests, apologies, compliments, and refusals. The results underscore the pedagogical value of integrating pragmatically grounded role-play tasks within middle-school EFL curricula to foster interactional competence and reduce speaking anxiety. The study contributes to instructed interlanguage pragmatics research by contextualizing speech act pedagogy within the Palestinian EFL setting, offering both theoretical enrichment and practical implications for communicative curriculum reform.

Keywords: Speech Act Theory, Role-Play Instruction, Speaking Fluency, EFL Pedagogy, Interactional Competence, Palestinian EFL Context.

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Introduction

Language is one of the most vital ways by which people from anywhere in the world can successfully accomplish a communication. According to Aitchison (2003), "language also helps in revealing emotions and expressing ideas and thoughts" when people communicate with each other. which implies that languages can be used for various functions, not only for ordinary conversations, like primates, humans always need and are able to convey their emotions, such as screaming, gestures, grunts, and express happiness, etc. Dobrovolsky and others (1989) declared that "language is a system," which means that a language can be used as a channel through which thoughts can be expressed, a vehicle for literacy forms, a social medium, a subject for political

issues, and a factor in building nations. Furthermore, language is a very important tool that enables humans to learn and cope with changing situations; it also helps in making any communication possible (Poole, 1999).

Within language, there are various systems and structures; according to some beliefs, these systems tend to be in some way complicated, and these complications occur due to the complexity of the wide range of components and words within a specific language. To be able to use any language, people have to be familiar with four main units: sound, word, sentence, and meaning. Linguists tend to study and comprehend each unit from the aforementioned ones, which goes under a certain field. First, phonetics, which concerns how sounds are articulated. Second, morphology, which deals with words and their internal structure. Third, the field that examines sentence form. Fourth, but not the last, is semantics, which investigates meaning. Besides all of these items for having a successful communication, there is another vital element that is called pragmatics.

Pragmatics is defined as the study of how the context, speaker intention, and receiver interpretation affect the meaning of the language, rather than the literal interpretation of words alone. According to Yale (1996), pragmatics is "the main concentration is on the speaker's meaning, not on the words or pieces of isolated sentences." This shows that pragmatics is mainly concerned with how speakers use language in unexpected ways that make meaning unrelated to the linguistic knowledge alone (Aitchison, 2003). On the other hand, it means how the receiver gets the intended meaning from the discourse. This goes with what Fromkin et al (2017) defined pragmatics, "the study of how circumstances and context play a role in the meaning of language". Pragmatics is a huge field that includes many items, one of these items are speech acts.

By tracking the history of speech acts, the theories about speech acts were initiated from the lectures that J.L Austin delivered, which were thereafter codified into a book called "How to Think with Words". The first publication was after his death in 1962. Austin stated that sometimes, when people utter an utterance, they may not describe something. Instead, by uttering utterances, they indeed do something.

Speech acts are those utterances that perform actions such as asking, answering, apologizing, giving commands, refusing, and making compliments, etc. Yule (1996) found that when people say something, they not only use language out of the blue to speak, but also, when they utter specific utterances, they actually have a force and intention, and these utterances will definitely affect the reaction of the receiver.

Speech acts are divided into three main dimensions. According to Grundy (2008), when people say anything, they indeed involve all of these types or at least one of them, which are locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts.

a. Locutionary acts.

It is the basic element among the three; it refers to the condition that an utterance must be grammatically correct with comprehensible vocabulary. Yule (1996), in his book, stated that in order to perform a successful locutionary act, both speaker and hearer have to share the same language; otherwise, the intended meaning will be misunderstood.

b. Illocutionary acts.

Sometimes, we do not just produce well-formed utterances with no purpose, but we form an utterance with some kind of function in mind. Yule (1996:48) said that an illocutionary act is performed via the communicative force of an utterance. For example, when saying "it is dark in this room", it may indicate an implied request to turn the lights on.

c. Perlocutionary acts.

The speaker utters specific talk to influence the receiver/s. affecting is not conditionally used to make people do physical acts; it also may deal with changing thoughts, feelings, etc., or so-called perlocutionary acts. For instance, when someone says to his friend, "I've run out of cash", that may be an indirect request to make his friend lend him some money.

The item speech acts involve other theories, such as the performative verbs theory, IFDs theory (Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices), felicity conditions, speech acts classification, direct vs. indirect speech acts, and so on.

Speech acts primarily deal with speakers' utterances when people say something. In his masterpiece (How We Do Things with Words), Austin (1962) claimed that speech acts theory is grounded upon performative and constative distinctions. Performatives are the utterances that represent an action by the uttered words; on the other hand, constatives are those utterances that are either true or false. He asserted that illocutionary speech acts are divided into five major parts, which deal with the illocutionary force: a) Verdictive, b) Exclusive, c) Commissives, d) Behabitives, e) Expositive.

Even though Austin's classification of illocutionary speech acts and the landmark contributions to the development of speech acts theory, his categories seemed to have some weaknesses. Searle (1979) declared that Austin's classification has points of weakness; as a result, he proposed another substitute categorization based on three factors: a) Illocutionary point, b) Direction of fit, and c) Sincerity condition expressed. Sreale (1979) stated that there are five types of illocutionary speech acts.

