

Navigating Culinary Topics in EFL Speaking: A Case Study on Role Play Implementation in Junior High School

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Abstract

Addressing the persistent gap between theoretical grammar and authentic oral communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, this qualitative case study investigates the implementation of role play navigating culinary topics among seventh-grade students at Junior High School. Grounded in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the study uniquely explores how combining familiar culinary themes with character simulation in an Islamic school setting addresses affective and linguistic barriers. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations, teaching document analysis, and semi-structured interviews specifically targeted at student key informants (KD, MDN, and AQ) and the English teacher. Applying Miles and Huberman's data analysis model alongside methodological triangulation, the findings reveal a systematic five-phase implementation: Warm-Up & Orientation, Participant Selection & Information-Gap Role Division, Collaborative Script Preparation, and Enactment with Reflection. Student responses demonstrated Based on observational data and interview narratives, students exhibited a noticeable shift in their learning behavior; they expressed feeling less hesitant to speak, actively utilized descriptive culinary vocabulary in context, and displayed growing self-assurance in their communicative attempts. The discussion critically contrasts these empirical outcomes with previous scholarship, proving that integrating contextual visual media (local culinary topics) and character-building values yields superior affective reduction and situational fluency compared to generic or uncontextualized role-play practices. The study highlights that role play provides an authentic pedagogical bridge for junior high school learners, transforming passive language instruction into active, meaningful communication.

Keywords: *Affective Filter, Culinary Topics, EFL Speaking, Empirical Synthesis, Role Play, Qualitative Case Study, Student-Centered Learning.*

1.Introduction

In the contemporary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational landscape, oral communication competence stands as a primary benchmark of language mastery. Under the recently implemented Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia, English instruction in junior high schools explicitly emphasizes active, functional communication and student-centered learning practices (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). For seventh-grade students transitioning from primary education



to secondary language acquisition, developing speaking confidence is critical. Ideally, speaking instruction should empower learners to express ideas spontaneously, construct meaning collaboratively, and interact fluently in real-life social contexts (Brown, 2007; Wely, 1976). However, an acute discrepancy persists between this pedagogical ideal and actual classroom realities.

A major issue emerging in recent EFL classrooms is the prevalence of high affective barriers and linguistic hesitation among early adolescent learners. Linguistically, students suffered from limited active vocabulary, incorrect phonetic pronunciation, and frequent grammatical errors (such as misusing subject-verb agreement or verb 'to be' forms like 'is' instead of 'are'). Psychologically, students exhibited strong inhibition, anxiety, and an intense fear of making pronunciation mistakes in front of peers a phenomenon accurately described by Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Ur's (1996) conceptualization of speaking inhibition. Traditional teacher-centered methods, which prioritize passive grammar drills and static textbook readings, further exacerbate this problem by depriving students of authentic communicative practice.

To mitigate these challenges, communicative teaching strategies such as presentations, discussions, and storytelling have been widely advocated. However, the Role Play method offers a uniquely transformative approach for early adolescent EFL learners. Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles (Richards, 2006), role play creates a low-anxiety, simulated social environment where students assume fictional identities, thereby reducing personal vulnerability while encouraging spontaneous verbal interaction. While extensive scholarship has documented the benefits of role play (e.g., Amelia & Fitriani, 2022; Hidayatullah et al., 2023), a distinct research gap remains regarding its contextualized integration with specific visual media and character-building values in early junior high school settings. The novelty of this study does not rely primarily on the uniqueness of the research site, but rather on its specific pedagogical contribution: integrating familiar culinary topics, high-definition visual materials, and information-gap activities within a role-play framework. This combination is theoretically designed to scaffold vocabulary retrieval while simultaneously lowering the affective filter of early adolescent learners. Therefore, this qualitative case study is guided by the following explicit research questions:

1. How is the role-play method utilizing culinary topics and visual media systematically implemented to teach speaking skills to seventh-grade students?
2. How do students respond to this implementation, specifically regarding their perceived speaking anxiety and communicative confidence?

