



## The Role of Role Play Method in Grade 8 Students' Mastery of Maharat Kalam

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### Abstract:

Arabic speaking skills (*maharah al-kalam*) are crucial for effective communication and learning in Islamic education. This study aimed to examine how the role-play method influences Grade 8 students' mastery of *maharah al-kalam*. A qualitative case study was conducted involving five students and two Arabic teachers, with data collected through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The findings revealed that role play significantly increased students' speaking confidence, promoted active participation, and expanded vocabulary during interactive sessions. The study contributes to the understanding of effective, student-centered learning strategies in Islamic education, particularly in contexts combining traditional values with modern pedagogical approaches. Practically, the results suggest that implementing structured role play activities can enhance oral proficiency, engagement, and communication skills, providing teachers with actionable strategies to foster more interactive and meaningful Arabic learning experiences.

**Keywords:** Role Play, Maharat al-Kalam, Arabic Speaking, Active Learning

### Abstrak:

Keterampilan berbicara bahasa Arab (*maharah al-kalam*) merupakan kemampuan penting dalam komunikasi dan pembelajaran pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh metode role play terhadap penguasaan *maharah al-kalam* siswa kelas VIII. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan lima siswa dan dua guru bahasa Arab sebagai informan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi kelas, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa metode role play meningkatkan kepercayaan diri berbicara, mendorong partisipasi aktif, dan memperluas kosakata siswa selama kegiatan interaktif. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman strategi pembelajaran yang efektif dan berpusat pada siswa, khususnya dalam konteks pendidikan Islam yang mengintegrasikan nilai tradisional dengan pendekatan pedagogis modern. Secara praktis, hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa penerapan role play terstruktur dapat meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara, keterlibatan, dan keterampilan komunikasi siswa, serta memberikan strategi bagi guru untuk menciptakan pengalaman belajar bahasa Arab yang lebih interaktif dan bermakna.

**Kata Kunci:** Role Play, Maharat al-Kalam, Berbicara Bahasa Arab, Pembelajaran Aktif

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## INTRODUCTION / المقدمة

Arabic holds a strategic position in Islamic education, serving as the primary medium for understanding the Qur'an, Hadith, and both classical and contemporary Islamic literature. Mastery of Arabic extends beyond linguistic proficiency; it is crucial for instilling moral, cultural, and spiritual values among learners. In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, the ability to communicate effectively in Arabic is

increasingly important, not only in traditional educational settings but also in cross-cultural interactions and academic research (Đuranović et al., 2021; Htwe, 2021; Mahmoud et al., 2021). Investigating effective strategies for Arabic language learning contributes significantly to improving education quality, bridging the gap between ideal learning objectives and actual classroom outcomes. Therefore, this study is socially and academically relevant, offering insights into enhancing students' communicative competence and providing tools to support youth in acquiring critical skills for both religious and academic contexts (Ma et al., 2024; Qamhan et al., 2021).

Despite its importance, mastering Arabic, particularly speaking skills (*maharah al-kalam*), remains a major challenge for many students. Learners often struggle to express ideas orally, exhibit low confidence in speaking, and possess limited vocabulary. This condition reduces active classroom participation and affects overall learning effectiveness (Setyanto et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). The issue reflects systemic challenges in Arabic language teaching strategies, which often emphasize rote memorization over practical communication. Consequently, identifying methods that enhance students' verbal abilities, confidence, and creativity is essential for achieving communicative and contextually meaningful Arabic instruction (Faris et al., 2022; Muaad et al., 2022). Developing effective pedagogical strategies addresses both individual learning difficulties and broader educational objectives, ensuring that students can engage meaningfully with the language while nurturing essential cognitive and social skills.

Field observations indicate that students frequently remain passive during Arabic lessons, preferring to listen rather than speak, and face difficulties constructing spontaneous sentences. These challenges are exacerbated by conventional teaching methods that rely heavily on lectures or memorization, offering minimal opportunities for interactive or real-life simulation activities (Ahmed et al., 2022; Alfakhry et al., 2023). As a result, a gap emerges between communicative learning objectives and students' practical abilities. Additionally, monotonous teaching methods reduce motivation and hinder engagement, highlighting the necessity for innovative strategies. Approaches that create interactive learning environments, encourage active participation, and expand vocabulary are critical (Mishra, 2021; Tarigan, 2023). These strategies foster a more engaging educational experience, enabling learners to practice Arabic in meaningful contexts and enhancing their overall communicative competence.