A. Assertiveness: The importance of assertive or so-called performative lies in obligating the speaker to be truthful about what is said. It is also a direction of fit, either words fit the world, or downgrade direction. Searle stated that this type of illocutionary act can be judged to be true or false, because they express speakers' beliefs. Assertiveness includes many kinds, such as statements, complaints, boasts, conclusions, and deductions.

B. Directives: Directive acts look to get the receiver to perform the act. The direction of fit in this type is the world to words, or what is called the upgrade direction. In this matter, the hearer acts according to what the speaker desires or wants, and the sincerity aspect is conveyed by the speaker's wants. Searle has set various categories of directive acts, such as command, ask, order, beg, entreat, pray, etc.

C. Commissives: This type primarily aims to commit the speaker to performing future actions. The direction of fit is typically the same as directives, which is from world to words or upgrade direction. This indicates that the act is successfully achieved if the speaker fulfills the promise. Sincerity, or the psychological state, is noticed when the action is indeed fulfilled with the intention to do.

D. Expressive: The main idea in this aspect is that the speaker expresses his psychological state with sincerity, such as expressing regret or being sorry when being late for a specific affair. This type has no direction of fit, because its aim is to express a person's feelings or attitude, not to words, to change the world or otherwise. Expressive illocutionary acts include various types of verbs, for example, condoling, congratulating, deploring, and so forth.

E. Declaratives: Even though Searle has not clearly stated the point of the declarative act's illocutionary act, he mentioned that for a declarative act to be successful, it must subject the current state to change. For example, when a judge said to a guilty person, "I sentence you to be guilty". The direction of fit for this type can be both an upgrade and a downgrade direction. In other words, there is an assertive declarative in which the speaker assures in advance the declaration that is going to be true and change reality.

After delineating the outlines of pragmatics and speech acts classification, it is important to illustrate how these items can be incorporated and effectively improve learners' awareness of pragmatics in the EFL classrooms. In consequence, pragmatic competence demands that learners use functional language for social aspects; they need to be exposed through such opportunities to experience and perform various speech act modes rather than only recognize them theoretically. Role- play considered to be one of the most important teaching strategies that supplies a feasible bridge that successfully connect theoretical material with practical performance that relates to real- life contexts in order to help learners comprehend effectively.

Such a method not only enables learners to perform and experience pragmatic competence, but also promotes improving their fluency and confidence to participate and engage in such performative contexts without fears to make errors.

The practical aspect of using functional language for real-life situations, especially role play that evolved as an effective instructional method for enhancing speaking competence, particularly for enabling EFL learners to handle social demands. Ladousse (2020), stated that using simulated intercommunication contexts, including role- play, learners have the opportunity to gain sufficient background for practicing using different social and professional contexts. Through situational exchanges, learners have the chance to improve fluency and personality to be courageous to participate, that strengthen their confidence, which is necessary particularly for speaking skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2019). In agreement, Thornbury (2021) declared that meaningful interaction can mostly improve fluency rather than structured drills, which is performed by incorporating role- play activities with classroom material.

The most significant advantage of role- play is that it highly affects and enhance speaking skills, including accuracy, fluency, and pragmatic competence. Zhang & Cheng (2021) summarized that participating in interactive role play tasks fosters the awareness of turn- taking, polite negotiations that are vital elements for effective communication. In the same line, Alonso & Graham (2023) noted that Role-play also improves students' adaptability to diverse roles and prepares them to communicate effectively with different audiences in various professional or social settings.

Various research has shown that actively engaging in group learning with role- play settings indeed positively affected language fluency. For example, Ellis (2020) believed that role- play not only can connect authentic material with daily communication, but it also has the ability to help learners in overcoming anxiety and build self- confidence. Furthermore, Larsen- Freeman & Anderson (2022) stated that role- play inspires learners to experience language by practicing various types of speech acts, which IN turn helps them in developing pragmatic competence. Consequently, role-play is a critical and transformational pedagogy that enables students to handle the complicated demands of our communicative world.

Although speaking is an important skill, EFL learners in middle grades still struggle with accuracy and fluency. Brown & Yule (1983) stated that many learners consider speaking the most challenging skill, mainly because the classroom focus is on accuracy over meaningful interaction. In Palestinian schools, 8th-grade learners' exposure is limited to activities in the authentic curriculum, structured drills, memorized dialogues, and teacher-student (IRF) exchanges. Richard (2008) criticized traditional teaching methods, arguing that leaving learners hesitant and lacking fluency does not prepare them for real-life communication.

One main obstacle is the lack of pragmatic awareness due to limited instruction. Most learners cannot perform simple speech acts such as apologizing, asking questions, or giving appropriate responses in real-life situations. Kasper & Rose (2002) found that pragmatic competence "is not an automatic evolutionary process"; instead, it develops gradually with instruction and practice through meaningful interaction.

Similarly, Taguchi (2015) noted that learners need ongoing exposure to varied, context-based communication to improve fluency. Without enough training, Palestinian learners will continue to struggle to express their ideas and thoughts confidently and fluently in English.

