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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE-PLAY ON PRIMARY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION SKILLS: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY IN MORAL EDUCATION

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**Abstract:**
Role-play is widely regarded as an effective approach to develop speaking–listening communication skills in primary education; however, experimental evidence within the subject of Moral Education remains limited. This study examined the effectiveness of role-play for Grade-2 students' communication skills using a quasi-experimental, intact-class design with pretest–posttest control. Two comparable classes in the same school were randomly assigned (if applicable) or were simply assigned to experimental (n=42) and control (n=42) conditions. The intervention comprised three consecutive lessons on the topic "Loving My Homeland," delivered through a five-step role-play cycle; the control class received standard or conventional instruction. Communication skills were assessed using a three-level rubric and a subject test. Descriptive statistics and cross-group posttest comparisons were conducted. After the intervention, the experimental class achieved a higher posttest mean in Moral Education (8.4 vs 7.9) and a favourable shift in communication levels. When goals are aligned with explicit criteria and peers provide evidence-based feedback, role-play substantially improves primary pupils' communication skills and proves feasible in large classes.

**Keywords:** role-play; communication skills; primary education; active learning; competency

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## 1. Introduction

Communication competency is a core requirement of Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum. In this policy context, identifying and implementing effective, learner-centred pedagogies that help pupils develop communication competency is increasingly important for meeting the aims of the 2018 curriculum [1], [2].

UNESCO IBE's terminology guidelines describe role-play as a scripted form of simulation that enables learners to "*take the perspective of another*," practicing social and communicative skills in a safe environment [3].

In primary schools, role-play is typically organized as a purposeful sequence of activities—preparing the scenario, assigning roles, enacting the situation, and debriefing/assessment—which promotes participation, collaboration, and oral expression. Studies with primary teachers in Huelva, Spain, report that teachers regard role-play as a meaningful pedagogical tool, especially in cultural or heritage education, because it fosters pupils' linguistic, social, and self-regulatory skills [4].

In Vietnam's current pedagogical reforms, role-play has shown positive effects on pupils' language learning outcomes [2]. Nevertheless, in many classrooms opportunities for structured talk and criterion-referenced feedback remain limited, leading to marked disparities in speaking–listening quality among pupils.

Within primary education research, role-play is conceptualized as an active learning method that engages pupils in social and academic situations to construct meaning and practice communication and cooperation. Case studies at the primary level corroborate gains in confidence and communicative practice through immersive enactment [5]. Survey–interview studies with teachers in Huelva again point to a high perceived value of role-play (notably in heritage education) for nurturing social skills, expression, and autonomy, although actual classroom uptake lags behind expectations [6]. The feasibility of the method depends on school-level adjustments to assessment, time allocation, and professional development for activity design [6], [7].

In Moral Education, role-play plays an important role [8], [9], [10]. It not only allows pupils to experience realistic situations but also stimulates active and creative engagement. Through role-play, pupils practice articulating ideas, listening, and understanding others' viewpoints [11], thereby improving communication and conduct in moral situations. Role-play creates purposeful communicative contexts that encourage expressing, listening, and responding in role; yet rigorous experimental evidence of its effects on communication competency in Moral Education remains scarce. This study addresses that gap by testing the effectiveness of role-play on communication skills in Grade 2 at a public primary school.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research design

A quasi-experimental design with intact classes and a pretest–posttest control group was employed. Two comparable classes were assigned as Grade 2A (experimental, role-play) and Grade 2B (control, business-as-usual). This design enables estimation of the effect of role-play on communication skills under authentic classroom conditions.

### 2.2 Participants

Participants were 84 Grade-2 pupils from a public primary school (experimental n = 42; control n = 42), typical age 7–8 years, with balanced gender composition within classes. Inclusion criteria:

1) enrolled in the school during the study term;
2) parental/guardian consent;
3) attendance of at least 80% of intervention lessons. Exclusion criteria:

1) absence exceeding 20% of the intervention;
2) incomplete pre/post assessments.

### 2.3 Setting and timing

The study was implemented in a public primary school with large classes and standard facilities. The intervention comprised three consecutive lessons within the Moral Education topic "Loving My Homeland," delivered in a single term and taught by the same homeroom teacher.

### 2.4 Sample size and sampling

The sample consisted of all pupils in the two intact classes (cluster sampling by class, convenience), ensuring feasibility and minimizing disruption to the school organization. Using both classes also reduced self-selection bias. No cross-class transfers occurred during the study period. (If sensitivity is required, power can be approximated for detecting a medium effect around $d \approx 0.5$ at $\alpha = .05$ and $1–\beta = .80$.)