Several studies have explored the effectiveness of teaching methods in developing Arabic speaking skills, including the role play method. Jameel et al. (2022) and Almusharraf (2021) reported that role play enhances students' speaking confidence and vocabulary. Amin et al. (2024) and Alharbi (2021) demonstrated that context-based conversational simulations increase learner engagement. Kashif et al. (2024) and Garouani (2022) emphasized that speaking skills often remain the main barrier to achieving communicative learning goals. Kele (2025) and van et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of qualitative approaches to understand classroom dynamics and factors influencing method implementation. However, these studies predominantly focused on general schools or traditional madrasahs, limiting the applicability of findings to modern pesantren contexts that integrate technology into teaching practices.

In addition to contextual limitations, prior research largely emphasized quantitative measures, such as improvements in speaking test scores, without examining the implementation process in depth. Analyses of student interactions, teacher roles, and classroom conditions that support or hinder role play implementation remain scarce

(Lounnas et al., 2022; Naser-Karajah et al., 2021). This gap indicates a critical need for qualitative insights into how role play can effectively enhance *maharah al-kalam* in modern Islamic educational settings. Addressing this gap allows for a deeper understanding of the interactive learning process and provides practical guidance for educators aiming to foster effective speaking skills in students, particularly in innovative educational environments that combine traditional values with modern technology.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on applying the role play method within modern pesantren settings, blending Islamic values with educational technology. This approach enables comprehensive exploration of how interactive strategies cultivate confidence, oral proficiency, and creativity simultaneously (Hourani et al., 2022). Furthermore, the study emphasizes qualitative analysis to capture student experiences, challenges, and teacher adaptations in real classroom contexts, offering original contributions previously underexplored (Fathi, 2021; Islam, 2024). By going beyond quantitative outcomes, this research provides a more holistic view of method effectiveness, revealing how context-specific factors influence learning and highlighting actionable strategies for improving Arabic teaching in technologically enhanced Islamic schools.

Based on existing phenomena and literature, this study addresses the research question: How does the role play method influence Grade 8 students' mastery of *maharah al-kalam* in modern Islamic educational settings? The underlying argument is that structured and contextually adapted role play improves speaking ability, active participation, and vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, the method fosters an enjoyable learning experience while supporting social and religious skill development. Preliminary evidence suggests that interactive strategies, tailored to the characteristics of modern pesantren, are more effective than passive, traditional approaches. By examining classroom dynamics and student engagement, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how role play contributes to communicative competence in Arabic learning.

This study contributes empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of role play in modern Islamic schools, providing practical guidance for teachers to design interactive, communicative Arabic lessons. It enriches qualitative literature on classroom dynamics, challenges, and successful implementation of role play, previously underexplored. The findings are expected to serve as strategic references for curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, and enhancing students' language proficiency in Islamic education contexts. By bridging theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching, this research holds academic, pedagogical, and social significance, offering valuable insights for improving Arabic instruction in contemporary educational environments.

## RESEARCH METHOD / المنهجية

This study employed a qualitative case study design, chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation process of the role play method and its influence on students' mastery of *maharah al-kalam*. The case study approach was selected because it allows researchers to explore complex phenomena within real-life contexts, focusing not only on outcomes but also on classroom dynamics, student interactions, and factors supporting or hindering the achievement of learning objectives (Sarfo et al., 2021). By emphasizing contextual understanding, this design enables a comprehensive examination of both the teaching method and its practical impact on students' oral Arabic proficiency.

The research was conducted in a modern Islamic educational setting, a pesantren that integrates traditional Islamic education with technological approaches. This location was chosen because it offers a unique learning environment where innovative methods, such as role play, can be applied, providing insights into how pedagogical strategies function in technologically enhanced Islamic schooling. The setting allows observation of students' active participation and adaptation to interactive learning practices, which are central to understanding the effectiveness of the role play method. The informants of this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique, focusing on students actively participating in Arabic learning activities and directly involved in role play exercises. Additionally, the Arabic language teachers were included to provide professional perspectives. The details of the informants are presented in the table below:

**Table 1. Data Informants**

| Informant          | Role      | Educational Background                               | Reason for Selection  |
|--------------------|-----------|--|---|
| 5 Grade 8 Students | Learners  | Actively involved in Arabic learning and role play   | To obtain direct student experiences and perceptions of the method    |
| 2 Arabic Teachers  | Educators | Experienced in teaching Arabic using various methods | To provide insights on method implementation and classroom management |