As a speech acts- based teaching pedagogy, role play has been highly recommended as an effective method for minimizing such weaknesses and a powerful tool for filling the aforementioned gap with difficulty in expressing ideas for Palestinian learners by supplying students with a suitable environment to practice, handling challenging contexts in order to improve their communicative competence. Much empirical research has been conducted to find out how role play can be used for such aims. Littlewood (1983) confirmed that "role play exercises can constructively enable learners to use language creatively and fluently to talk about their points of view or share opinions and thoughts". Regardless of the fact that the role-play instruction technique has an important role in the educational process, it hasn't received enough attention from Palestinian research. It is also rarely incorporated in EFL classrooms, particularly in the middle-class stages. Consequently, this study aims to examine and fill the gap by supplying an effective, pragmatically based speaking activity, especially the role play instruction method, seeking to improve fluency and confidence among 8th-grade learners. Owing to the limited investigations about such a vital aspect, this research scrutinizes whether merging role play activities can actually prepare learners with enough knowledge to speak more fluently, react more appropriately, and perform with demonstrating greater self- assurance.

Research Questions

Main Research Question

1. To what degree does implementing illocutionary speech act-based role-play enhance fluency and confidence among 8th-grade Palestinian learners?

Sub-Questions

1. How can speech act grounded role play activities impact learners' fluency in terms of effortlessness?
2. How can speech act role play, rooted role play affect learners' confidence when communicating with others?
3. How can learners react to various speech act-based role-play activities such as requesting, making compliments, greeting, etc.?

Objectives of the Study

1. To figure out how speech act grounded role play can leverage 8th-grade learners' fluency and confidence.
2. To investigate the techniques through which role-play creative activities can boost learners' speaking fluency in terms of effortlessness.
3. To determine the way that can help improve students' confidence to engage without hesitation.

4. To analyze the style of learners' reaction towards various types of illocutionary speech acts, including role play.

Significance of the Study

Theoretical Significance

Pragmatics is a highly observant field for many aspects of human life. In the light of EFL instruction, it was one of the foundational topics to investigate for many theorists, particularly on how pragmatic instruction, including speech acts-based role-play activities, can influence the ability to perform different illocutionary utterances fluently with higher self- assurance among EFL learners. Kasper & Rose (2002) pointed out that such competence is not a matter of theories or structured lessons to be memorized; on the contrary, it's a cumulative instructional scaffolding followed by meaningful interaction, such as daily training about making requests, providing answers, etc., to supply learners with real-life contexts through a rich interactional environment for 8th-grade Palestinian learners.

Within the discipline of interactional competence, language is not only a systematic and mental process, but it also expands to include the social aspect in which learners need to be linked with the context as participants. Taguchi (2015) declared that during a social interactional context, "linguistic competence greatly depends on the social situation". Thus, by inquiring how students' fluency and self-confidence can be affected and improved by incorporating different types of speech acts with interactional contexts, this inquiry aims to find out how interactional competence can be improved throughout classroom activities.

Simultaneously, the study is related to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). As Little Wood (1981) stated, "communicative language teaching instruction helps learners to acquire the communicative ability, which can greatly enable learners to cope with daily situations". Derived from speech acts, the role play method can effectively achieve this aim because practicing such activities will qualify student to handle their real-life situations.

Eventually, it is one of the educational processes to include fluency and confidence-building pedagogy in the Palestinian curriculum in EFL classrooms. Richard (2008) noted that "for foreign language learners, speaking skills mastery should be a priority in the educational process". Furthermore, examining how role-play tasks grounded in speech acts can improve fluency and confidence, this investigation links pragmatic performance with spoken language enhancement.

Practical Implications

Given that there wasn't enough research, this study looks to unravel the impact of role-play activities based on speech acts on developing learners' oral ability. Though various studies assured the importance of instruction in speech acts can boost

pragmatic competence (Derakhshan & Eslami 2015, Qari, 2021), many studies have been conducted on university students and middle-class learners. In the same line, Al-Hassani & Al- Salami, 2022) have assessed the obstacles related to the speaking fluency, hesitation, and low self-assurance among school students. Nevertheless, not many studies investigated the impact of role play instruction on building the aforementioned items, particularly among middle- stage students.

Contextual Significance (The Palestinian EFL Context))

Regarding the fact that most of the middle- class learners in the Palestinian schools are facing difficulties in performing right and appropriate utterances fluently and confidently, conversely, the main aspect of the Arab pedagogies in the EFL classrooms is the instruction of grammar, accuracy, and memorizing and written exams with limited material for practicing real- life contexts to develop learners' communicative competence. This study is crucial since it addresses one of the most important aspects that need to be included in the Palestinian English curriculum, with an attempt to find out more about the role of speech act-based role play activities on influencing and enhancing learners' performance with greater fluency and confidence.