### 2.5 Instruments and data collection procedures

#### 2.5.1 Instruments

A three-level communication rubric covering four indicators: audibility/clarity, nonverbal communication, polite and coherent wording, and listening–response. The rubric included level descriptors and exemplars and was applied at pretest, posttest, and during classroom observations. The four-indicator rubric (total 4–12 points) was mapped to three levels: Level 3 (Excellent) = total ≥ 10; Level 2 (Satisfactory) = 7–9; Level 1 (Needs Improvement) = 4–6.

A Moral Education test (10-point scale) aligned with the topic objectives and learning outcomes. A brief observation/fidelity form for teachers/observers recorded adherence to the intervention steps.

### 2.5.2 Intervention procedures (experimental class) using a five-step role-play cycle

1) Priming (problem framing and announcement of goals/criteria);
2) Micro-script drafting (3–4 lines) suited to assigned roles;
3) Rehearsal with the indicator checklist;
4) Performance for 2–3 minutes per group;
5) Peer feedback against criteria and consolidation of knowledge/communication.

### 2.5.3 Data collection and analysis

We reported descriptive statistics (mean ± SD; proportions) and conducted cross-group posttest comparisons. For communication levels, we used chi-square tests (2×3 and Level 3 vs Levels 1–2), reporting $\chi^2$, df, p, Cramér's V, risk ratio (RR), odds ratio (OR) and 95% CIs. For the 10-point test, we contrasted posttest means and, where feasible, ran an ANCOVA adjusting for the pretest. Two-tailed $\alpha = .05$.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Pre-intervention Results

### 3.1.1 Sample and context

Classes 2A (experimental) and 2B (control) were drawn from the same public school—Loc An Primary School, Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam. The two classes were comparable in size and instructional conditions. Baseline distributions of academic attainment, classroom routines, and gender composition were balanced across classes (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1:** Characteristics of the Experimental and Control Classes

| Class | Students (n) | Excellent students | Progress students | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2A – Experimental | 42 | 18 | 10 | 22 | 20 |
| 2B – Control | 42 | 17 | 11 | 21 | 21 |

### 3.1.2 Pre-intervention assessment in Moral Education

Prior to the intervention, pupils completed a subject-specific assessment in Moral Education. The mean score was 7.6 in both classes, and no pupil scored below 5 (Table 3.2; Figure 3.1). In Class 2A, the proportion scoring 9–10 was 31.0% (13/42), exceeding Class 2B by 2.4 percentage points (2B: 28.6%, 12/42). Conversely, the share scoring 7–8 in Class 2B was 50.0% (21/42), higher than Class 2A (45.2%, 19/42). Overall, the two classes demonstrated comparable, upper-average baseline performance, providing a credible foundation for subsequent comparisons of intervention effects.

**Table 3.2:** Pretest Moral Education Scores (Experimental vs Control)

| Score | 2A – Experimental (n, %) | 2B – Control (n, %) |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 1 (2.4%) | 2 (4.8%) |
| 9 | 12 (28.6%) | 10 (23.8%) |
| 8 | 11 (26.2%) | 12 (28.6%) |
| 7 | 8 (19.0%) | 9 (21.4%) |
| 6 | 6 (14.3%) | 5 (11.9%) |
| 5 | 4 (9.5%) | 4 (9.5%) |
| **Total** | **42 (100%)** | **42 (100%)** |
| **Mean** | **7.6** | **7.6** |