2. Method

This research is qualitative. The study is designed to explore how role play is implemented and to understand its role in facilitating the speaking skills of grade 7 students. The purpose of this approach is to gain a thorough grasp of how role play is used to teach speaking English at 7th grade Junior High School. It also reveals reactions to the usage of role play in speaking instruction. A qualitative case study is ideal for this research because it allows the researcher to explore a specific phenomenon within its real-life context by gathering data from multiple sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The research instruments used to gather the study's data: documentation, interviews, and observation. Following its collection through observation and written documentation, the data was examined and given in the form of a descriptive explanation.

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2014) to investigate the real-life implementation of the Role Play method in an EFL speaking classroom. A qualitative case study was specifically chosen because it allows for a holistic, contextualized exploration of a bounded system in this instance, a single seventh-grade classroom at Junior High School. The uniqueness of this research subject stems from three distinct contextual factors: (1) the educational setting of an Islamic junior high school that embeds moral-character values into language learning, (2) the transitional developmental stage of grade 7 students who present high initial affective filters, and (3) the innovative integration of local culinary visual media as a catalyst for communicative role-playing.

The participants in this study comprised 20 seventh-grade students at Junior High School. To gather in-depth qualitative data, purposive sampling was utilized to select three specific student key informants (KD, MDN, and AQ). These informants were selected based on specific criteria observed during the preliminary phase: (a) exhibiting high initial speaking anxiety, (b) demonstrating distinct communicative barriers (e.g., pronunciation vs. vocabulary recall), and (c) showing observable shifts in participation during group work.

- a. KD: Represented students with high performance anxiety and fear of negative peer evaluation, who made significant emotional progress through group preparation.
- b. MDN: Represented students who struggled primarily with pronunciation accuracy and vocabulary recall, but excelled when granted character-playing roles.
- c. AQ: Represented introverted, shy learners who initially exhibited severe verbal hesitation but gradually built confidence through peer-supported role interactions.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three complementary qualitative techniques over a multi-week observation cycle (consisting of 3 meetings, 2x40 minutes each):

1. Classroom Observation: The researcher acted as a non-participant observer during the 3 sessions, using structured observation sheets to record classroom dynamics, the four phases of role-play implementation, and specific student speaking behaviors.
2. Semi-Structured Interviews: Post-implementation interviews were conducted with the English teacher (30 minutes) and the three key informants (15-20 minutes each). The sessions were audio-recorded and fully transcribed to capture their subjective experiences and perceptions regarding speaking anxiety.
3. Documentation Analysis: Included teaching modules, student worksheets, and photographic artifacts.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis was performed interactively using Miles and Huberman's framework. Data Reduction involved an initial open-coding process of the observation field notes and interview transcripts to identify recurring themes related to "affective filter reduction" and "situational fluency". This was followed by Data Display (organizing coded data into descriptive narratives) and Conclusion Drawing. Methodological triangulation was applied by comparing observation notes with interview transcripts and documents.

3. Findings and Discussion

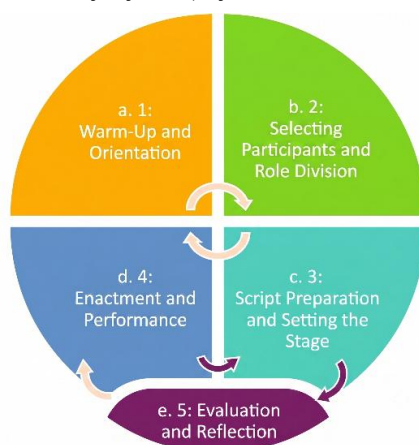
The findings section focuses strictly on presenting the raw data collected during the study, omitting any deep analysis or interpretation. Researchers typically utilize tables, graphs, and statistical summaries to report these direct observations, numbers, and facts. As Creswell (2014) notes, this segment is reserved exclusively for the objective results gathered from research measurements and observations, rather than their meaning. Discussion section is where researchers interpret, analyze, and contextualize those results. This part of the paper explains the significance of the data, evaluates how the outcomes align with the original hypotheses, and compares the work to existing literature. It also addresses the study's strengths and limitations. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017), the discussion serves to link empirical findings back to established theories, explain unexpected or expected outcomes, and recommend pathways for future investigation.

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the data collection process and the subsequent discussion regarding the implementation of the Role Play learning method to teach speaking in describing food to the seventh-grade students at Junior High School. The data was gathered through classroom observations, interviews with the English teacher and selected students, and documentation analyses including teaching modules and student worksheets.

