

# Role-Playing Method to Enhance Children's Communication Skills and Cognitive Development

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the role-playing method in improving children's communication skills and cognitive development in a kindergarten in Tahunan Village. The background of this research is the importance of contextual and active learning for early childhood, where role-playing can serve as a meaningful learning medium. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, the school principal, and students' parents, participatory observation, and documentation of activities. The results indicate that the role-playing method encourages children to interact actively, improves their communication abilities, symbolic thinking, and simple problem-solving skills. This activity aligns with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development proposed by Lev Vygotsky, where children are able to reach their cognitive potential through teacher guidance and social interaction. In conclusion, the role-playing method is effective as an enjoyable learning strategy that supports the social and cognitive development of early childhood learners.

**Keywords:** Role-Playing, Communication Skills, Cognitive Development.

## I. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) serves as a fundamental foundation for building the quality of human resources in the future. At this stage, children are in the golden age, a period characterized by rapid development in cognitive, language, social, and emotional aspects. Therefore, educational processes provided for early childhood must be carefully designed to be appropriate, contextual, and aligned with children's developmental characteristics. One approach considered effective in early childhood learning is learning through play. Play is not merely a recreational activity for children; rather, it serves as a primary medium in the learning process. Through play activities, children actively explore their environment, develop imagination, and construct understanding about the world around them. This perspective is consistent with the view of Jean Piaget, who argued that children learn through active interaction with their environment and construct knowledge through direct experience (Piaget, 2001). In addition, Lev Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction in children's cognitive development, where learning occurs through collaboration and communication with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

One form of play activity that has significant potential in developing various aspects of children's development is the role-play method. Role play is an activity in which children pretend to be certain characters, such as doctors, teachers, shopkeepers, or family members, and perform these roles within a

particular scenario. Through this activity, children not only develop their imagination but also learn to understand other people's perspectives, improve communication skills, and enhance thinking abilities (Yuniati & Rohmadheny, 2018; Khairani et al., 2023). Communication skills are one of the important aspects that must be developed from an early age. Communication ability is not limited to speaking skills, but also includes listening, understanding messages, and expressing ideas and feelings effectively. Children who possess good communication skills tend to interact more easily within their social environment, demonstrate higher self-confidence, and resolve conflicts constructively (Putri & Nurhafizah, 2023; Budiarti, 2024). However, in practice, many young children still experience difficulties in expressing opinions, interacting with peers, and understanding instructions given by teachers.

In addition to communication skills, cognitive development is also a crucial aspect of early childhood education. Cognitive development relates to the ability to think, understand, remember, and solve problems. Children with strong cognitive development will be better prepared to face the next level of education (Berk, 2013). However, cognitive development in early childhood cannot be effectively achieved through conventional teacher-centered learning methods. Instead, it requires active, enjoyable, and engaging approaches that involve children directly in the learning process (Singer et al., 2006; Ginsburg, 2007). The role-play method offers a relevant solution to address these needs. In role-playing activities, children naturally engage in social interactions that encourage them to communicate with peers. They learn to use language in meaningful contexts, such as engaging in dialogue, asking questions, and responding to others. In addition, role play stimulates children's cognitive development through symbolic thinking, decision-making processes, and problem-solving situations that arise during play (Simanjuntak & Latuhihin, 2024; Veronica, 2017).

Philosophically, role play can be viewed as a space for meaning construction for children. In this activity, children not only imitate reality but also reconstruct their experiences into simpler and more understandable forms. Children learn to understand the social world through the roles they perform, allowing integration between real experiences and imagination. This process enables children to develop abstract thinking abilities that serve as a foundation for more complex cognitive development in the future (Vygotsky, 2004; Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Nevertheless, the implementation of the role-play method in early childhood education institutions still faces several challenges. Some teachers still tend to use instructional teaching methods that provide limited opportunities for children to explore. In addition, limited facilities and infrastructure, as well as teachers' lack of understanding of play-based learning strategies, become obstacles in optimizing the use of role-play methods (Miller & Almon, 2009; NAEYC, 2009).