Data collection was conducted through multiple techniques to ensure depth and validity (Campbell et al., 2020). First, observations were carried out to directly monitor the learning process, including teacher activities and student responses during role play sessions. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with both students and teachers to gather information regarding experiences, perceptions, and challenges encountered in the learning process. Third, documentation was collected, including activity notes, photographs, and learning archives, to complement the primary data.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw field data to identify essential information. Data display was presented in narrative form to systematically describe observed phenomena and emerging patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the data to answer the research questions comprehensively. To ensure data validity, the study applied triangulation of sources and methods. Source triangulation involved comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure consistency. Method triangulation was employed by using multiple data collection techniques, providing a more accurate, credible, and comprehensive understanding of the role play method's effectiveness in enhancing students' *maharah al-kalam*.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION / نتائج البحث و المناقشة**

### **Finding**

The following section presents the findings of this study on the role play method in enhancing Grade 8 students' mastery of *maharah al-kalam*. The results focus on three main aspects: students' speaking confidence, active participation in classroom activities, and vocabulary expansion during interactive sessions. These findings are derived from interviews, observations, and classroom documentation, providing comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of role play in fostering communicative competence.

### **Role play increased students' speaking confidence**

In this study, speaking confidence refers to the students' ability to express ideas clearly, spontaneously, and assertively during Arabic language learning activities, particularly in role play simulations. It includes their willingness to initiate conversation, respond to peers and teachers, and use appropriate vocabulary without hesitation. Speaking confidence is operationally observed as the frequency, fluency, and clarity of verbal participation during classroom interactions, reflecting students' comfort level and engagement with the language. In the context of role play, confidence is manifested when students actively participate in assigned roles, enact dialogues with peers, and demonstrate the courage to convey opinions even when making mistakes.

One student stated during the interview, "I feel braver to speak Arabic because in role play, I can pretend and make mistakes without feeling embarrassed." This statement indicates that the role play method reduces anxiety associated with speaking in front of the class, allowing students to experiment with language in a safe and supportive environment. The researcher interprets this as evidence that structured role play activities create conditions that encourage risk-taking in oral communication, fostering incremental improvements in students' self-assurance and willingness to speak. Another informant shared, "I used to be afraid of answering questions, but now I can express my ideas more confidently during conversations with classmates." This highlights that repeated engagement in simulated interactions enables students to practice speaking actively, internalize vocabulary, and receive immediate feedback from peers. The researcher interprets this as a clear demonstration that confidence is not innate but develops through interactive, contextually meaningful activities, which help students gradually overcome hesitancy and participate more fully in class discussions.

During classroom observations, students who were previously passive began initiating dialogues, volunteering for roles, and responding promptly to prompts from the teacher and peers. For instance, students raised their hands frequently, exchanged lines confidently, and maintained eye contact while speaking. The researcher interprets these behaviors as consistent evidence of increased speaking confidence. Restating the data, the observed pattern shows that role play effectively encourages students to take verbal initiative, engage actively with tasks, and express themselves without excessive fear of making mistakes.

Overall, the data reveal a consistent pattern: students' speaking confidence improves through repeated, structured role play activities. Both interview statements and classroom observations converge to show that providing a supportive, simulated environment enables learners to speak more freely, experiment with language, and gradually build self-assurance. The combination of peer interaction, teacher guidance, and contextualized dialogue exercises creates a positive feedback loop, enhancing oral proficiency and fostering a culture of active verbal participation in the classroom.

### **Active participation improved classroom engagement significantly**

In this study, active participation is operationally defined as the observable behaviors of students engaging willingly and consistently in classroom activities, including initiating responses, interacting with peers, performing assigned roles, and contributing to discussions. Classroom engagement refers to the level of attention, enthusiasm, and involvement displayed by students during learning sessions. Active participation is measured through the frequency, quality, and responsiveness of student actions, which

indicate their cognitive, social, and emotional investment in the learning process. In the context of role play, engagement is evident when students actively join simulations, respond promptly to prompts, and collaborate with classmates to complete tasks effectively.

**Table 2. An Observation of Active participation improved classroom engagement significantly**

| Observation   | Indicator                            |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Students volunteered for role play roles without prompting                      | Willingness to participate actively  |
| Students responded quickly and confidently to teacher questions                 | Promptness and responsiveness        |
| Students interacted with peers during simulated dialogues                       | Collaboration and peer engagement    |
| Students maintained attention and followed instructions throughout sessions     | Focus and sustained attention        |
| Students showed enthusiasm through gestures, facial expressions, and voice tone | Emotional involvement and motivation |

Based on the observations recorded in the table, students consistently demonstrated high levels of engagement throughout the role play activities. The researcher interprets this as evidence that structured interactive learning fosters active involvement, reduces passivity, and encourages meaningful collaboration among students. Restating the data, students not only volunteered for roles but also responded promptly to teacher prompts, interacted dynamically with peers, maintained sustained attention, and exhibited emotional enthusiasm. This combination of behaviors confirms that active participation is strongly correlated with increased classroom engagement. The observed pattern indicates that role play effectively transforms students from passive listeners into proactive participants who contribute to the learning process and remain attentive and motivated throughout the lesson.

