

ROLE-PLAY AS PEDAGOGICAL TOOL ON ARABIC LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract: *This study aims examines the effectiveness of the role-play method in enhancing students' Arabic language skills, particularly in speaking proficiency, motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and active learning. A total of 405 undergraduate students from UiTM enrolled in Arabic language courses participated in the study. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire and analysed descriptively. The findings reveal positive student perceptions, with high mean scores in fluency, engagement, and vocabulary development. These findings affirm role-play as an effective pedagogical approach in Arabic language instruction.*

Keywords: *Role-play, Arabic Language, Speaking, Motivation, Vocabulary, Active Learning.*

Introduction

Role-play is an interactive pedagogical tool that enhances language acquisition by immersing learners in real-life communication scenarios. Rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), role-play enables collaborative learning in which students support one another in developing linguistic skills. Additionally, Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis highlights the importance of comprehensible input, which role-play naturally provides, while Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory underscores the role of imitation in acquiring language patterns.

Traditional language instruction, particularly in Arabic, has often emphasized rote memorization and passive learning, which may hinder students' ability to use the language effectively in real-life situations. This limitation has led to growing interest in interactive, learner-centered approaches that promote meaningful communication. Role-play addresses this need by enabling students to engage actively with the language and develop practical communication skills. Role-play fosters communicative competence, fluency, motivation, and cultural awareness, making it an effective strategy in language learning. In light of these theoretical foundations, the present study seeks to explore learners' perceptions and experiences of using role-play in Arabic language learning.

Specifically, this study aims:

1. To identify learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of role-play in improving Arabic speaking proficiency.
2. To determine the influence of role-play on learners' motivation and engagement in Arabic language learning.
3. To demonstrate the role of role-play activities in supporting vocabulary acquisition in Arabic.
4. To illustrate the effectiveness of role-play in promoting active learning in the Arabic language classroom.

Literature Review

Role-play is well known used in foreign language learning as a student-centered approach that helps build communication skills through meaningful interaction. In the context of Arabic language learning, it provides a safe and practical environment for students to practise the target language in real-life situations. By simulating authentic scenarios, role-play helps learners move beyond simply knowing Arabic structures to using them actively and spontaneously.

Studies have consistently shown that learners exposed to modelled language in interactive contexts, such as role-play, demonstrate improved communicative competence and confidence in using the target language (Nunan, 2004; Littlewood, 2013). Role-play allows learners to mimic real-world language patterns, reinforcing grammatical and pragmatic knowledge. Qizi (2020) highlights that role-play is applicable in both beginner and advanced learning stages, offering flexibility to accommodate learners' backgrounds and language proficiency levels. Research also confirms that role-play significantly enhances speaking proficiency. Saja et al. (2020) observed that structured role-playing activities increase students' fluency, vocabulary, and confidence in Arabic. Similarly, Abdulhafid et al. (2024) and Zakaria and Nawawi (2024) found that role-play encourages spontaneous communication and develops conversational skills, while Zulpianto and Daud (2024) emphasized its role in creating engaging, student-centered environments that improve speaking performance.

From the perspective of motivation and engagement, role-play has been shown to foster student interest and active participation. Amirkhanova and Bobyreva (2020) demonstrated that role-play enhances not only language competence but also pedagogical skills and social interactions among trainee teachers. In Arabic language contexts, Abdelhafid et al. (2024) found that role-play reduces learners' anxiety, increases enthusiasm, and supports participation—especially important for learners in non-Arabic-speaking environments. Ahmad et al. (2024) further associate role-play with 21st-century learning skills, including creativity, collaboration, and communication.

Vocabulary acquisition is another domain in which role-play proves effective. According to Ghifari et al. (2024), students engaged in role-play displayed notable improvements in vocabulary use and pronunciation. This aligns with earlier findings that regular exposure to vocabulary in context enhances retention (Saja et al., 2020). Nur et al. (2024), however, stress that effective implementation is critical; challenges such as time constraints and classroom management must be addressed to fully realize the benefits of role-play.

Additionally, role-play supports the shift toward active learning. Traditional Arabic language instruction, which often relied on rote memorization, is being replaced by methods that promote interaction and critical thinking. Studies by Al-Sultan and Daif-Allah (2024), and Najib and Supardi (2022), show that role-play enables students to use Arabic in meaningful contexts, thereby improving comprehension, pronunciation, and overall engagement. This shift is consistent with modern language pedagogy, which advocates experiential learning over passive knowledge acquisition.