This condition is also found in TK Desa Tahunan, where some children still demonstrate low communication skills, such as lack of confidence in speaking in front of peers, difficulty expressing opinions, and limited participation in group activities. Moreover, children's cognitive development has not yet been optimal, as indicated by limited thinking abilities in solving simple problems. This situation indicates the need for innovation in the learning process that can improve both aspects simultaneously. Based on these problems, the role-play method is considered an effective alternative for improving children's communication skills and cognitive development. Through the implementation of this method, children are expected to become more active in social interaction, more confident in communication, and more capable of developing their thinking abilities optimally. Furthermore, role-play activities can create an enjoyable learning atmosphere, motivating children to participate actively in the learning process (Darsan, 2025; Wintari et al., 2013).

This research is important because it contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the body of knowledge regarding the effectiveness of the role-play method in early childhood education. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for early childhood teachers in designing more innovative learning strategies that align with children's developmental characteristics. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the implementation of the role-play method can improve children's communication skills and cognitive development in TK Desa Tahunan. Through this research, it is expected that effective and applicable learning strategies can be identified to support the optimal development of early childhood. Accordingly, the research question formulated in this study is: "How can the implementation of

the role-play method improve the communication skills and cognitive development of children in TK Desa Tahunan?"

## II. Literature Review

Early childhood education plays a significant role in supporting children's overall development, particularly during the early years of life when cognitive, social, and emotional capacities rapidly develop. During this period, learning experiences should be designed to encourage active exploration and meaningful engagement. One of the most important approaches in early childhood education is play-based learning, which allows children to learn naturally through interaction, imagination, and experimentation. Research has consistently shown that play is a fundamental component of healthy child development because it promotes cognitive growth, creativity, and social competence (Ginsburg, 2007; Singer et al., 2006). From a developmental perspective, play is closely related to children's cognitive development. According to Jean Piaget, children construct knowledge through active interaction with their environment and direct experiences (Piaget, 2001). Through play activities, children are able to experiment with ideas, solve problems, and develop logical thinking skills. Similarly, Lev Vygotsky emphasized that social interaction plays an essential role in cognitive development. Vygotsky argued that children develop higher mental functions through collaboration with peers and adults within the social context of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In this sense, play activities that involve interaction and collaboration can effectively support both cognitive and social development.

One form of play-based learning that has been widely implemented in early childhood education is role play. Role play refers to an activity in which children imitate real-life situations by acting out specific roles such as teachers, doctors, family members, or community workers. This activity enables children to explore social roles, express ideas, and communicate with others in a meaningful context. Studies have shown that role play contributes significantly to the development of language, communication skills, and social interaction among young children (Yuniati & Rohmadheny, 2018; Khairani et al., 2023). Communication skills are an essential component of children's development, particularly in early childhood education settings. Effective communication includes the ability to express ideas, listen to others, and interact socially with peers and teachers. Children who develop strong communication skills tend to demonstrate higher confidence, improved social relationships, and better participation in learning activities (Putri & Nurhafizah, 2023). Role-play activities provide opportunities for children to practice communication through dialogue, storytelling, and cooperative interaction. Through these activities, children learn to express thoughts and emotions while also understanding the perspectives of others.

In addition to communication development, role play also supports children's cognitive growth. During role-playing activities, children engage in symbolic thinking, decision making, and problem-solving processes. These cognitive processes occur when children imagine situations, create storylines, and respond to challenges that arise during play. Research indicates that role play stimulates children's imagination and encourages them to think creatively and analytically (Simanjuntak & Latuhihin, 2024). Furthermore, educational play activities have been found to contribute positively to children's cognitive and social development by encouraging active participation and experiential learning (Rumiyati & ZulFitria, 2024; Veronica, 2017). Several empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of role-play methods in early childhood education. For example, research by Aulina (2013) found that role-playing activities significantly improve children's social abilities and interpersonal interaction. Similarly, Wintari, Jampel, and Asril (2013) reported that the implementation of role-play methods can enhance children's socio-emotional development by encouraging collaboration and empathy among peers. More recent studies also indicate that role play can effectively improve children's communication competence and language development when integrated into structured classroom activities (Darsan, 2025; Budiarti, 2024).

