

Effectiveness of Role-Playing on Arabic Language Skills in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract:

Arabic language learning in non-Arabic-speaking contexts often faces challenges related to limited communicative practice, low engagement, and insufficient interactive opportunities. Addressing these issues through communicative, student-centered education, this systematic literature review aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of role-playing in improving Arabic language proficiency in higher education. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a comprehensive search was conducted across four electronic databases (ERIC, Google Scholar, Springer Nature Link, and Wiley Online Library) for empirical quantitative studies published between 2015 and 2025. The methodological quality of eligible studies was assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools. Six higher education studies met the inclusion criteria. A comparative synthesis showed that quasi-experimental studies consistently reported improvements in objective language outcomes, particularly speaking fluency, dialogue competence, and vocabulary acquisition. Conversely, cross-sectional survey studies primarily highlighted gains in learner motivation, self-confidence, engagement, and communicative competence. Notably, implementations featuring authentic scenarios, collaborative activities, and active instructor facilitation yielded broader linguistic and affective benefits. Despite variations in study design and duration, the methodological quality ranged from moderate to high. Overall, role-playing is an effective, low-cost, and adaptable pedagogical strategy. These findings support integrating structured role-playing activities into Arabic language curricula while emphasizing thoughtful instructional design to maximize learning outcomes.

Keywords: Arabic Language Skills; Communicative Competence; Role-Playing.

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Efektivitas Role-Playing terhadap Keterampilan Bahasa Arab di Perguruan Tinggi: Review Literatur Sistematis

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Abstrak:

Pembelajaran bahasa Arab di konteks non-penutur asli sering kali menghadapi tantangan terkait keterbatasan praktik komunikatif, rendahnya keterlibatan pembelajar, dan kurangnya kesempatan belajar interaktif. Menjawab tantangan tersebut melalui pendekatan pendidikan yang komunikatif dan berpusat pada siswa, tinjauan literatur sistematis ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas teknik *role-playing* dalam meningkatkan kemahiran bahasa Arab di perguruan tinggi. Mengikuti panduan PRISMA 2020, pencarian komprehensif dilakukan di empat basis data elektronik (ERIC, Google Scholar, Springer Nature Link, dan Wiley Online Library) untuk penelitian kuantitatif empiris yang terbit antara tahun 2015 dan 2025. Kualitas metodologis dari studi yang memenuhi syarat dinilai menggunakan Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools. Enam studi di tingkat perguruan tinggi memenuhi kriteria inklusi. Sintesis komparatif menunjukkan bahwa studi kuasi-eksperimental secara konsisten melaporkan peningkatan pada hasil bahasa yang objektif, terutama kelancaran berbicara, kompetensi berdialog, dan penguasaan kosakata. Sebaliknya, studi survei potong-lintang terutama menyoroti peningkatan pada motivasi, kepercayaan diri, keterlibatan, dan kompetensi komunikatif pembelajar. Penerapan yang menggunakan skenario otentik, kegiatan pembelajaran kolaboratif, dan fasilitasi aktif dari pengajar terbukti memberikan manfaat linguistik dan afektif yang lebih luas. Terlepas dari variasi desain dan durasi penelitian, kualitas metodologis secara umum tergolong sedang hingga tinggi. Secara keseluruhan, *role-playing* merupakan strategi pedagogis yang efektif, berbiaya rendah, dan adaptif. Temuan ini mendukung pengintegrasian aktivitas *role-playing* terstruktur ke dalam kurikulum bahasa Arab dengan menekankan pentingnya rancangan pembelajaran untuk memaksimalkan hasil belajar.

Kata Kunci: *Role-Playing*; Keterampilan Berbahasa Arab; Kompetensi Komunikatif.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global emphasis on communicative competence in language education has encouraged a significant paradigm shift from traditional, teacher centered instruction to more learner centered and performance-based approaches (Rezi & Bedra, 2024). This transformation is particularly relevant in the field of Arabic language education, where the ability to use Arabic effectively has become increasingly important in both academic and real-world contexts (Almelhes, 2024; Oueslati et al., 2020). Mastery of the Arabic language is not only vital for understanding classical texts and engaging in religious discourse but also for participating in contemporary Arabic media, intercultural communication, and various professional domains. However, developing communicative proficiency in Arabic requires more than the memorization of grammatical rules it demands immersive and interactive learning experiences that simulate authentic linguistic situations (Almelhes, 2024; Amirul Mukminin et al., 2025).