In conclusion, literature and recent empirical studies confirm that role-play is a valuable method in Arabic language education. It enhances speaking fluency, increases motivation and engagement, supports vocabulary acquisition, and promotes active learning. Its alignment with key learning theories and its proven effectiveness across diverse settings make it a powerful tool for fostering linguistic competence and learner-centered instruction.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate students' perceptions of role-play in Arabic language learning, particularly in improving speaking proficiency, increasing motivation and engagement, enhancing vocabulary acquisition, and promoting active learning. The study involved 405 undergraduate students enrolled in Arabic language courses at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Dungun. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across various proficiency levels, specifically from students enrolled in different levels of the Arabic language curriculum (TAC151, TAC251, TAC452, TAC451, TAC501). From a total population of 652 students, approximately 50% of students from each TAC level were selected to ensure balanced representation across proficiency groups. The questionnaire included 20 items across four domains (speaking, motivation, vocabulary, active learning), each using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Table 1: Reliability Test

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.963	20

Table 1 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .963; thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and percentage, employing SPSS software. Findings were then interpreted based on mean scores to reflect students' perceptions in relation to each research objective.

Findings

Findings for demographic profile

Q1. Gender

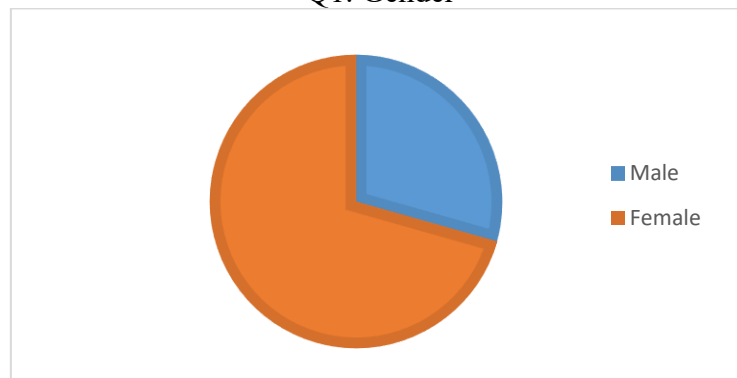


Figure 1: Percentage of Gender

Figure 1 illustrates the gender distribution of the respondents. Out of 405 participants, 286 (70.6%) were female, and 119 (29.4%) were male.

Q2. Current TAC Level

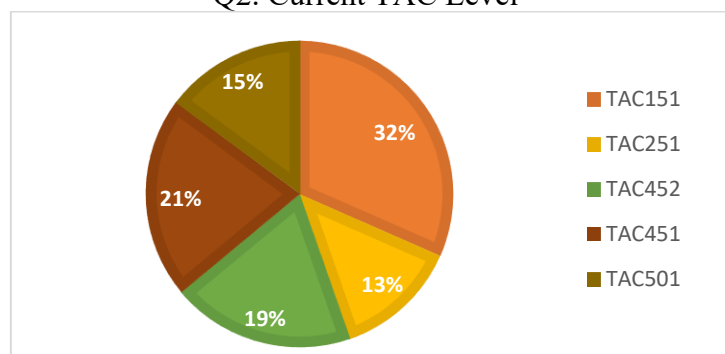


Figure 2: Percentage for Current TAC Level

Figure 2 presents the percentage for respondents for each TAC level. The results indicates that 32% of the respondents were from TAC151, while 13% of them were from TAC251, 19% from TAC452, 21% of them from TAC451 and 15% respondent from TAC501.

Q3. Prior Experience in Learning Arabic Before UiTM

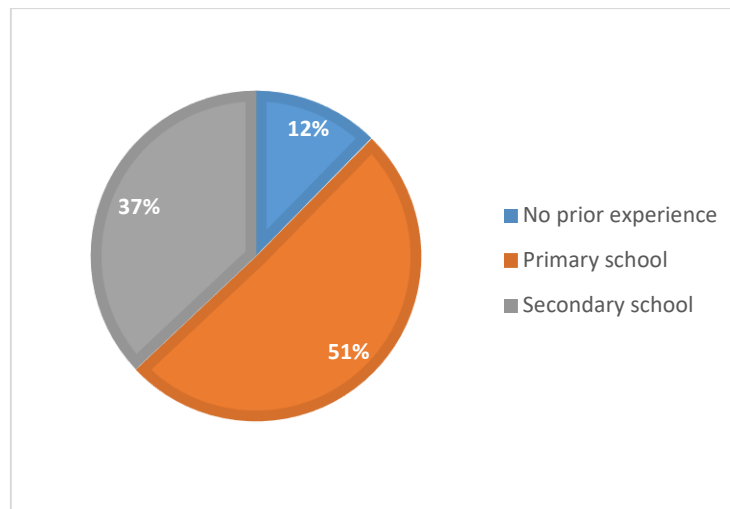


Figure 3: Percentage for Prior Experience in Learning Arabic Before UiTM

Figure 3 presents the percentages of respondents with prior experience in learning Arabic before UiTM. Most of the respondents (51%) learnt Arabic during secondary school. While (37%) respondents experienced learnt Arabic in primary school. Only (12%) of them have no prior experience learning Arabic. This indicates that most respondents had some foundation in Arabic before their university studies.