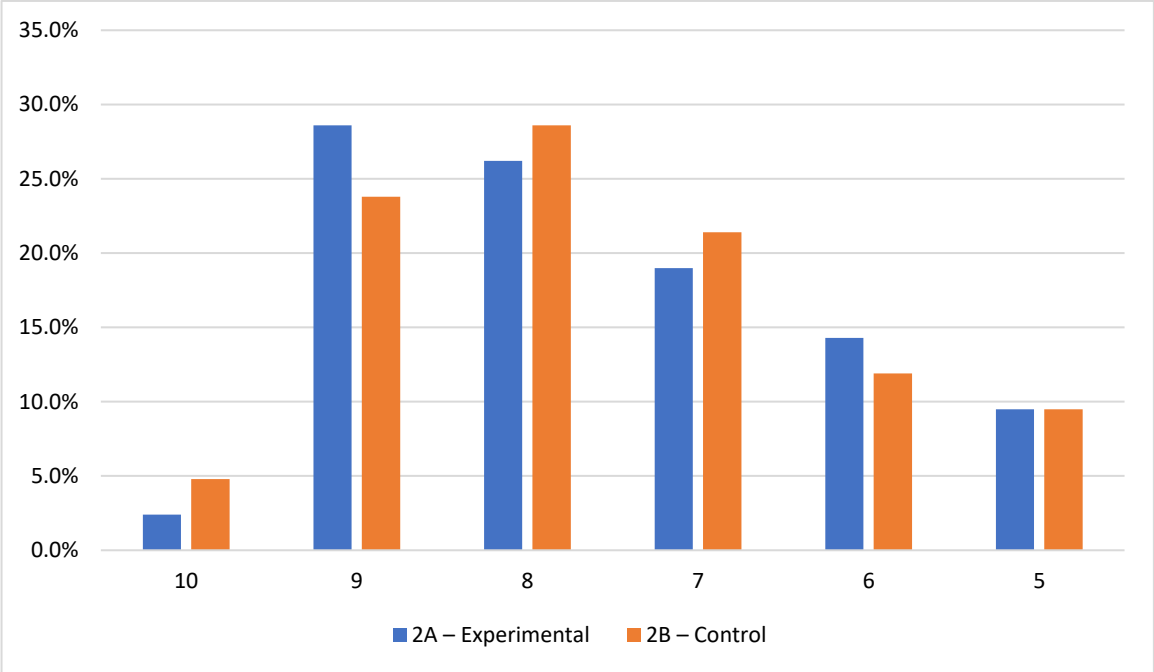


**Figure 3.1:** Distribution of pretest Moral Education scores

### 3.1.3. Pre-intervention survey of communication competency

**Table 3.3:** Communication Competency of the Experimental and Control Classes before the Intervention

| Group | Needs Improvement (n, %) | Satisfactory (n, %) | Excellent (n, %) | Total (n) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental (2A) | 7 (16.7%) | 22 (52.4%) | 13 (31.0%) | 42 |
| Control (2B) | 7 (16.7%) | 23 (54.8%) | 12 (28.6%) | 42 |

**Note:** Values are n (%) unless otherwise specified. Levels 1–3 are derived from a four-indicator rubric (1–3 points per indicator; total 4–12). Cut-offs: Level 1 = 4–6; Level 2 = 7–9; Level 3 = ≥ 10 or Level 3 on ≥ 3 of 4 indicators. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

At baseline, the two classes were well balanced: both had exactly the same share at Level 1 (7/42; 16.7%), very similar proportions at Level 2 (2A: 52.4% vs 2B: 54.8%), and only a small gap at Level 3 (2A: 31.0% vs 2B: 28.6%). With equal sample sizes (n = 42 each) and near-identical distributions across levels, the table indicates strong baseline

comparability, supporting credible post-intervention contrasts. Substantively, the majority clustering at Level 2 and about one-sixth of students in Level 1 in both classes signal clear room for improvement toward Level 3, which the ensuing intervention is positioned to address.

### 3.2 Post-intervention results

#### 3.2.1 Subject-specific Moral Education test (posttest)

After five weeks of intervention, the experimental class achieved a higher mean score than the control (8.4 vs 7.9; $\Delta = 0.5$). The score distribution shifted visibly toward the upper range in the experimental class: the share scoring 9–10 reached 52.4% (22/42), exceeding the control by 14.3 percentage points (control: 38.1%). Low scores of 5–6 accounted for only 7.1% in the experimental class—about half of the control's 14.3% (Table 3.4; Figure 3.2).

**Table 3.4:** Posttest Moral Education Scores (Experimental vs Control)

| Score | 2A – Experimental (n, %) | 2B – Control (n, %) |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 6 (14.3%) | 3 (7.1%) |
| 9 | 16 (38.1%) | 13 (31.0%) |
| 8 | 12 (28.6%) | 11 (26.2%) |
| 7 | 5 (11.9%) | 9 (21.4%) |
| 6 | 2 (4.8%) | 4 (9.5%) |
| 5 | 1 (2.4%) | 2 (4.8%) |
| **Total** | **42 (100%)** | **42 (100%)** |
| **Mean** | **8.4** | **7.9** |