Overall, the data reveal a clear pattern: when students actively participate, their classroom engagement improves significantly. Engagement is manifested through verbal contributions, peer interactions, attentiveness, and expressive behaviors. The observations show that role play encourages a cycle of participation, where active involvement leads to greater interest, enhanced collaboration, and sustained focus. Consequently, students become more invested in learning activities, demonstrating that participatory methods are essential for creating a dynamic and interactive classroom environment.

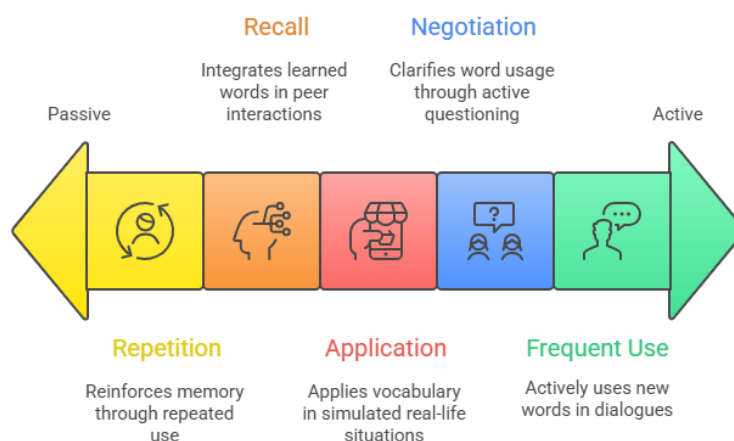
**Vocabulary expansion observed during interactive sessions**

In this study, vocabulary expansion is operationally defined as the observable increase in the range and accuracy of words and expressions used by students during Arabic learning activities, particularly in role play simulations. It includes students’ ability to recall previously learned words, use new terms appropriately in context, and integrate vocabulary into spontaneous conversations. Vocabulary expansion is measured through documentation such as activity notes, transcripts of student dialogues, and photographic evidence of classroom interactions, capturing the practical use of newly acquired terms. In the context of interactive role play sessions, students are encouraged to apply and experiment with unfamiliar vocabulary, demonstrating both cognitive and linguistic growth.

The data were obtained through classroom documentation, including transcribed dialogues from role play sessions, activity notes, and photos of students performing assigned roles. The transcriptions revealed frequent use of newly introduced words, as students actively incorporated them into their conversations. Photographic



documentation captured students pointing to visual prompts, exchanging lines with peers, and demonstrating comprehension of context-specific vocabulary. For instance, a photo of two students performing a marketplace role play could serve as visual evidence of practical vocabulary usage, illustrating students' application of transactional language in Arabic. The researcher interprets these artifacts as clear evidence that interactive activities promote measurable vocabulary growth, allowing learners to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic communication scenarios.



**Figure 1. Vocabulary acquisition through role-play: From passive to active learning**

Observations of classroom sessions confirmed that students frequently paused to select precise words, asked for clarifications from peers, and repeated terms for reinforcement. The researcher interprets this as an active learning process where students consciously expand their vocabulary while practicing communication. Restating the data, students demonstrated the ability to recall and integrate new terms, negotiate meaning in dialogue, and adapt vocabulary to different role play contexts. The documentation aligns with observed behaviors, confirming that structured role play activities stimulate vocabulary growth in a meaningful and contextually relevant manner.

The pattern emerging from the data indicates that vocabulary expansion is strongly facilitated by interactive role play activities. Students not only learn new words but also apply them in practical contexts, leading to greater retention and comprehension. The combination of observation, transcription, and photographic documentation illustrates a consistent trend: when students engage in immersive and contextually rich language exercises, their vocabulary repertoire increases, enhancing overall oral proficiency and communicative competence.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the role play method significantly enhances students' speaking confidence, active participation, and vocabulary acquisition in Arabic learning. Comparing these results with existing literature, it aligns with previous research emphasizing the benefits of interactive and student-centered approaches in language learning. For example, studies on communicative language teaching suggest that simulated real-life scenarios provide learners with opportunities to practice language in meaningful contexts, reducing anxiety and improving self-efficacy (Alsaad et al., 2022; Hamza et al., 2021). Similarly, the current findings confirm that when students engage in structured role play, they demonstrate greater willingness to speak, take verbal initiative,

and interact dynamically with peers, supporting theoretical claims that confidence develops through practice and social interaction rather than innate ability. However, this study extends prior research by situating the role play method specifically within modern pesantren settings, combining Islamic values with technological integration, which had been underexplored in previous studies.