Since the study introducing the impact of speech acts based role play teaching method, it represents a context- specific inquiry on how pragmatic ability can be improved by interactive tasks in order to help overcome such barriers. It provides some pedagogical implications on how speech acts can be introduced to the Palestinian learners by practicing with communicative tasks, for example, negotiating through a meaningful interaction, not only teacher- centered instruction, which in turn can also contribute to building self- assurance and fluency.

Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. At the outset, it is obvious that validity is restricted since the participants of the study were intentionally chosen, which meant that the selection did not occur randomly. Additionally, the sample size is somewhat insufficient, which affects the generalizability of the findings because the results cannot include the 8th-grade learners in the Palestinian schools. Furthermore, the allocated time for conducting the study by practicing enough tasks is restricted; it spans only a month and a half, which may not allow learners to acquire sufficient knowledge, experience, and improvement. Finally, the result of the post- test may be affected by different factors; learners may be confused under exam pressure or influenced by classroom distractions.

Delimitations of the Study

The focus of the study is restricted by several factors. First, the quasi-experimental strategy employs only an experimental group without a control group, which may strongly affect the findings. Moreover, the research sample consists solely of 8th-grade learners, omitting other levels such as elementary students, which represent a key developmental stage. Finally, the study concentrates exclusively on the effect of speech act-based role play on fluency and confidence, rather than including variables such as communicative proficiency or storytelling technique.

Definition of Key Terms (Operational Definitions)

In the light of this study, the items (speech acts, role play, speaking fluency, and self-confidence). All these aspects have operational definitions that are associated with the context of the inquiry.

1. Speech acts are defined as students' capability to engage in functional communicative situations that enable them to achieve social goals such as apologizing, making requests, giving regards or greetings, ordering, and providing responses, etc.
2. Role play is a pedagogical method in which learners assume the roles of others to explore authentic communication scenarios, including requesting, complimenting, and negotiating. The objective of this instructional technique is to facilitate learners' speaking fluency and enhance their confidence in active participation.
3. Speaking fluency: the skill that supplies the speakers (i.e., the subject of the study) with the capability to use various speaking features such as smoothness, somewhat speed speech, shifting the tone contextually, giving attention to the intonation, and making the situation normal and naturally improvised.
4. Self- confidence: according to study contexts, confidence defined as learners' desire to participate and act out the given scripts with controlled anxiety, and clear voice. it also means engaging without hesitation, fearing of making errors, and with declined degree of stammering with clear production of words and letters.

Literature Review

This chapter aims to present an overview of some theoretical and empirical implications related to the presented study. It commences with a theoretical framework about the theories on which the researcher based the study, including both the pedagogical and psychological aspects. The following part reviews the key concepts of the study, such as role play, turn-taking, asking, apologizing, etc. Then, the chapter shifts to present some previous empirical research that utilizes the same subject covering the main items of the study (speech acts, role play, speaking fluency, and self- confidence). The chapter terminates by summarizing the aforementioned parts with a visual supplementary chart in order to make a

conceptualized understanding of the relations between the items of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The research is grounded on two main theories for better recovery of the instructional method.

1. Speech Acts Theory. (Austin (1962), Searle (1969))

It is one of the important pillars in this study; the foundation of speech act theory refers to Austin (1962) and was later modified by Seale (1969). The theory stated that when we say something, we definitely mean something. In other words, words are not only for communicating and talking to each other; instead, we use words to achieve a specific thing, such as greeting, repairing a relationship, apologizing, asking, etc. Austin said that languages are functional in their nature because producing words or sentences means that there is a need to express something, "to say something is to do something". Later, Searle developed this theory by categorizing it into the five main types: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, which associate linguistic aspects with social ones according to the context.

The research strongly depends on speech acts theory since the role play teaching method mainly requires stimulated situations on speech acts, for example, acting out a script on asking, and learners act out the activity. The tasks are not only a means for structured exercises, but they are also a social one by which students do things with words (Austin 1962).

2. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development emphasizes the role of social interaction and culture in learning. He believed that children learn through guided participation with more knowledgeable others, like teachers or peers. Key concepts include the zone of proximal development, where learning happens just beyond a child's current abilities with support, and the importance of language in shaping thought.

Role play relates to Vygotsky's theory by engaging students in meaningful interaction, which enables them to best learn from other peers by negotiating and using language as a functional means for communication. Such a technique can gradually internalize speech act patterns in a way that strongly polishes not only learners' speaking fluency, but also helps them gain greater self- assurance to participate.

Review of Key Concepts

1. Speech act theory: Speech act theory is considered to be a subfield of pragmatics. According to Austin in his book (How To Do Things With Words) (1962), speech act is the theory that posits language is not only a medium for expressing information, but also a tool for making things by producing words or sentences. Austin divides the theory into three major concepts: locutionary (the actual statement), illocutionary (the intended meaning), and perlocutionary (the effect on the receiver). On the other hand, Searle developed the theory (1969), utterances express actions, and each utterance is analyzed into three main components: locutionary (the utterance in itself), illocutionary (the aim to be achieved by words), and perlocutionary (the words' effect on the listener, either acceptance or refusal). Seale classified speech acts into five types: assertive, commissive, directive, declarative, and expressive.

