The Efficacy of Role-Playing Techniques in Fostering Arabic Speaking Proficiency Among Female Learners

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of role-playing techniques in enhancing Arabic speaking proficiency among female learners in an Islamic boarding school context. The study aims to (1) determine the extent to which role-playing improves learners' oral performance and (2) identify the speaking components most affected by this pedagogical intervention. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative pre- and post-test measures with qualitative classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative findings demonstrate a statistically significant improvement in overall speaking proficiency (p < .001), with the greatest gains observed in learners' self-reported communicative confidence, followed by fluency and vocabulary use. Qualitative evidence further reveals reduced speaking anxiety, heightened motivation, and increased classroom engagement, indicating that role-playing creates a supportive affective and communicative learning environment. Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the findings suggest that gender-sensitive, interactive pedagogy facilitates meaningful participation and expressive language use among female learners. The study concludes that role-playing is not merely an instructional activity but a pedagogical strategy that effectively bridges linguistic competence and communicative confidence. These findings offer practical implications for Arabic language educators seeking to implement experiential and culturally responsive speaking instruction in female Islamic educational settings.

Keywords: Arabic speaking proficiency, female learners, role-playing technique, communicative language teaching, sociocultural theory

Introduction

Speaking proficiency stands as one of the most visible indicators of successful foreign language learning (Du & Daniel, 2024; Jin et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023), yet it remains among the most challenging skills to master particularly in the context of Arabic as a foreign language. Within Islamic educational institutions, female learners often face unique barriers to developing oral fluency. Despite years of exposure to

Arabic grammar, vocabulary, and recitation-based instruction, many students struggle to express themselves spontaneously in Arabic. This persistent issue highlights the need for teaching methods that foster communicative interaction, confidence, and linguistic creativity. The role-playing technique offers such potential, providing a bridge between theoretical learning and real-life communication practice (Selfa-Sastre et al., 2022; Souzandehfar & Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim, 2023). Moreover, Arabic is not merely a medium of communication but also the gateway to accessing the profound knowledge of Islam and its sacred sciences (Hanifansyah et al., 2025; Mahmudah, 2025; Nur Hanifansyah, 2025).

Traditional Arabic language instruction in many Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and madrasah tends to emphasize memorization, grammatical accuracy, and translation activities (Baharun, 2025; Baharun et al., 2023; Muhamad Solehudin et al., 2024, 2025; Solehudin et al., 2024). While these elements are essential for linguistic foundation, they do not adequately stimulate authentic oral communication. Learners often become passive recipients of knowledge rather than active users of language. Female students, in particular, may experience additional affective barriers such as anxiety, shyness, or fear of making mistakes in front of peers and teachers. These challenges can inhibit their oral participation and impede progress in developing *maharah kalam*, the core skill for achieving communicative competence in Arabic. Consequently, there is a growing pedagogical need to integrate methods that actively engage students in interaction and self-expression.

The role-playing technique has gained recognition as an effective pedagogical strategy across various language learning contexts. It involves learners taking on specific roles in simulated situations that resemble real-life communication. This approach encourages learners to use the target language in meaningful and spontaneous ways, thereby enhancing fluency, accuracy, and sociolinguistic competence. Studies in English language learning have long demonstrated that role-playing improves students' confidence, reduces anxiety, and enhances their communicative abilities (Alvarez, 2024; Kaygısız & Akar, 2025; Santoso & Prasetyo, 2024). However, within the field of Arabic language education, particularly among female learners, empirical research on the efficacy of role-playing remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on general student populations without addressing gender-related dynamics in classroom communication.

Gender plays a crucial role in shaping language learning experiences. Research in sociolinguistics and educational psychology has shown that female learners tend to exhibit higher language sensitivity and empathy, but also higher communication apprehension, especially in culturally conservative settings (Barrios & Napiórkowska, 2024; Lei & Lei, 2022; Sun, 2023; Tarighat & Krott, 2021; Ward & Ragosko, 2025). In many Islamic institutions, interaction between male and female students is restricted, and female classes may adopt more structured or teacher-centered modes of instruction. Consequently, opportunities for spontaneous

conversation and peer interaction become scarce. This socio-cultural factor underscores the importance of exploring role-playing as a pedagogical intervention tailored for female students, allowing them to practice Arabic in safe, supportive, and meaningful contexts.