Objective 1

This section presents data for the first research objective to identify learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of role-play in improving Arabic speaking proficiency.

Table 2: Role-Playing as a Tool for Improving Arabic Speaking Proficiency

ITEM A	Mean
Q1 Role-playing activities help me speak Arabic more fluently.	3.74
Q2 I feel more confident speaking Arabic after participating in role-play activities.	3.47
Q3 Role-playing helps me form Arabic sentences spontaneously.	3.47
Q4 Role-play activities make it easier for me to pronounce Arabic words correctly.	3.67
Q5 I can use Arabic sentence structures better because of role-play activities.	3.51

Table 2 shows the mean score for Role-Playing as a Tool for Improving Arabic Speaking Proficiency. The highest mean score is Q1 ($M = 3.74$) suggests that students strongly perceive role-play as an effective tool for developing fluency in Arabic, likely due to the real-time language practice and spontaneous speaking it encourages. In addition, Q4 shows a relatively high mean score of ($M = 3.67$) which indicates that pronunciation skills also benefit from role-play, possibly because learners are more engaged in listening and articulating words in context. Item Q5 implies that role-play may support grammatical accuracy and sentence construction, allowing learners to apply learned structures in practical conversation., received a mean of ($M = 3.51$). In contrast, the lowest mean scores are shared by Q2 and Q3 both ($M = 3.47$). Although these scores are still positive, they suggest that confidence building and spontaneity in speaking may require further reinforcement, possibly through increased exposure or supportive feedback during role-plays.

Objective 2

This section presents data for the second research objective to determine the influence of role-play on learners' motivation and engagement in Arabic language learning.

Table 3: The Impact of Role-Playing on Motivation and Student Engagement

ITEM B	Mean
Q1 Role-playing activities increase my motivation to learn Arabic.	3.65
Q2 I feel more engaged in Arabic lessons that involve role-playing.	3.64
Q3 I look forward to Arabic classes that include role-play activities.	3.45
Q4 Role-playing makes Arabic learning more enjoyable and meaningful.	3.72
Q5 Role-play activities encourage me to participate more actively in Arabic classes.	3.56

Table 3 presents the mean score for The Impact of Role-Playing on Motivation and Student Engagement. The highest mean score was recorded for Q4 ($M = 3.72$). This implies that students find role-play activities engaging and they perceive them to enhance the overall learning experience in a more meaningful way. The second highest mean was observed for Q1 ($M = 3.65$) where learners reported that role-playing increased their motivation to learn Arabic. This is followed closely by Q2 ($M = 3.64$) where learners felt more engaged in Arabic lessons that include role-play. These findings support the idea that role-playing not only encourages active learning but also increases students' intrinsic motivation and participation in class. Q5 showed the mean score ($M = 3.56$) that some students expressed less enthusiasm to participate actively in role-play activities, possibly due to individual preferences or classroom dynamics. Meanwhile, the lowest mean ($M = 3.45$) was found in Q3. This suggests that while students recognize the benefits, they may still lack anticipation or excitement for role-play-based lessons.

Objective 3

This section presents data for the third research objective to demonstrate the role of role-play activities in supporting vocabulary acquisition in Arabic.

Table 4: Role-Playing as a Method for Enhancing Arabic Vocabulary Acquisition

ITEM C	Mean
Q1 I can remember Arabic vocabulary more easily after participating in role-playing.	3.55
Q2 Role-play helps me understand the meaning of Arabic words through context.	3.72
Q3 I am able to use new Arabic words in sentences after engaging in role-play.	3.60
Q4 Role-play activities introduce me to a wider range of Arabic vocabulary.	3.64
Q5 I acquire new vocabulary faster through role-play than through other methods.	3.51