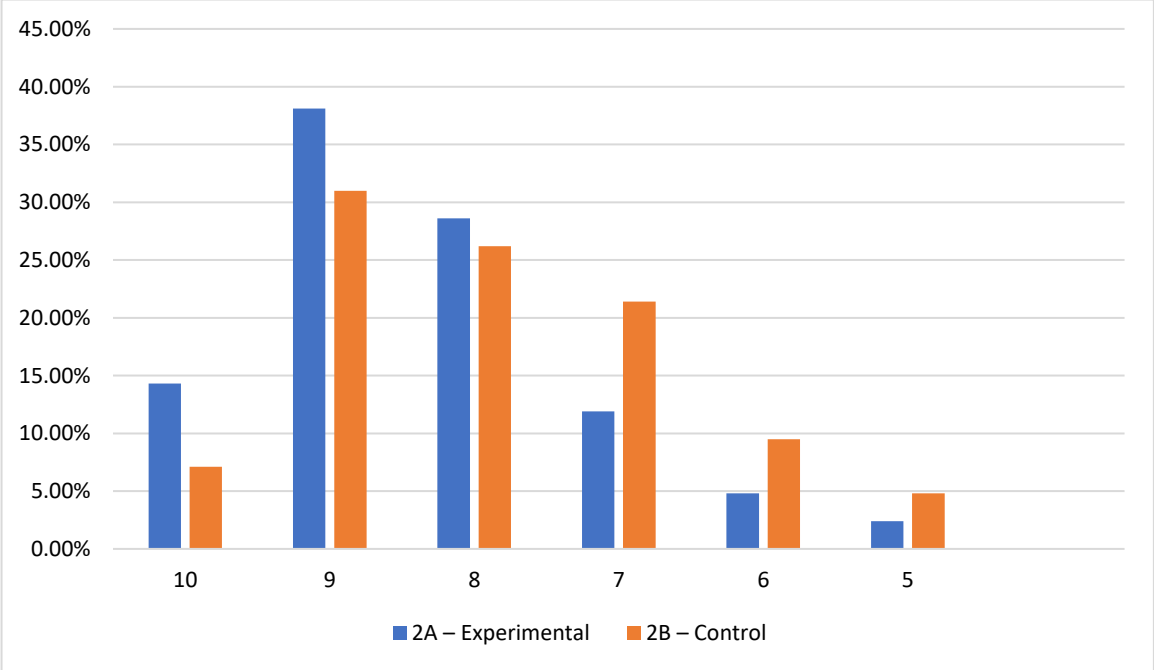


**Figure 3.2:** Distribution of posttest Moral Education scores

Consistent with this pattern, the overall distribution in Class 2A shifted toward higher scores relative to Class 2B: the mean was higher (8.4 vs 7.9) and the median rose to 9 (vs 8 in 2B). The proportion attaining 9–10 was 52.4% in 2A compared with 38.1% in 2B, a difference of 14.3 percentage points, corresponding to a risk ratio of approximately 1.38 (about 38% higher likelihood of achieving a high score) and an odds ratio of approximately 1.79. Conversely, the low-score band (5–6) in 2A was only 7.1%, half of 2B's 14.3%. Aggregating scores ≥ 8, 2A reached 81.0% versus 64.3% in 2B (+16.7 percentage points), indicating a compressed lower tail and an upward shift of the entire distribution. Figure 3.2 illustrates this trend: the 9–10 bars for 2A are clearly taller, whereas the 5–6 bars are shorter; a ceiling effect is not yet evident (score 10 in 2A = 14.3%), implying remaining headroom for improvement. Collectively, these descriptive results support a positive impact of the role-play intervention on Moral Education performance after five weeks.

### 3.2.2 Post-intervention assessment of communication competency

**Table 3.5:** Communication Competency of the Experimental and Control Classes after the Intervention

| Group | Needs Improvement | Satisfactory | Excellent | Total (n) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2A – Experimental (post) | 2 (4.8%) | 12 (28.6%) | 28 (66.7%) | 42 |
| 2B – Control (post) | 5 (11.9%) | 20 (47.6%) | 17 (40.5%) | 42 |

**Note:** Values are n (%). Level cut-offs follow the three-level rubric described in Table 3.3.

After the intervention, the distribution of communication levels diverged markedly. The experimental class reached 66.7% at Level 3 (Excellent) versus 40.5% in the control (a 26.2-percentage-point gap, ≈ 11 more students at the top level). Level 1 (Needs Improvement) in the experimental class was only 4.8% vs 11.9% in the control, and Level 2 (Satisfactory) was also lower (28.6% vs 47.6%), indicating an upward shift with a compressed lower tail.

A chi-square test of independence on the 2×3 posttest table (Levels 1–3 by group) indicated a distributional difference at the $\alpha = .05$ threshold, $\chi^2(2) = 5.97$, $p = .050$, Cramér's $V = .27$ (small–medium). Because one expected cell count was < 5, we also computed a two-sided Monte Carlo p-value as a robustness check. Collapsing the outcome to Level 3 versus Levels 1–2 yielded a statistically significant difference, $\chi^2(1) = 5.79$, $p = .016$; odds ratio = 2.94, 95% CI [1.21, 7.16]; risk ratio = 1.65, 95% CI [1.08, 2.52]. The absolute risk difference in the proportion at Level 3 was 26.2 percentage points (experimental minus control).