The findings are structured into two primary focus areas derived from the research questions: 1) How are the steps for applying the role-play method in teaching speaking implemented? and 2) What are the described student responses to the implementation of the role-play method in achieving speaking learning objectives, especially in increasing self-confidence and speaking skills of seventh-grade students?

The Implementation of Role-Play Steps in Describing Food

Based on chronological classroom observations, the implementation of the Role Play method was systematically adapted following the five phases of Role Play syntax (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2009) aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka framework:



In Figure 3.1 above, we can see that in implementing the Role Play method there are steps that must be applied in it, namely as follows:

- a. Warm-Up and Orientation

The teacher initiated the session by establishing a supportive learning environment and explicitly introducing the core learning objectives: enabling students to identify, articulate, and describe various food characteristics correctly within an interactive conversation. To activate students' background knowledge (schemata) and contextualize the topic, the teacher presented a short video depicting a restaurant scene where a customer and a waiter engaged in a functional dialogue about ordering food. Following the video screening, the teacher explicitly introduced sensory adjectives (e.g., savory, spicy, crunchy, soupy, sweet, tender, juicy) and reviewed essential grammatical structures, specifically the placement of the verb 'to be' required for describing physical attributes and flavors. This orientation phase successfully built an initial cognitive baseline, reducing students' anxiety and preparing them for active verbal interaction.

As they practiced role-playing as part of their English language instruction, the students appeared excited in class. Each student assumes predefined roles, such as tourists and tour guides or consumers and sellers in a store, under the teacher's guidance, to practice speaking in pertinent contexts. They engage in conversation with one another in English while attempting to create characters and plots that are appropriate for the situation at hand. Teachers frequently struggle to assist students in improving their speaking abilities when teaching English. The role-playing approach is one practical way to get past this obstacle. With this approach, students can directly experience the application of the language they are learning by practicing speaking in real-world scenarios. Students acquire both the language's structure and the ability to speak confidently and impulsively in this fashion. Students can improve their speaking abilities in an enjoyable and engaging way by using role play in English language instruction.

b. Selecting Participants and Role Division

The class of 20 seventh-grade students was systematically organized into conversational pairs and one group of five students. To establish a clear communicative context, the teacher distributed high-definition visual aids depicting popular local dishes (such as Bakso, Chicken Satay, Donuts, and Sweet Martabak). Within these groups, students were assigned distinct, interdependent roles to ensure an authentic two-way interaction. For instance, Student A acted as a 'Customer' or 'Food Vlogger', while Student B acted as a 'Waiter' or 'Chef'. By assigning complementary roles, the teacher deliberately created an information gap between participants. This structural setup drove an intrinsic necessity to communicate, aligning with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles which state that meaningful social interaction fosters second language acquisition (Richard, 2006)

c. Script Preparation and Setting the Stage

During this phase, the teacher allocated 15 minutes for students to collaboratively draft a short role-play script on their designated Student Worksheets. Guided by the assigned food media and character roles, students negotiated meaning within their groups to construct descriptive sentences. The teacher mandated that the dialogues must incorporate explicit descriptions of the food's taste, texture, appearance, and ingredients. For example, students working on the Bakso prompt negotiated phrases such as "the broth is savory" and "the meatballs are soft, chewy, and juicy". This collaborative drafting stage served as a vital scaffolding process, allowing students to refine their target vocabulary, correct minor grammatical errors together, and rehearse their pronunciation before public execution.

This was also conveyed by one of the groups:

A : *let's go eat meatball there*
B: *let's go! People say the meatball is delicious*
C : *Yes, It is true. They say the broth is savory*
D : *the meatball are soft, chewy and juicy*
E : *And served with tofu, noodle, and frittes*

This required students to actively use English to communicate meaning rather than simply reading a static descriptive text.

In this case, many students do not understand the characters they will play, students do not pay attention to fluency, giving students the freedom to develop their own dialogue and characters. However, by employing this role-playing technique, the instructor attempts to improve.

In order to help students, comprehend and develop areas that require improvement, like speaking fluency and the usage of suitable terminology, the teacher often offers constructive criticism. It is believed that by employing this method, students will gain more self-assurance in their ability to actively and successfully use English in everyday contexts.