Table 4 presents the mean scores for role-play as a method for enhancing Arabic vocabulary acquisition. The mean scores reflect a generally positive attitude among learners toward using role-play to improve vocabulary learning. The highest mean score was recorded for Q2 ($M = 3.72$), where learners strongly valued the contextual nature of role-play, which allows them to deduce word meanings naturally during interaction. This is considered a key factor in vocabulary acquisition. The second-highest mean was observed for Q4 ($M = 3.64$), indicating that learners felt role-play broadened their lexical exposure by simulating diverse communication scenarios. Other items also showed encouraging results. For instance, Q3 ($M = 3.60$) showed that learners were able to use new Arabic words in sentences after engaging in

role-play, while Q1 ($M = 3.55$) suggested that learners found it easier to remember Arabic vocabulary, likely due to the meaningful and repeated use of words in context. The lowest mean was recorded for Q5 ($M = 3.51$). Although still positive, this slightly lower value may reflect that some learners find traditional or structured methods such as memorisation and drills more efficient for rapid vocabulary acquisition. Learners might perceive role-play as more helpful for long-term retention and usage rather than for quick memorisation.

Objective 4

This section presents data for the fourth research objective to illustrate the effectiveness of role-play in promoting active learning in the Arabic language classroom.

Table 5: The Shift Toward Active Learning Strategies in Arabic Language Education

ITEM D	Mean
Q1 Role-playing reflects a shift from passive to active learning in Arabic classes.	3.61
Q2 I am more involved in learning when active strategies like role-playing are used.	3.54
Q3 Active learning methods such as role-play help me understand Arabic better.	3.61
Q4 I prefer Arabic lessons that involve interactive activities like role-playing.	3.55
Q5 Active learning through role-play improves my performance in Arabic.	3.60

Table 5 presents the mean scores for the shift toward active learning strategies in Arabic language education. The mean scores range from 3.54 to 3.61, indicating a generally positive response among respondents. Notably, two items recorded the highest mean score of ($M = 3.61$) for both Q1 and Q3. The finding from Q1 implies that learners acknowledge the pedagogical transition brought by role-play, shifting from traditional lecture-based methods to more learner-centered approaches. Q3 reflects learners' belief that active strategies not only increase participation but also enhance comprehension. The third-highest mean was observed in Q5 ($M = 3.60$), suggesting that learners view role-play as contributing positively to their academic performance, possibly through better retention and practical application of the language. In addition, Q4 ($M = 3.55$) shows a growing preference among learners for engaging and collaborative classroom experiences. In contrast, the lowest mean was found in Q2 ($M = 3.54$). Although still positive, this relatively lower score may indicate that while learners recognise the benefits of role-play, some do not always feel fully involved during such activities, perhaps due to low confidence or peer-related dynamics.

Discussion

This study supports the claim that role-play improves Arabic language acquisition by fostering fluency, motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and engagement. These findings are aligned with Krashen's emphasis on comprehensible input and Bandura's focus on observational learning. Role-play creates real-world linguistic scenarios that improve retention and encourage spontaneous use of Arabic. In line with Abdulhafid et al. (2024), this study affirms that learners feel more motivated and less anxious when engaging in role-play. Furthermore, learners prefer interactive lessons, mirroring Najib and Supardi's (2023) findings. However, the relatively moderate score in learner anticipation for role-play ($M = 3.45$) suggests a need for variation in activity design or increased scaffolding for hesitant learners.

The findings also support the study by Ghifari et al. (2024), who reported that role-play helps learners use new vocabulary more confidently in conversation. But while their study focused on beginner learners, this study found that learners at intermediate levels were even more

engaged. This could mean that learners who are exposed to role-play more often become more confident and can remember vocabulary better in future.

Even though the overall results are positive, there are still some challenges when using role-play in the classroom. As mentioned by Nur et al. (2024), big class sizes and limited time can make it hard for every learner to take part fully. In this study, the engagement score was slightly lower ($M = 3.54$), which could be due to learners not getting equal chances to interact during the activity. Educators may need to use group rotations or limit the group size so that more learners have a chance to participate.

Based on these findings, some practical steps can be taken. Educators can include role-play more often in Arabic lessons, using everyday topics like shopping or giving directions. It is also helpful to prepare learners before starting the activity, especially those who are shy or unsure. Giving feedback after the activity can also help learners improve. When done well, role-play can not only support language learning but also help learners develop important soft skills like teamwork and communication.

Conclusion

The results of this study affirm the effectiveness of role-play in Arabic language learning, particularly in enhancing speaking proficiency, increasing students' motivation and engagement, expanding vocabulary, and promoting active learning. The positive perceptions demonstrated through the findings support the incorporation of role-play as a core strategy in Arabic language instruction. These findings suggest that incorporating role-play into Arabic language instruction may enhance not only linguistic outcomes but also student engagement and classroom interaction. Future research may explore the long-term impact of role-play on speaking fluency or compare its effectiveness with other pedagogical tools.

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