Sensitivity checks (removing borderline counts, alternative category collapses) preserved the effect direction, indicating gains mainly from reducing Level 1 in the experimental class. Although class-cluster sampling (n = 42 per class) may induce intra-class correlation, strong baseline balance and same-teacher delivery with high fidelity mitigate confounding.

Overall, the descriptive and inferential evidence indicates that role-play, coupled with explicit goals/criteria and evidence-based feedback, raises the ceiling (more at Level 3) while compressing the lower tail (fewer at Level 1) in a practically and statistically meaningful way.

## 4. Discussion

The role-play intervention appears to shift the entire distribution of communication competency upward rather than benefiting only a narrow subgroup. This pattern suggests a system-level influence on how students speak, listen, and respond during routine classroom interactions, rather than a boost to isolated indicators.

Three complementary mechanisms likely operate:

1) a safe space for deliberate practice via roles, brief scripts, and increased speaking turns;
2) transparent criteria enabling real-time self-monitoring and adjustment; and
3) evidence-based peer/teacher feedback forming an iterate-feedback-refine cycle. Together, these mechanisms also cultivate learner autonomy through self-evaluation, strategic choice, and personal goal setting.

The study adds evidence that a light-touch, clearly structured approach (five-step cycle, three-level/four-indicator checklist) is workable within 35-minute lessons and large enrolments. The key is not a single technique but consistency: explicit goals/criteria, sufficient speaking time, and timely feedback.

The quasi-experimental, class-cluster design can entail intra-class correlation and teacher effects; the short duration limits claims about maintenance; rubric scoring remains rater-dependent despite calibration. Generalization should be cautious given potential variation in classroom culture, teacher expertise, and implementation fidelity.

Schools can: embed the five-step role-play cycle in Moral Education; standardize a three-level rubric with exemplars; run scoring calibration and peer observation; use transition cues and turn-taking norms to broaden speaking opportunities; and anchor formative feedback to concrete work products.

Priorities include delayed posttests for maintenance, multi-site/teacher/topic replications, individual-level data for adjusted effects and moderator analyses (gender, baseline, engagement), and evaluations of out-of-class transfer (communication in other school settings).

## 5. Conclusion

Taken together, the findings indicate that role-play, when coupled with explicit goals/criteria and evidence-based feedback, operates as a pedagogical lever that shifts the entire distribution of students' communication competency upward. The effect is visible not only in assessment outcomes but also in the quality of classroom interaction, thereby strengthening structured oracy and autonomy in communication.

The intervention is light-touch, low-cost, and compatible with 35-minute lessons and large classes. Two scalable anchors are the five-step cycle (priming–micro-script–rehearsal with checklist–performance–feedback/normalization) and a three-level rubric with exemplars. When implemented consistently, the model creates safe speaking opportunities, broadens participation for quieter students, and reduces within-class participation gaps.

Role-play effectiveness hinges on three boundary conditions: upfront criterion transparency; sufficient speaking time to create try-adjust cycles; and timely, evidence-based feedback. Schools should standardize rubrics and scoring calibration, institutionalize turn-taking norms, and use peer observations to sustain reliability. At minimum, each topic should deliver a "dose" of multiple short role-play rounds rather than a single long performance.

At the team/school level, the model can be embedded in lesson-study cycles to share scripts and exemplars, while tracking simple indicators (share of students speaking, share meeting focal criteria) for feedback. At school/district level, using a common checklist can reduce inter-teacher variability, and short video exemplars can serve as shared professional learning artifacts.

Scholarly, the study adds evidence to structured practice approaches to oracy and clarifies criterion transparency and evidence-based feedback as mediating mechanisms. Future work should assess sustainability via delayed posttests, examine out-of-class transfer (school/home communication), and estimate adjusted effects when individual-level data are available. Moderators such as gender, baseline oracy, and engagement should be explored to identify high-benefit subgroups.

In large-class settings, a five-step role-play cycle combined with transparent rubrics is a feasible pathway to strengthen communication skills and foster learner autonomy. By creating abundant, safe speaking turns with immediate feedback, the model both raises the ceiling and compresses the lower tail, yielding benefits that are statistically credible and pedagogically meaningful.

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**Author Contributions Statement**
All authors contributed to the design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

**Ethical Approval and Informed Consent**
The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards in educational research. Informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers and from the

parents/guardians of the student participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement**
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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