The researcher's findings indicate that the quality of role play in the classroom was good, aligning with established characteristics of effective role play. These characteristics emphasize that role play should be grounded in familiar situations, allow students to speak naturally, and foster creativity. Specifically, the type of role play used in this study was Simple Role Play, in which students engaged in a dramatic performance based on a scenario that had been prepared in advance. The effectiveness of role play as a teaching strategy for language learning and development is well known. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach supports the use of role play as it focuses on interaction and practical communication skills. According to Brown (2007), effective role play allows students to practice real-life

language use in a supportive, controlled environment. It offers opportunities to use language in a meaningful context, enhancing both fluency and accuracy.

d. Enactment and Performance

In the enactment phase, each pair or group came to the front of the classroom to perform their role-play script in front of their peers. The activity was executed as a Simple Role Play, where students staged their prepared scenarios using speech, gestures, and facial expressions. Rather than passively reading static descriptive text, students actively used oral English to convey meaning within realistic social exchanges. While some students experienced initial hesitation or minor pronunciation errors during the performance, the collaborative nature of performing a character significantly lowered their affective filters. Acting as a character reduced the fear of making mistakes, allowing students to focus on situational fluency and expressive communication.

e. Evaluation and Reflection

The final phase focused on post-performance assessment and reflective feedback. Immediately following the student presentations, the teacher provided constructive, learning-oriented feedback regarding vocabulary accuracy, proper pronunciation of sensory adjectives, grammatical correctness (e.g., proper use of *is/are*), and speech fluency. In addition to linguistic components, the evaluation addressed interpersonal skills, including polite expressions (such as "Excuse me", "Please", and "Thank you"), structured turn-taking, and active listener engagement. The teacher then led a brief reflection session, encouraging students to express their feelings about the performance and identify areas for personal improvement. This structured evaluation loop successfully reinforced vocabulary retention, boosted speaking confidence, and solidified the learning outcomes.

This structured yet interactive method aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, which prioritize meaningful communication and real-world interaction. By embedding language practice within a supportive, contextualized environment, role play bridges the gap between classroom learning and practical application, ultimately strengthening both the fluency and accuracy of the learners (Brown, 2007). Galloway (2008) asserts that paying attention to speaking skills, evaluation should also include participants' ability to take initiative, respond to challenges, and work together in the context of the role played. Participants are assisted in identifying areas for improvement through constructive and learning-oriented feedback.

The describe students' responses to the implementation of the role-play method

The data captured through the checklist instruments and student interviews revealed significant behavioral patterns in terms of language production, accuracy improvements, and social dynamics. To provide structured numeric clarity on student performance during the observation sessions, the qualitative data obtained from the systematic observation sheet is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Students' Responses

Informant Code	Initial Emotional State & Barriers	Post-Role Play Perception & Growth
KD	Experienced high anxiety, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes in front of peers.	Felt happy and confident after rehearsing with group members; food vocabulary became easier to recall.
MDN	Felt anxious regarding pronunciation mistakes and vocabulary recall under direct questioning.	Felt comfortable acting as a 'Chef/Vlogger'; assuming a character removed personal pressure.
AQ	Extremely shy and hesitant due to lack of previous public speaking practice in English.	Found the activity highly enjoyable; observing peers made the classroom atmosphere supportive.

Based on the results of interviews with three students, namely KD, MDN, and AQ, there are several patterns that can be researcher analyzed regarding their responses to the implementation of the role play activity in English speaking class, as the follow:

1. Students' Learning Experience

Initially, all three students shared a common pattern of feeling anxious or pressured when learning English speaking in a traditional classroom environment. However, their affective filters visibly lowered during the role-play performance. This shift from anxiety to enjoyment is evidenced by KD's account: "I usually tremble when the teacher asks me to speak because I am afraid of making mistakes. But when we rehearsed the script together in our group, I felt happy and forgot I was actually taking an English test." Similarly, MDN, who initially worried about his pronunciation, noted, "Acting as a Chef made me less nervous. If I made a mistake, it was the 'Chef' making the mistake, not me." This indicates that character simulation provides a psychological shield against peer evaluation.