Based on these theoretical and empirical perspectives, it can be concluded that role play is a valuable learning strategy in early childhood education. By combining imagination, social interaction, and experiential

learning, role play provides opportunities for children to develop communication skills and cognitive abilities simultaneously. Therefore, the implementation of role-play methods in early childhood classrooms is expected to support children's holistic development and create a more engaging and meaningful learning environment.

### III. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the role-playing method in improving children's communication skills and cognitive development in a kindergarten in Tahunan Village. The research subjects consist of children aged 4–6 years, classroom teachers, and the school principal. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis used an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data was tested through source and technique triangulation to ensure the credibility of the research findings.

### IV. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1. Results

The results of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation related to the implementation of the role-play method in improving children's communication skills and cognitive development at TK Desa Tahunan. The data presented represent field findings that describe the experiences and perspectives of the research subjects from an emic viewpoint. Based on interviews with the classroom teacher, it was found that the role-play method has been routinely implemented in learning activities. The teacher revealed that children showed high enthusiasm when participating in these activities. During the learning process, children appeared more active in speaking, more confident in expressing their opinions, and able to interact with their peers. The teacher also stated that through role-play activities, children could more easily understand instructions and respond to situations presented in the play scenarios. This finding indicates an improvement in children's communication skills. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies which show that role play can enhance children's language and communication development in early childhood education (Yuniati & Rohmadheny, 2018; Khairani et al., 2023).

These findings are consistent with the results of observations conducted during the learning activities. Children were actively involved in the games, engaging in dialogue according to the roles they played and using simple language in communication. For example, during a role-play activity about buying and selling, children were able to conduct conversations such as offering goods, asking about prices, and symbolically completing transactions. In addition, children demonstrated the confidence to speak in front of their peers, although still using simple sentences. Such interactive activities are known to foster children's communication competence and social interaction (Putri & Nurhafizah, 2023; Darsan, 2025). From the cognitive development perspective, the observation results indicated that children were able to understand the flow of the game and follow the agreed rules. Children also showed the ability to make simple decisions, such as determining which roles to play and resolving minor problems that occurred during the activity. In several situations, children used objects around them as symbols to represent certain objects, indicating the development of symbolic thinking. This finding aligns with studies indicating that pretend play activities stimulate children's cognitive development, imagination, and problem-solving abilities (Simanjuntak & Latuhihin, 2024; Veronica, 2017).

The interview results with the school principal further reinforced these findings. The principal stated that the role-play method is appropriate for early childhood characteristics because it provides children with opportunities to learn through direct experience. According to the principal, through role-play activities

children not only learn how to communicate but also develop thinking skills and understand social situations around them. The principal also added that these activities help teachers observe children's development more comprehensively. This perspective is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of play-based learning in supporting children's holistic development (Rumiyati & ZulFitria, 2024). Meanwhile, interviews with parents indicated behavioral changes in children at home. Parents reported that children became more communicative, frequently told stories about school activities, and imitated the roles they played during learning. Children also appeared more confident in expressing their wishes and opinions and more active in asking questions about things that attracted their attention. This suggests that the impact of the role-play method is not only visible at school but also continues in children's daily lives.