2. Role play: Role play is a major form of simulation that allows learners to stand on other's shoes and put themselves into imaginary situations. Role play teaching technique enhances learners' social, communicative, and linguistic abilities by engaging in real-world contexts that need negotiation and exchanging knowledge through a style by which students become participants instead of only sitting down and receiving information from teachers inactively.

3. Speaking fluency: Speaking fluency is the ability to speak without unnecessary pauses, hesitation, and controlled anxiety, and a smooth flow of expressing thoughts through the communicative situation.

4. Self- confidence: Confidence refers to learners' belief that they can learn English and use it in their lives in different situations without fearing making errors. Confidence can also be shown in their willingness to participate and express their opinions and ideas with a clear voice, eye contact, and taking the risk to make errors and learn by correcting and repairing.

Pragmatism and Speech Acts

Recent studies have increasingly highlighted the effects of explicit pragmatism instruction on improving learners' ability to communicate using speech acts in real-life situations to achieve their goals, such as negotiation and requesting. Previously, Derakhshan and Shaki (2021) conducted a comprehensive analytical study on how pragmatism and its teaching techniques enable students to make appropriate requests. This study demonstrated the effectiveness of speech act instruction in improving learner performance. With a similar aim, Huang (2022) examined differences between explicit and implicit instruction and found that implicit instruction helps learners achieve greater fluency and accuracy in using appropriate social and cultural terms, underscoring the importance of integrating implicit pragmatism instruction. In a recent study, Al-Kawaz (2023) examined the effects of explicit speech act instruction on improving Iraqi learners' performance in refusal and agreement. He demonstrated that the explicit approach improved learners' efficiency by reducing linguistic and social errors. In the same vein, Emrah et al. (2024) investigated the effectiveness of explicit instruction in

pragmatic knowledge of speech acts for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, concluding that explicit instruction improved learners' performance and enhanced their pragmatic awareness. Similarly, Farnia and Asadi (2024) used WhatsApp to teach EFL learners in Iran how to say "no" and "yes" in a culturally appropriate manner, confirming improved performance and recommending that digital training can benefit learners even outside of school. In 2025, Zoubi et al. investigated the pragmatic competence of academically gifted EFL students at Ajloun National University in Jordan, finding significant improvements in learners' perceptions and comprehension when they used speech acts effectively and efficiently.

Role-play: In the modern era, the method of teaching through role play has received considerable attention from researchers. In 2021, in his investigation on improving learners' speaking skills through role play explicit instruction, Pinatih concluded that role-play showed greater improvement on students' performance by providing opportunities for practicing the language and raised their social awareness when learners experiencing the scenes they get. In a complementary study, Katemba (2023) investigated that role-play improves speaking proficiency skills and concluded that role play instruction does improve learners' speaking abilities by integrating sufficient practice on speech acts various styles. Later, Henisah et al (2023) applied the role play teaching technique on elementary schools in Bangladesh and concluded that the study has positive insights towards implementing role play for improving learners' speaking skills and enhancing their communication skills. More recently, Cong LY (2024) applied the role play technique to his learners at a Vietnamese university to improve learners' language learning. The investigation concluded that using role play in teaching EFL can boost learners' speaking and communication skills, which in turn lead to improve their negotiation and collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, and better cultural understanding. Similarly, in 2024, Ridayani inquired into the effectiveness of speech act based role play activities and multimedia on his learners' speaking skills and ascertained that role play does affect students' speaking skills, showing better communications in real- life situations with greater self-assurance.

Various studies on this field revealed that role-play as a teaching technique can boost speaking and communication skills, foster a supportive environment for active learning, encourage collaboration, enhance cultural understanding, and enhance problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Speaking Fluency: Modern studies on the English speaking field for EFL learners have intensified significantly since speaking skills are considered to be a basic pillar for attaining language successfully. In 2020, Nugroho investigated the perception and understanding of his students' about classroom tasks for improving speaking understanding at Indonesian university and concluded that learners showed

positive insights toward enhancing their speaking skills by adding extra instruction techniques such as enrolling them in a public or daily communicative contexts, using role play as a method for developing their fluency, doing presentations in the academic environment and supporting these tasks with outside activities. Similarly, Sun & Revesz (2021) researched the effect of task repetition (storytelling) on improving Chinese students' speaking performance. They emphasized that repetition is an effective pedagogy for developing L2 learners' oral performance, including fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, Zhang & Zhou (2023) executed a survey on the effects of task repetition on enhancing EFL learners' fluency in a Chinese school. The study suggested that repetitive practice enables the development of oral fluency. Moreover, different task repetition (role play, storytelling) schedules may influence fluency development, with interleaving repetition resulting in more favorable behaviors in utterance speed, pause duration, and repair phenomena. Recently, Mansouri (2025) inquired into the impact of task repetition awareness and cognition difficulty on improving EFL learners' oral performance, such as accuracy and fluency. The results concluded that repetition-based drills showed great improvement in learners' fluency, accuracy, and oral performance, particularly when students are aware of the merits of such drills on increasing the complexity of L2 speech production. More recently, in 2025, in his study on the effect of role-play-based activities on polishing learners' fluency and speaking ability in Jordanian EFL classrooms. Rabah found that role play showed a progressive improvement in learners' speaking fluency in the experimental group rather than the control group by utilizing spontaneous and natural performance with greater self-assurance.