2. Students' Participation and Confidence During Role Play

The role-play activity successfully scaffolded the students' confidence. AQ, who represented the introverted learners, initially felt severe hesitation. However, peer support during the activity facilitated her participation: "At first, I was extremely shy to come to the front. But watching my friends act silly as customers made the classroom feel

supportive. I didn't feel alone, so I became braver to speak." This account demonstrates how a collaborative, low-anxiety environment directly correlates with increased student participation.

3. Speaking Ability and Describing Food

The informants strongly agreed that the role-play activity facilitated practical language use rather than passive reading. The integration of visual culinary media directly aided their descriptive vocabulary retention. KD explicitly stated how the context helped her memory: "It is much easier to remember adjectives like 'savory', 'spicy', and 'chewy' when teacher pretend to eat the Bakso right in front of me, instead of just memorizing a list from a book." Furthermore, AQ noted she could smoothly describe her favorite food using the target phrases, confirming that situational context enhances vocabulary recall and conversational fluency.

4. Students' Perceptions of Role Play

The students exhibited highly positive perceptions of the activity, highlighting its interactive nature. MDN emphasized the shift from traditional methods: "I liked this activity because it was interactive and not a boring grammar lesson. We could create our own dialogue." Consequently, all three students agreed that role play made learning English significantly more enjoyable. Most importantly, the interview narratives confirm that integrating authentic contexts effectively reduces their shyness and provides a long-term boost to their communicative self-assurance.

Overall, the results of this interview indicate that the role play activity serves as a powerful and enjoyable instructional tool to reduce anxiety and enhance speaking confidence. While the students experienced different levels of initial hesitation, the interactive, collaborative, and contextual nature of the role play allowed Keyla, Muhammad Dzikry, and AQ to improve their vocabulary retention and public speaking comfort. These findings can be a valuable consideration for teachers to implement more active, performance-based learning to support students' speaking skills development.

Pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension are among the English-speaking skill indicators that Junior High School students have studied, according to table 4.1. Students in seventh grade at Junior High School typically follow their teachers' directions and actively participate in English teaching and learning activities.

Finally, the implementation of this conversational method within the specific framework of Junior High School allowed for the simultaneous realization of character development goals. The restaurant and culinary scenarios forced students to manage complex peer dynamics, requiring patience, polite interaction (such as using 'Excuse me', 'Please', and 'Thank you'), and structured turn-taking. Furthermore, the conversational context allowed students to organically weave in discussions about healthy eating, halal practices, and gratitude. This outcome reinforces the core objectives of the 'Independent Curriculum' (Kurikulum Merdeka), proving that interactive language instruction can successfully serve as a powerful conduit for both communicative proficiency and positive civic disposition.

Analysis of the Contextual Classroom Observation Data

To provide a comprehensive overview of the instructional baseline and the communicative environment at Junior High School, a structured observation was systematically conducted on July 15, 2026. The empirical data gathered through the research instruments are categorized into four critical dimensions: the teaching and learning process, students' speaking behavior, classroom atmosphere, and the implementation suitability of the Role Play method. based on the data results obtained as follows:

1. Teaching and Learning Process and Classroom Atmosphere

The observation data revealed that while the English teacher clearly outlined the core learning objectives, the overall instructional delivery remained heavily reliant on conventional, teacher-centered approaches. The evaluation indicated a critical absence of interactive teaching methodologies, language production opportunities, and structural multimedia resources to support speaking functions. Consequently, this dynamic directly impacted the classroom environment; although students maintained generic attention and exhibited high collaborative comfort when working in peer groups, there was a noticeable deficit in active classroom participation, spontaneous enthusiasm, and general enjoyment during the standard English lessons. The rigid structure failed to cultivate an optimal, low-anxiety environment necessary for language acquisition.

2. Students' Speaking Behavior

The seventh-grade student baseline behavior showed significant linguistic obstacles in terms of oral skills and language production indicators. The students demonstrated a 'Fair' proficiency level in their willingness to speak, self-confidence, sentence construction capacities, and peer interaction dynamics. A primary communicative asset observed was their correct phonetic pronunciation of English words, which was rated as 'Good'. However, their functional output was significantly hindered by a critical lack of appropriate food-related vocabulary and a severe hesitation to respond to oral questions, resulting in low fluency marked by frequent processing pauses.