The observed increase in active participation also reflects patterns reported in the literature on experiential and collaborative learning. While previous studies highlighted engagement improvements in general classroom contexts, this research provides detailed evidence that role play transforms passive learners into proactive participants in an Islamic educational environment (Heinrich et al., 2020; Marín et al., 2022). The data show that students not only volunteered for roles but maintained attention, responded promptly, and displayed enthusiasm throughout activities. This supports theoretical perspectives suggesting that active engagement is a mediator between instructional methods and learning outcomes (Chen et al., 2021; Markelz et al., 2022). Practically, the findings indicate that teachers can cultivate more interactive classrooms by implementing structured role play exercises, thereby fostering both cognitive involvement and socio-emotional investment in learning.

Vocabulary expansion, as evidenced by transcripts, activity notes, and photographic documentation, further corroborates the literature emphasizing contextualized language use. Previous research suggests that learners retain vocabulary more effectively when words are practiced in authentic communicative situations (Alsayadi et al., 2021; Setyanto et al., 2022). Consistent with this, the present study shows that students frequently applied newly acquired words in dialogues, negotiated meanings with peers, and adapted terms to various simulated contexts. The theoretical implication is that meaningful language exposure in a supportive, interactive environment strengthens lexical development and promotes communicative competence (Almahasees, 2024; Ritonga et al., 2022). Practically, the findings highlight the necessity for teachers to integrate role play activities regularly to enrich students' vocabulary while reinforcing their ability to apply language in realistic scenarios.

In terms of overall pedagogical impact, these findings underscore the interplay between confidence, participation, and vocabulary growth. Each aspect mutually reinforces the others: increased confidence encourages more active engagement, active engagement provides more opportunities to practice vocabulary, and expanded vocabulary further supports confident and meaningful communication. The results demonstrate that role play is not only a tool for improving isolated skills but also a holistic strategy for cultivating a dynamic, student-centered learning environment. Theoretically, this aligns with socio-constructivist views that knowledge and skills are co-constructed through social interaction, highlighting the importance of collaborative, context-driven methods in language acquisition.

Finally, the study offers practical and theoretical contributions to both educational practice and research. Teachers can utilize these insights to design interactive lesson plans that integrate role play, fostering oral proficiency, confidence, and active participation simultaneously. From a research perspective, this study fills a gap by providing qualitative evidence of role play effectiveness in modern pesantren settings, bridging the existing literature on traditional schools and technologically integrated Islamic education. Furthermore, it suggests that structured, immersive learning activities can create a positive feedback loop, where confidence, engagement, and vocabulary mutually



enhance each other, ultimately improving students' overall communicative competence.

## CONCLUSION / الخلاصة

This study reveals that the role play method effectively enhances Grade 8 students' mastery of *maharah al-kalam*, particularly in speaking confidence, active participation, and vocabulary acquisition. The key insight gained is that interactive and contextually structured role play provides a safe and supportive environment where students can experiment with language, make mistakes without fear, and gradually build self-assurance in oral communication. The findings highlight that active engagement in role play fosters collaborative learning, encourages peer interaction, and strengthens students' ability to recall and apply newly acquired vocabulary in meaningful contexts. The study demonstrates that a student-centered, experiential approach not only improves linguistic proficiency but also contributes to socio-emotional growth, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning Arabic. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of integrating innovative pedagogical strategies, such as role play, into Arabic instruction to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical communicative competence in modern Islamic educational settings.

The study also makes significant scholarly contributions by providing qualitative evidence of role play's effectiveness in technologically integrated Islamic schooling, a context that has been underexplored in prior research. Its strength lies in the triangulation of multiple data sources—interviews, observations, and documentation—offering a comprehensive understanding of classroom dynamics and method implementation. However, the research is limited to a single grade level and specific institutional setting, which may restrict generalizability. Future studies could expand the scope by including multiple educational levels, diverse pesantren contexts, or longitudinal designs to assess the sustained impact of role play on Arabic proficiency. Further research may also explore the integration of digital simulations and technology-enhanced role play to maximize engagement and learning outcomes.

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