The findings from interviews and observations were supported by documentation data showing that role-play activities were implemented in a planned and continuous manner. Documentation in the form of activity photographs demonstrated children's active participation in various play scenarios, while lesson planning documents showed that role-play activities were designed to support the development of children's communication and cognitive skills. Overall, the results indicate a relationship among interview, observation, and documentation data. Teachers' statements regarding the improvement of children's communication skills were consistent with observational findings showing children's active participation in speaking and interacting. This was also reinforced by parents' experiences observing behavioral changes in children at home. Similarly, the school principal's view regarding the importance of role play in learning was supported by observation findings showing the development of children's cognitive abilities, such as symbolic thinking and simple problem solving. Thus, the data obtained indicate that the implementation of the role-play method provides meaningful learning experiences for children in developing their communication skills and cognitive abilities.

#### 4.2. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the role-play method at TK Desa Tahunan has a positive impact on children's communication skills and cognitive development. Children became more active in speaking, able to express ideas, and demonstrated symbolic thinking and simple problem-solving abilities. These findings are consistent with the theoretical perspective of Lev Vygotsky, who emphasized that children's cognitive development occurs through social interaction with others, including peers and more competent adults (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of role-play activities, the teacher acts as a mediator who guides children, provides direction when necessary, and encourages them to explore their ideas. This situation reflects the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the distance between a child's actual ability and the potential level of development that can be achieved with assistance from others (Vygotsky, 1978). Educational researchers have also explained that teacher guidance or scaffolding can help children gradually achieve higher levels of cognitive functioning (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

During role-play activities, children engage in complex social interactions. They communicate through dialogue, cooperate with peers, and resolve small conflicts that arise during play. These activities not only improve communication skills but also stimulate cognitive development because children learn to solve problems, make decisions, and understand different social roles. In line with Vygotsky's theory, learning occurs when children participate in social activities that challenge their abilities, allowing them to perform beyond their current developmental level with the support of scaffolding provided by teachers or peers (Wood et al., 1976). Furthermore, the role-play method allows children to use symbols and imagination to express their experiences. For example, children use simple objects as representations of items in buying-and-selling or doctor-themed play activities. This symbolic activity supports cognitive development through the process of internalization, which according to Vygotsky refers to the transformation of social interactions into individual cognitive abilities (Vygotsky, 2004). Children who initially require teacher assistance to understand the rules of the game gradually become able to perform roles independently, indicating that social experiences have been internalized into personal cognitive abilities.

These findings also support Vygotsky's concept that language functions as a primary tool in cognitive development. During role-play activities, children use language not only to communicate but also to plan, organize, and solve problems within the play scenario. Teachers provide questions, guidance, and feedback that encourage children to think critically and express their ideas. This process demonstrates the strong relationship between social interaction, language development, and cognitive growth, as emphasized in Vygotsky's theoretical framework. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate that role play is not merely an enjoyable activity but also functions as a pedagogical tool that supports children's social and cognitive development. This method allows children to learn in meaningful contexts where social interaction becomes the medium through which they reach their potential development within the Zone of Proximal Development. These findings reinforce the relevance of Vygotsky's theory in early childhood education practice, particularly in play-based learning that emphasizes active participation and guidance from adults or more capable peers.

## V. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and analysis using the theoretical perspective of Lev Vygotsky, it can be concluded that the implementation of the role-playing method in the kindergarten of Tahunan Village is effective in improving children's communication skills and cognitive development. Role-playing activities encourage children to interact actively with their peers and teachers, allowing the learning process to occur within a meaningful social context. This interaction aligns with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which children are able to reach higher levels of ability through guidance and support from others. Furthermore, role-playing enables children to use language as a tool to express ideas, plan actions, and solve simple problems. The symbolic and imaginative activities that occur during role-playing help internalize social experiences into individual cognitive abilities. Thus, this method not only enhances communication skills but also supports the development of symbolic thinking and problem-solving abilities in early childhood. Overall, the role-playing method represents an effective, enjoyable, and contextual learning approach for early childhood education. Its implementation can serve as a key strategy in early childhood education programs to optimally develop children's social and cognitive potential.

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