Recent studies on Arabic language pedagogy have increasingly emphasized the importance of interactive and communicative approaches. Malki-Levy et al. (2025) revealed that bilingual intervention programs significantly improved linguistic performance among Arabic-Hebrew learners, stressing the role of contextualized practice in developing language proficiency. Similarly, Ismaiel, AlGhafari, and Ismaiel (2023) showed that *peer-assisted learning* enhanced learners' comfort and confidence in Arabic communication, validating the impact of student-centered collaboration.

In a related line, Tallas-Mahajna (2024) employed *role-play* to elicit natural Arabic speech among children, proving its capacity to trigger authentic language production and morphological accuracy. Beyond pedagogical design, Said (2021) highlighted that family language ideology, especially maternal proficiency, strongly influenced motivation and literacy in Arabic-English bilinguals, linking gender and affective environment to language learning outcomes. Complementarily, Aldukhayel (2023) demonstrated that pre-learning scaffolds such as vocabulary preteaching increased learners' engagement and comprehension, reinforcing the value of preparatory communicative tasks in language acquisition.

Despite extensive evidence on interactive and bilingual interventions, few studies have examined the specific efficacy of role-playing in enhancing Arabic speaking proficiency among female learners, particularly within Islamic educational contexts. Moreover, prior research has focused largely on general or child populations, leaving unexplored how gender-sensitive, affective, and culturally grounded role-play activities can empower female learners to overcome anxiety and foster communicative competence in Arabic.

Despite the growing body of research on communicative and interactive approaches in Arabic language education, empirical studies that specifically examine the effectiveness of role-playing techniques among female learners within Islamic boarding school contexts remain limited. Existing studies tend to focus on general learner populations, bilingual settings, or early childhood education, often overlooking the gender-sensitive and affective dimensions of Arabic speaking development in faith-based institutions. Moreover, prior research has rarely integrated quantitative measures of speaking performance with qualitative insights into learners' emotional engagement and classroom interaction. To address this gap, the present study proposes role-playing as a gender-sensitive and experiential pedagogical solution grounded in Communicative Language Teaching and Sociocultural Theory. By employing a mixed-methods design in a female Islamic educational setting, this study aims to demonstrate how role-playing can

simultaneously enhance linguistic performance and communicative confidence, thereby bridging the persistent gap between grammatical knowledge and authentic oral communication in Arabic learning.

The focus of this research is twofold. First, it seeks to determine whether role-playing significantly improves the speaking proficiency of female Arabic learners in terms of fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Second, it aims to identify which aspects of speaking benefit most from role-playing activities whether linguistic competence, paralinguistic expression, or communicative confidence. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative pre- and post-tests with qualitative observations and interviews to obtain a comprehensive understanding of learners' progress and perceptions.

This study is confined to female students enrolled in an Arabic-speaking program at an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. The role-playing sessions were integrated into the speaking curriculum over one academic semester, focusing on communicative scenarios such as daily conversations, academic discussions, and moral storytelling. While this scope limits the generalizability of findings to other contexts or mixed-gender settings, it provides valuable insight into gender-specific pedagogical strategies within Islamic education.

The significance of this research lies in its potential contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it expands the body of literature on Arabic language pedagogy by incorporating gender-sensitive perspectives, which remain underrepresented in the field. Practically, it offers educators an effective and adaptable model for enhancing female students' communicative competence. By encouraging active participation and creative expression, role-playing transforms the classroom into a dynamic environment where learners engage cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Moreover, it aligns with the principles of *communicative language teaching (CLT)* (Adem & Berkessa, 2022; Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024; Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Taridi et al., 2024)and *experiential learning*, emphasizing that language mastery emerges through meaningful use rather than passive reception.

