

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Speaking ability is one of the most essential skills in language learning, especially for communication. It helps us convey ideas or messages to others. This is supported by several scholars who believe that speaking is considered the most critical skill (Akhter et al., 2020; Frans et al., 2023; Huon & Em, 2022; Islam et al., 2022; Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020; Rao, P, 2019). Students who master their speaking ability will be able to communicate their thoughts and feelings wisely based on the circumstances and context while speaking about the language. In the point of view of Ur (1996, p.20), speaking appears to be the most significant of the four language skills: those who know a language are described as speakers' of that language, as if speaking encompasses all of the needed information for that language. Furthermore, these speaking abilities are essential for students when they need to settle down in their careers. Speaking is a crucial talent that should be developed entirely, as most organizations have always prized the capacity to communicate effectively. Therefore, students must master these foreign language abilities to obtain high verbal competency so that they can utilize English communication as a way of communication, particularly in study and job activities.

In the language learning process, there is one important indicator, namely students' engagement. It is one of the crucial factors in successful learning (Ginting, 2021; Harmer, 1998). In general, student engagement refers to active participation in a wide range of academic and school activities and dedication to achieving learning objectives. Students who are enthusiastic about studying are more likely to invest time and effort in achieving their objectives (Ginting, 2021). As a result, engagement is viewed as a motivator in obtaining academic success or achievement (Astin, 2014; Kuh, 2009). Based on this opinion, teachers need to create a pleasant learning atmosphere that can keep students engaged in the learning process, especially to learn speaking skills. One of the teaching

techniques that teachers can apply is role play. Role play is the activity of playing the role or character of another person so that we can experience how to be that person. Role plays can be the right strategy to attract students' interest and attention to speaking English. Stevens (2015) emphasized that scholars view role-play as an effective active learning strategy: it encourages participation among passive learners, adds dynamism to the classroom, and promotes material retention.

Practically, role play is adapted as a teaching technique in Professional Listening and Speaking (from now on, PLS) at one of the universities in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. This course will help students improve their comprehension of professional content, practice communication in specialized fields, assess their language skills, simulate real-world scenarios, and cultivate ethical communication practices to excel in English communication in various professional settings. Based on statements from a PLS lecturer and several PLS students, it was confirmed that role-playing contributed to students' engagement. The lecturer stated that the most visible is behavioural engagement. Meanwhile, students said role-playing improved their speaking skills, categorized as cognitive engagement. Apart from that, if seen directly in the field, which the researcher discovered through observations in one of the PLS classes, it appears that students generally are well engaged when carrying out role play. This can be seen from the complete property used by students, the fair distribution of roles, and the fact that the students looked enthusiastic when playing their respective roles. With this phenomenon, the idea arises for the researcher to investigate the students' engagement during role plays in the PLS course.

A growing number of studies have been conducted to scrutinize the students' engagement during English learning speaking. Kartinah & Prasetyowati (2022) emphasized the importance of student cognitive engagement in problem-solving and online learning in their study. The level of students' cognitive engagement in the series content reached the fourth level in this study, namely extending; at this level, students in the class answered questions and showed interest by asking questions. Conversely, Tiana & Rahayuningsih (2022) tried to investigate the

correlation between students' behavioral engagement and speaking skills. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between students' behavioral engagement and speaking skills. This suggests that behaviourally engaged students tend to have good speaking skills. Furthermore, in their research, Nurmasadah et al. (2022) tried to examine undergraduate English students' emotional experiences when learning to speak English. The study reveals that many students feel anxious and nervous when speaking English in front of their peers and teachers. The study suggests that understanding students' emotional experiences can assist teachers in motivating and engaging them in English-speaking activities.

However, most of them only focused on the partial learning engagement of the students, such as behavioural engagement (Tiana & Rahayuningsih, 2022), emotional engagement (Nurmasadah et al., 2022), and cognitive engagement (Kartinah & Prasetyowati, 2022). Little attention has been devoted to the students' whole learning engagement during English learning, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context. Even so, little research has been conducted to investigate the students' engagement during English learning through Role plays in Professional Listening and Speaking. Hence, this study aims to fill the void.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

A research question addressed in the present study is “What engagements do the students perform during English learning speaking through Role plays in the course of Professional Listening and Speaking?”

1.3 Operational Definitions

The definition of key terms is to avoid misunderstanding the reader about the terms used. Then, the study provides some of the definitions of the critical terms related as follows:

1.3.1 Student Engagement

The student's behaviour, emotion, and cognitive activeness while participating in oral activities in the PLS course, such as their willingness to present role-play examples in front of the

classroom and provide compelling role-play performances with comprehensive preparation.

1.3.2 Role Play

Role play is a teaching technique used as an activity in English-speaking learning in the Professional Listening and Speaking course. Role plays that students performed such as being news presenter, flight attendant, promoting tourism, business, and academic meetings, and Model United Nations (MUN).

1.3.3 Professional Listening and Speaking Course

Professional Listening and Speaking (PLS) is a course designed and led by the teacher to help students comprehend professional content, practice communication in specialized fields, assess their language skills, simulate real-world professional scenarios, and cultivate ethical communication practices to excel in English communication within diverse professional settings.

1.3.4 English-speaking learning

English-speaking learning activities through role plays in the Professional Listening and Speaking course

1.4 Aim of the Research

This study aims to investigate the engagements that students perform during English learning speaking through Role plays in the course of Professional Listening and Speaking.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1. Theoretical use

This study expands existing theories on the use of roleplay as a teaching technique. It might be a source of data or a point of reference for further

research that is interested in the same topic with a more significant field in professional listening and speaking courses that relate to the students' engagement.

1.5.2. Practical use

Practically, this research can provide in-depth information, and teachers can utilize role play as an activity in English-speaking learning, especially in promoting student engagement.

1.5.3. Empirical use

Empirically, this research will provide experience to the researcher in investigating the students' engagement while role-playing and provides new empirical insights to the readers about what are the engagements that students perform while role-playing in the professional listening and speaking course.