3. Suitability of the Role Play Learning Method

Despite the communicative challenges identified in the current classroom ecosystem, the diagnostic checklist strongly validated the step-by-step implementation of the role play method in teaching speaking. The evaluation indicated that the seventh-grade cohort highly enjoys situational acting, actively thrives in collaborative learning frameworks, and demonstrates strong potential in following structured performance instructions. Most importantly, the topic of "Describing Food" was deemed highly suitable for active simulation. The instrument conclusively verified that

the strategic implementation of the Role Play learning method is highly likely to alleviate speaking anxiety, drop the students' affective filters, and systematically advance their oral proficiency skills. To rigorously contextualize the contributions of this research and highlight its distinct empirical findings, a critical comparative analysis was conducted against relevant prior studies on role play implementation in EFL speaking classrooms. Table 3.2 synthesizes the key pedagogical dimensions, media usage, contextual focus, and observed outcomes across these studies in comparison to the present research.

Table 3.2 Comparative Synthesis of Present Study with Previous Role Play Research

STUDY & CONTEXT	TOPIC & MEDIA FOCUS	TARGET OUTCOME	COMPARATIVE ANALYTICAL INSIGHTS
PRESENT STUDY (2026)	Culinary Topics (Describing local food) + High-Definition Visual Media + Islamic Values	Lowering affective filter, situational fluency, & character integration	Demonstrates that combining familiar sensory-rich topics (food) with character simulation in an Islamic school provides dual benefits: affective reduction and moral character growth.
HIDAYATULLAH ET AL. (2023)	General conversational transactions without specific media focus	General speaking accuracy & grammar drills	Focuses primarily on linguistic accuracy. The present study complements this by illustrating how visual culinary media provides an affective scaffold, offering an alternative to general dialogue practices.
AMELIA & FITRIANI (2022)	Standard textbook role-playing scenarios in general junior high school	Basic speaking achievement & fluency	Employs broad textbook scenarios. The present study reveals that local contextual media (e.g., Bakso, Sate) drives extends student engagement than generic textbook topics.
NIKMAH (2019)	Role play in Higher Education (University EFL students)	Advanced transactional speaking & fluency	Focuses on adult learners with higher baseline autonomy. The present study fills the gap for early adolescents (Grade 7) who require structured visual scaffolding to overcome initial shyness.
ZURAIDAH (2020)	Simple role play in Grade VIII public junior high school	Fluency and active classroom participation	Confirms general effectiveness of role play, but lacks integration with character-building values and qualitative depth regarding specific student affective profiles (e.g., KD, MDN, AQ).

Comparing the empirical results of this study with existing literature reveals three key advantages of integrating culinary visual media into role play for seventh-grade EFL learners. First, unlike previous studies that relied on broad, uncontextualized scripts (Hidayatullah et al., 2023; Zuraidah, 2020), using familiar local food topics (e.g., *Bakso* and *Sate*) acts as a sensory-rich cognitive anchor, enabling faster vocabulary retrieval with reduced cognitive load. Second, in contrast to standard textbook scenarios (Amelia & Fitriani, 2022), character-based simulations (e.g., food vloggers, chefs) create authentic information gaps and provide a psychological shield that reduces peer scrutiny for introverted students like KD and AQ. Third, while earlier research focused on autonomous university students (Nikmah, 2019), this study demonstrates that structured, peer-assisted scaffolding effectively lowers heightened affective filters (Ur, 1996) during the early adolescent transitional phase, successfully bridging primary grammar knowledge with active communicative competence.

4. Conclusion

This qualitative case study concludes that the implementation of the Role Play method using culinary topics effectively bridges the gap between theoretical English instruction and authentic oral communication for seventh-grade students at Junior High School. Executed through four systematic steps Warm-Up & Orientation, Participant Selection with Information Gap, Collaborative Script Preparation, and Enactment with Reflection role play transformed the learning environment into an active, student-centered space. The qualitative evidence from key informants (KD, MDN, and AQ) demonstrates that character simulation significantly lowers affective filters, reduces speaking anxiety, and enhances descriptive vocabulary retention, pronunciation accuracy, and situational fluency. For EFL educators, this study provides a practical, contextualized framework for designing interactive speaking activities that integrate local cultural themes and character values into secondary language education.

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