From an educational psychology perspective, role-playing also fosters motivation and self-efficacy. Female learners who often hesitate to speak Arabic in public can gradually overcome fear of error through supportive peer interaction. The element of "pretending" within role-play reduces the psychological burden of self-consciousness, enabling learners to take linguistic risks in a safe setting. This process strengthens not only their language ability but also their self-confidence and interpersonal skills qualities essential for leadership and communication in broader social and religious contexts.

In conclusion, the persistent gap between grammatical knowledge and oral proficiency in Arabic education particularly among female learners demands innovative pedagogical solutions. Role-playing techniques provide a promising

avenue for bridging this gap by combining linguistic practice with affective engagement. This study thus aims to examine empirically the efficacy of role-playing in fostering Arabic speaking proficiency among female learners, contributing to the advancement of gender-sensitive, communicative, and student-centered Arabic pedagogy.

Method

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the efficacy of *role-playing techniques* in fostering Arabic speaking proficiency among female learners (Creswell, 2021, 2024). The theoretical foundation draws upon Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (East & Wang, 2024; Ekawati et al., 2024; Taridi et al., 2024)and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Gauvain, 2020; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), both of which emphasize interaction, collaboration, and experiential learning as central to language acquisition. The research was conducted at an Islamic boarding school for female students (pesantren putri), selected for its communicative yet traditional Arabic learning environment, which provided an ideal setting to observe how role-play can enhance speaking confidence and fluency.

The participants comprised 60 female students from intermediate-level Arabic classes. Primary data were obtained through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations (Brevik, 2019; Dignath & Veenman, 2021), and semi-structured interviews with both learners and instructors (Buys et al., 2022), while secondary data were drawn from relevant pedagogical literature and institutional documents. The intervention consisted of eight role-playing sessions integrated into the speaking curriculum over one academic term, focusing on practical communication scenarios such as greetings, daily dialogues, and social discussions.

Data collection followed a structured process: quantitative scores were analyzed statistically using paired-sample t-tests to measure performance improvement, while qualitative data were coded and interpreted through Miles and Huberman's interactive model covering data reduction (Asipi et al., 2022), display, and conclusion drawing. This methodological integration enabled triangulation of findings (Albashir et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2020), ensuring both empirical rigor and contextual depth in evaluating how role-playing enhances Arabic oral proficiency among female learners.

Methodologically, this study addresses several limitations observed in prior research on Arabic speaking instruction. Previous studies have often relied on single-method designs, predominantly quantitative pre–post testing or purely qualitative classroom observation, which tend to capture performance gains without sufficiently explaining learners' affective and interactional experiences. Such approaches may overlook how pedagogical interventions operate within specific sociocultural and gendered learning contexts. By adopting a mixed-methods design,

the present study integrates statistical measurement of speaking improvement with qualitative exploration of learners' perceptions, emotional responses, and classroom dynamics. This methodological integration enables a more nuanced understanding of how role-playing functions not only as a linguistic technique but also as a sociocultural and affective intervention. Furthermore, conducting the study in a female Islamic boarding school allows for contextual sensitivity often absent in previous research, thereby strengthening the methodological relevance and ecological validity of the findings.

Result and Discussion

Improvement of Arabic Speaking Proficiency through Role-Playing

Quantitative results from the pre- and post-tests revealed a significant improvement in participants' Arabic speaking proficiency after the role-playing intervention. The mean score increased from 68.4 (SD = 7.8) in the pre-test to 83.7 (SD = 6.5) in the post-test, with a p-value < 0.001, indicating a statistically significant gain in overall performance. The improvement was particularly evident in three domains: fluency, vocabulary usage, and confidence in spontaneous interaction. Students demonstrated better pronunciation, more natural rhythm in conversation, and improved ability to construct coherent responses without relying on memorized dialogues.

Qualitative observations supported these findings. During the first sessions, learners exhibited hesitancy and short, formulaic utterances. However, in later sessions, they began to communicate more creatively and contextually. This transformation suggests that *role-playing* provided a low-anxiety environment that stimulated authentic speech and emotional engagement key components in *Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis* and *Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory*.