Confidence: Recently, self-efficacy is one of the important that has been inquired by the researcher in EFL classroom. For example, in 2024, Santoso & Prasetyo investigated the use of role play based scripted to enhance learners' self-assurance in speaking skills, the results showed that controlled and scaffolded scripted drills offers high opportunities for learners to improve their speaking skills with greater confidence within a supportive teaching environment. The study also suggested that role play is an effective pedagogy to be included in the curriculum. Furthermore, Ardhana & Sadikin (2025), analyzed a study on ways to increase students' confidence in speaking skills (role play scripts) in a high school in Jakarta and summarized that role play can indeed leverage learners' confidence with most of the students have achieved the target grade (75%). The study also found that learners become more active when they participate and speak which also raises their self- satisfaction. Within the same time, Permatasari & Wulandari (2025), conducted a study aimed to test the impact of speaking skills particularly role play tasks on upgrading learners' fluency and confidence. The study ascertained that through repeated activities, learners could effectively strengthen their fluency

which in turn boost their self-confidence. After a while, Fouziah & Ahmed (2025), persued a study on the consequences of using role play tasks on developing learners' self-efficacy in EFL classroom instruction. The finding stated that beside role play is a fun and functional teaching method which facilitates learners' comprehension of the structured scripts, it approved to be an efficacious technique for reducing learners' anxiety and hesitation to participate. Additionally, in 2025, Mafulah & Shole tested the importance of self-assurance on improving learners' speaking skills. The outcomes showed that speech act based role play instruction can refine students' speaking skills and self-efficacy to enroll in such activities which make role play technique an efficient pedagogy with extracurricular tasks.

Summary and Conceptual Framework

The current chapter presented conceptual and practical implementations of the impact of speech act-based role play on improving speaking skills, especially fluency and confidence. Based on speech act theory for Austin, which primarily stated that language is not only for performing words and sentences, instead, language is a tool to achieve people's needs, such as ordering, refusing, making compliments, etc., which justifies the need for developing learners' pragmatic awareness through explicit instruction to enable them to enroll in meaningful communicative contexts. Correspondingly, Vygotsky's communicative theory of sociocultural and cognitive development emphasized that learners can improve their speaking skills by engaging in a social interaction with collaboration and peers, interchanging speech such as turn- taking in role play scripts and mediated dialogue. Role play instruction strongly corresponds with the current investigation, which seeks to help learners' exposure to functional language and interactive situations to learn and build internalized communicative competence.

Previous empirical studies assured that pragmatic instruction enables student to boost the usage of speech acts in real- life contexts, with a complementary participation, role play tasks grounded from speech act provide learners with the sufficient knowledge how to communicate for achieving various goals like apologizing, making declarations, etc. previous practical studies also concentrated on some techniques that help learners to participate with reduced anxiety and hesitation such as repetitive method that pave the road toward building greater self- efficacy and automatic performance of words by supplying interactive environment that leverage learners' willingness to speak fluently and confidently.

Both theoretical and empirical fields have strongly supported the core aim of the study, which is investigating ways for improving EFL 8th-grade learners' speaking fluency with appropriate social terms to communicate effectively, through which fluency and confidence can be developed automatically by practicing. The diagram below concisely describes the way both dependent and independent variables emerged together for improving students' performance.
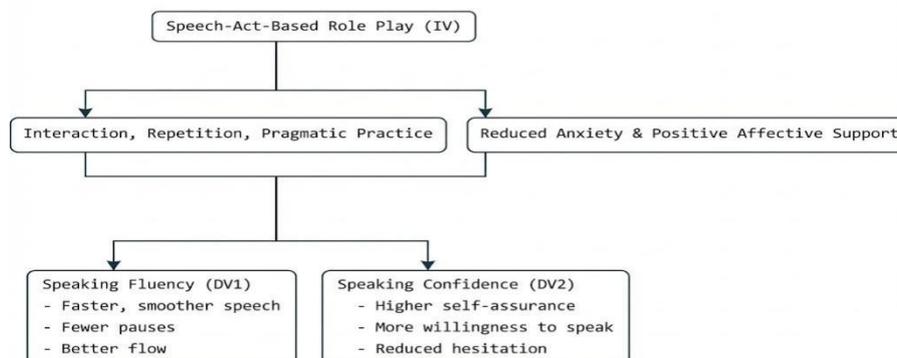
Methodology

The current inquiry, based on a qualitative research design attempting to find out the impact of role paly on developing Palestinian 8th-grade (14 years old) learners' performance and fluency by integrating various speech act modes. The design is suitable since the aim of the study is enrolling students in an empirical course (explicit instruction using speech act-based role- play activities) and it qualitatively observes learners' fluency and confidence improvement not measuring them.

The study also uses a quasi-experimental design because it includes teachers' observation lists, pre- test, and post-test in order to make a concise comparison between their performance before and after the practical intervention. Such a research method helps to apply the course as a treatment one, which provides a richer instructional situation for enabling learners to enhance their pragmatic perception. It also gives the opportunity to conclude with descriptive results, observations, and performance assessment, which are important items for reflecting on learners' performance during the course, and for students to maintain their progress.

Overall, the justification using a qualitative quasi- empirical design is that the practical interaction focuses on how and why learners' improvements occurred throughout exposure to role-play-based activities, more than quantitative analysis. Furthermore, qualitative design provides more efficient data on how learners understand and perceive the course and

interact accordingly. Consequently, the qualitative- quasi method accurately depicts the process of development with more academic, social, and pragmatic comprehension through students' participation.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in a public Palestinian school in Ramallah city. Where English is taught as a foreign language, learners always find difficulties in handling and comprehending, especially with three lessons every week. Where classrooms where the school are not prepared with enough infrastructure, either for the authentic instructional process or for supplementary activities. The subjects of the study are about thirty-three middle- level students in the 8th grade, gathered from three divisions (A, B, and C), with little knowledge about pragmatic speech acts usage not only in their real life,but also during the lesson. The sample was intentionally chosen because the researcher intends to enroll at this level to facilitate their understanding and perception of how to use speech act types through performing creative role-play scripts. Learners haven't been exposed to any course related to speech acts and role play before.

The researchers, i.e., the teacher included in the investigation as a neutral observer with an initial criterion for assessing learners' current level, followed by a pre-test, then the teacher starts guiding learners toward the required insights that help sustain progression until reaching the target level of performing different utterances fluently with greater self-assurance. All the learners were fully informed about the nature of the process and the goal, and agreed on regular lessons consensually.

Research Instruments

Research Design

Teacher Observation List

Teachers start with three rubrics divided into speaking fluency, confidence, and pragmatic appropriateness. The assessment is for all learners as one group, not individually. The checklist assesses smooth utterances, clear voice and articulation, ability to phrase true sentences with suitable intonation and pauses when there is need for, willingness to participate with using eye contact confidently. The checklist is also reviewed by two EFL qualifes teachers to assure the validity.

Pre- Test and Post- Test for Speaking

Learners are going to attend a pre-test for assessing their level before starting the treatment course, and a post-test to evaluate the final result after being exposed to scripted scenarios. Both tests include speech acts-based role-play activities, either creative or scripted types. The assessment process for the pre and post-tests checks learners' progression within the items:

a. Speaking fluency.
b. Confidence and self- assurance.
c. Pragmatic appropriateness.

The test uses the previous rubric that was piloted and agreed upon by two EFL teachers.

Audio Recording

Sessions are going to be recorded not only for documenting the process, but also to be revised by the teacher to identify the errors made through the practice, peers' interaction, their hesitations, and the difficult situations, and to check their performance improvement.

Teachers' Notes

The teacher maintained a notice document to write observations about the atmosphere of the classroom, write down the items that need to be emphasized more, and difficulties when performing role play. Such notes have a strong contribution to data and results analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

To maintain the replicability and clarity of the study, the collection process was ordered sequentially. The collected data through various steps, starting with the teacher's observations and ending with learners' final performance and data analysis.

Preliminary observation

During the regular classroom lessons, the teacher observed some issues related to learners' peaking behavior with errors with articulation, hesitation to start an activity, unclear voice because of the fear of making errors, and their general oral participation. The initial observation was categorized according to the presented rubric for the major fields. i.e., fluency, confidence, and pragmatic awareness (speech acts).

Pre- Test Administration

After gathering the subject of the study, students are going to attend a diagnostic speaking test on a specific type of speech acts- based role play context (requesting, apologizing, etc.). The teacher is going to measure the sample's speaking performance according to the criteria fluency, self-efficacy, and word appropriateness. Additionally, the session is being recorded to identify items that need to be improved during the intervention.

The Intervention Course (Role Play Activities)

Throughout the instructional process, teachers implement various types of speech acts using the role-play method with explicit, scaffolded, and structured activities. Learners maintained performing role-play scenarios regularly during the scheduled training period. The teacher keeps writing notes about the ongoing practice and learners' performance progress using communicative and functional language, which helps not only with guiding the lessons to come, but also with capturing more concise analysis.

Post- Test Administration

The last step of the instructional and practical treatment course. The subjects in the study are going to attend the achievement test using the rubric for the same items (fluency, confidence, and functional items). Collected video recordings are also used for a more effective comparison between previous and current performance.

Final Comments and Remarks

The teacher is going to document the same sample's speaking performance during a natural classroom lesson to remark on the last observations and being compared with the first impression and observation of students' weaknesses and errors in their performance to determine improvement patterns.

Organizing and Processing Data

The whole set of measurement items is going to be organized chronologically, including checklist criteria, diagnostic, and achievement rubrics, which are going to be compared to document learners' progression. Teacher's notes are also going to be included for the natural classroom performance before and after the instructional process.