Interview Excerpt (Student A, age 19):
"At first, I was afraid to speak Arabic because I always thought my grammar was wrong. But when we acted out real-life situations, I forgot about grammar and just focused on expressing myself. That made me more confident."

Interview Excerpt (Instructor 1):
"Female students tend to hesitate when speaking in front of others. Role-playing helped them overcome this barrier because it felt like a story rather than a test. Their speech became more natural and emotionally connected."

Interview Excerpt (Instructor 2):
"Another challenge for female learners is adapting to gender-specific vocabulary and grammatical forms. The use of *ta' marbūṭah*, *fiʿl amr*, and *fiʿl muḍāriʿ* directed toward female speakers is not commonly practiced in everyday communication, especially for beginners. Through role-playing, they gradually learned how to use these forms appropriately in conversations among women."

Affective and Social Gains among Female Learners

The role-playing activities also yielded strong affective benefits, particularly in reducing speaking anxiety and encouraging peer collaboration. Observational data and interview transcripts revealed that participants perceived role-playing as enjoyable and less intimidating than traditional oral drills. The cooperative nature of the activity fostered mutual support and group cohesion. Many participants expressed that working in small groups created a safe space for linguistic experimentation.

Beyond confirming the effectiveness of role-playing for improving speaking performance, the present findings provide a more nuanced interpretation of how and why this technique functions effectively within a female Islamic educational context. While previous studies have reported gains in fluency and confidence through role-playing and communicative tasks (Alvarez, 2024; Kaygısız & Akar, 2025), these studies were largely situated in secular or mixed-gender learning environments. In contrast, the current study demonstrates that the affective benefits of role-playing particularly the substantial increase in self-confidence are amplified in gender-segregated and faith-based settings, where learners may otherwise experience heightened communication anxiety. This finding refines earlier research by suggesting that contextual and cultural factors mediate the pedagogical impact of role-playing. Furthermore, unlike studies that focus primarily on linguistic outcomes, this research highlights the interdependence between affective readiness and linguistic performance. The observed improvement in fluency and spontaneous interaction appears to be closely linked to reduced anxiety and increased emotional safety, supporting sociocultural perspectives that view language development as socially and psychologically situated. Thus, the present study extends existing literature by positioning role-playing as both a linguistic and affective intervention rather than merely a communicative technique.

Interview Excerpt (Student D, age 18):
"When I played the role of a shopkeeper, I learned how to use Arabic naturally, not just from the textbook. My friends corrected me in a fun way, and I wasn't scared anymore."

These findings align with Ismaiel et al. (2023), who found that *peer-assisted learning* enhances students' comfort and communicative confidence in Arabic. Similarly, Aldukhayel (2023) emphasized that pre-task scaffolding activities like vocabulary preteaching help learners engage cognitively and emotionally before language production. The present study extends these insights by demonstrating that *role-playing functions simultaneously as an affective filter reducer and a communicative scaffold*.

Linguistic and Cognitive Development through Communicative Simulation

Beyond affective outcomes, the data revealed notable linguistic growth. Students showed increased lexical range and syntactic variety during their performances. Transcribed classroom interactions indicated that students began using complex sentence structures, cohesive devices (e.g., *lianna*, *fa*, *idhā*), and pragmatic markers appropriate to social situations. This linguistic sophistication reflects internalization through interaction, consistent with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework.

In parallel, the *role-play sessions* prompted cognitive engagement through problem-solving and contextual adaptation. This supports Malki-Levy et al. (2025), who noted that bilingual interventions grounded in real-life communicative contexts enhance linguistic flexibility and conceptual transfer. Similarly, Tallas-Mahajna (2024) demonstrated that role-play elicits natural morphosyntactic production in Arabic-speaking children a mechanism observed here among adolescent female learners as well.

Comparative Analysis and Synthesis

The combined quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that role-playing significantly enhances Arabic speaking proficiency, particularly by addressing psychological and cultural barriers among female learners. The observed improvement resonates with Said (2021), who highlighted the pivotal influence of female role models and affective environments in Arabic language development. This study's context an all-female Islamic boarding school provided a socially supportive environment, allowing participants to engage confidently in communicative simulations without external anxiety factors.