Data Analysis

According to the diagnostic test that was conducted with rubrics, the sample showed magnitude issues and difficulties with items, including speaking fluency, self- assurance, and pragmatic awareness. For example, the fluency rubric of fluency presented weaknesses with taking the responsibility to start a conversation, as well as the confidence rubric demonstrated hesitation to participate due to fear of committing errors with limited tone control. Furthermore, the pragmatic rubric revealed learners' inability to perform socially accepted utterances during the role- play activities.

According to the documented note from the teacher, students started grounding patterns of enhancement, for example, they showed improvement in their speech pronunciation, more controlled anxiety, better selection of tone and intonation, and

they became more active participants and had eagerness and willingness to engage and perform new patterns of speech acts. Her documented notes also revealed that approximately halfway through the intervention, learners began to demonstrate greater performance; they also showed more polite manners during their practical course and among their colleagues in the classroom, such as accepting or refusing. Their utterance also turned out to be clearer, with less hesitation and stammering; furthermore, learners exhibited more correct reading and self- correction, which means that they have greater self- efficacy, grammatical, and social awareness.

After completing the treatment course, learners were more confident; they illustrated not only a remarkable modulation while they spoke, they communicate with a clearer voice whenever they spoke English. Students also exhibited an improved level of fluency; for example, they read and act role play scripts using intonation and stress more suitably than before, with fewer overlaps between them.

Accordingly, learners performed more advanced socially appropriate and coherent flow of utterances, with more social awareness and self- correction and adjustment relating to the context.

Ethical Considerations

The informed consent statement was sanctioned by the learners' parents and by the head teacher. Learners were informed that their identities would remain confidential. Learners were also informed about the purpose of the inquiry and that the course is voluntary and that all participants have the right to withdraw whenever they want.

Results and Findings

To answer the main and sub-questions question of the research. It descriptively reported learners' speaking fluency, confidence and socially suitable items before and after the intervention course. The following questions were answered respectively.

Findings of the Impact of Speech Acts Based- Role Play Activities (RQ1)

Learners showed a remarkable improvement and approved that role play treatment course was effective in developing their fluency, self- assurance and social awareness with individualized differences of enhancement among them.

Skill	Level of benefit	Pre-test (before intervention)	Post- test (after the intervention)
Fluency	Very good	Continuous pause and hesitation to participate. Long fragmented utterances.	Noticeable enhancement due to the exposure to real- life situations.
Confidence	Reasonable level of self- assurance	Reluctance or refrain to engage. Strong concerns to initiate.	Role play considerably improved their self- efficacy with personalized differences levels.
Social awareness	Strong impact	Low ability to speak appropriately, inaccurate use of speech acts types. Inappropriate choose of suitable modes of interaction	Learners use more polite methods to communicate such as requesting and refusing. More controlled tone, stress and intonation. Remarkable choice of suitable utterances.

Findings of Fluency (RQ2)

Most of learners exhibited a noticeable improvement in fluency, on the other hand, some showed slight weaknesses still need to be developed. The following table described the transformation before and after the intervention.

Fluency sign	Level of benefit	Diagnostic test	Achievement test
Hesitation, irrelevant pause	High	Recurring, extended silence stops	Significantly shortened
Speaking pace	Mediate	Slow and laboriously.	Moderate speaking & fast through reading.
Turn- taking	High	Hesitation to initiate	Eager to initiate with engaging.
phrasing	Fairly high	Read word- by- word in a monotone voice	Read with a mixture of run- ons, mediate pause for breath with reasonable stress and intonation

Finding of Confidence (RQ3)

According to the pre- test and post- test analyzed rubrics, students demonstrated high impact on their confidence, the following table depicted the transformational shift on their personalities regarding to their participation.

Fluency item	Level of benefit	Diagnostic test	Achievements test
Voice modulation	High	Weaknesses with articulation and frequent fading away voice, and some articulation issues	Clear, fairly loud and reasonable understandable sound. Mediate- high voice modulation.
Body posture	Very high	Difficulties with sustaining the right posture according to the context, with very limited eye contact, also weird and trembled gestures	The student is mostly able to maintain the right composure and body language while speaking and presenting. Sometimes, need additional help.
Willingness to participate	High	Very observable avoidance to speak justified by fears of making errors with changeful responses.	Lessen anxiety with strong desire to participate and approve oneself with active presence and confident responses.

Discussion of the Findings Related to the Theoretical Framework

The results of the study represent the effective impact of using Speech Act- based Role Play instructional method for improving EFL 8th grade Palestinian learners' speaking skills especially fluency and self- confidence skills which are the most important talent that enable learners to keep learn in an attempt the reach the ultimate aim that is helping learners to be able to interact with various real- life context either with their learning journey or with intercultural communication. Thus, the findings highly concur with Searle's Speech Acts theory that presents the produced utterances not only as a tool for transferring information and exchanging knowledge, but also for achieving needs and aims throughout communication between humans, such as making compliments, asking, and promising. Furthermore, the findings also greatly support the Sociocultural theory, pioneered by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes the fundamental role of social interaction and cultural context in language acquisition and development. This article explores how social and cultural factors shape the learning processes of language learners, both in their native languages and in additional languages. By examining key concepts such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding.

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