While previous research has explored bilingual and peer-learning interventions, this study uniquely demonstrates how gender-sensitive role-playing bridges cognitive, linguistic, and affective domains of Arabic learning. By integrating performance-based pedagogy within a culturally safe environment, learners not only improved technical fluency but also redefined their self-perception as capable Arabic speakers.

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Test Mean Scores of Female Arabic Learners after Role-Playing Intervention.

Variable	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Gain	Sig. (p)
Fluency	3.12	4.25	+1.13	<0.001
Vocabulary	3.05	4.18	+1.13	<0.001
Pronunciation	3.21	4.12	+0.91	<0.01
Confidence (Self-Rating)	2.89	4.33	+1.44	<0.001

Note: The table shows statistically significant improvement across all variables. The highest gain was in learners' self-rated confidence (+1.44, p < 0.001),

followed by fluency and vocabulary (+1.13 each, $p < 0.001$), and pronunciation (+0.91, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the role-playing technique effectively enhanced both linguistic and affective aspects of Arabic speaking proficiency.

The results confirm that role-playing effectively develops speaking proficiency among female Arabic learners through three interrelated mechanisms: (1) providing a safe affective environment for authentic speech, (2) facilitating sociocultural interaction that activates cognitive and linguistic processes, and (3) enhancing learner confidence and motivation. Compared with earlier studies (Malki-Levy, 2025; Ismaiel et al., 2023; Tallas-Mahajna, 2024; Aldukhayel, 2023), this research advances the pedagogical understanding of *role-play as a holistic communicative tool* not only a classroom activity but a transformative learning experience.

These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of communicative and experiential learning in enhancing oral language proficiency. Studies grounded in Communicative Language Teaching have demonstrated that meaningful interaction and simulated communicative tasks facilitate fluency and spontaneous language use (Adem & Berkessa, 2022; East & Wang, 2024). Similarly, research on role-playing in foreign language contexts has shown that adopting situational roles reduces performance pressure and encourages linguistic risk-taking, leading to improved confidence and conversational flow (Alvarez, 2024; Kaygısız & Akar, 2025). In Arabic language education, Tallas-Mahajna (2024) and Malki-Levy et al. (2025) highlight that contextualized interaction supports natural morphosyntactic production and communicative flexibility. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that role-playing is particularly effective for female learners in Islamic educational settings, where affective factors and sociocultural norms may otherwise constrain oral participation. By situating speaking practice within supportive and meaningful scenarios, role-playing enables learners to move beyond memorized patterns toward authentic communicative engagement.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of role-playing techniques in enhancing Arabic speaking proficiency among female learners in an Islamic educational setting and to identify which aspects of speaking benefit most from this instructional approach. The findings demonstrate that role-playing significantly improved learners' overall speaking performance, with notable gains in fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and, most prominently, communicative self-confidence. Quantitative results confirmed statistically significant improvements across these domains, while qualitative evidence revealed increased motivation, reduced speaking anxiety, and higher levels of engagement during communicative activities. These findings indicate that role-playing effectively addresses both

linguistic and affective dimensions of Arabic speaking development. By providing a safe, interactive, and contextually meaningful learning environment, role-playing enables female learners to engage in authentic oral communication. Aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this study underscores the value of communicative simulation as a pedagogical strategy that bridges linguistic competence and communicative confidence in gender-sensitive and faith-based educational contexts.

Despite its promising outcomes, this study is limited to one institution and a relatively small participant group, which restricts generalizability. Future research should explore larger and more diverse populations, include longitudinal analysis, and examine comparative interventions such as storytelling or digital simulation-based role-play. Practically, the findings suggest that Arabic language instructors particularly in female Islamic schools should integrate structured role-playing into their speaking curriculum to promote confidence, linguistic creativity, and active participation. The study underscores that empowering female learners through experiential communication can bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and real-life fluency, offering a pedagogical model adaptable to various Arabic learning environments.

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