Arabic language skills play a central role in both academic and religious contexts, especially in countries where Arabic is used as a medium of instruction in Islamic education (Wekke, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2023). However, many learners face significant challenges in acquiring Arabic proficiency, particularly in communicative competence. These challenges are often manifested in difficulties with vocabulary recall, sentence construction, pronunciation, and contextual usage, which can hinder students' confidence and motivation in language learning (Keshav et al., 2022). Similar to other foreign language acquisition contexts, learners of Arabic frequently report anxiety, lack of engagement, and low communicative performance, which in turn affect their overall language development and academic achievement (Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015; Bakalla, 2023).

The development of Arabic language skills is influenced by various factors, including prior exposure to the language, instructional strategies, classroom environment, and learner attitudes (Pikri, 2022) (Almelhes, 2024). Conventional teaching methods in many institutions still rely heavily on rote memorization and grammar-translation approaches, which often fail to provide opportunities for learners to actively use the language in real-life scenarios (Sattarova, 2024). As a result, students may acquire theoretical knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but remain unable to apply their skills in authentic communicative settings (Brosh, 2019). This gap has prompted educators to explore alternative teaching methods that are more interactive, learner centered, and effective in fostering language use (Selim, 2018; Abdulhafid et al., 2020).

Among the innovative pedagogical approaches, role-playing has attracted increasing attention (Moreno-Guerrero et al., 2020) (Rofiq et al., 2024). Role-playing is an instructional technique that simulates real-life situations, allowing learners to practice language skills in an immersive and meaningful context. By assuming specific roles and interacting with peers, students engage in authentic communication, develop fluency, and build self-confidence (Axrorova, 2024; Cunalata Ramón, 2023). In addition, role-playing promotes collaborative learning, enhances motivation, and reduces language learning anxiety, making it particularly suitable for teaching communicative skills in Arabic (Sarifudin & Setyawan, 2025).



Physiologically and psychologically, role-playing can enhance memory retention, foster creativity, and encourage risk-taking in language practice. It enables learners to experiment with language structures, negotiate meaning, and receive immediate feedback in a supportive environment (Bowman & Lieberoth, 2018). Furthermore, role-playing aligns with communicative language teaching principles and experiential learning theories, both of which emphasize the importance of meaningful interaction and active learner participation in language acquisition (Sarifudin & Setyawan, 2025).

Despite these potential benefits, the effectiveness of role-playing in Arabic language learning remains underexplored, with existing studies often limited in scope, sample size, or methodological rigor. Moreover, variations in research designs, implementation procedures, learner populations, and assessment tools make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about its impact on different dimensions of Arabic language skills. These gaps underscore the need for a systematic synthesis of available evidence to evaluate the true effectiveness of role-playing as a pedagogical strategy in Arabic language instruction.

In response to this need, the present systematic review aims to assess the effectiveness of role-playing in improving Arabic language skills, focusing on communicative competence, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and learner motivation. By synthesizing findings from studies conducted over the past decade, this review seeks to provide evidence-based insights that can guide educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in adopting role-playing as an innovative and effective approach to teaching Arabic as a foreign or second language. The objective of this study was to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of role-playing as a pedagogical strategy in enhancing Arabic language skills, particularly in improving communicative competence, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and learner motivation.

METHOD

Study Design

This systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive and structured literature search was conducted across four electronic databases ERIC, Google Scholar, Springer Nature Link, and Wiley Online Library to identify eligible studies published between January 1, 2015, and July 31, 2025. The selected timeframe was intended to capture recent empirical evidence on the application of role-playing in Arabic language learning over the past decade. To maximize the identification of relevant primary studies, combinations of keywords related to the research topic, including "role-play," "role-playing," "Arabic language learning," "Arabic language skills," "dialogue skills," "communicative competence," "vocabulary acquisition," and "learner motivation," were combined using Boolean



operators (AND and OR) and adapted to the search syntax of each database. The literature search identified records from ERIC, Google Scholar, Springer Nature Link, and Wiley Online Library. In accordance with the eligibility criteria, Google Scholar was searched without applying a "Review Article" filter to ensure the inclusion of primary empirical studies and to minimize the risk of excluding potentially relevant evidence. The number of records retrieved from each database is presented in Table 1. The screening process was independently performed by two reviewers (MY and RUB), who applied predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria during title, abstract, and full-text screening. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion. When consensus could not be reached, a third reviewer (AM) and an additional senior reviewer (TM) were consulted to reach a final decision. This multistage screening process was conducted to minimize selection bias and ensure a transparent and comprehensive identification of relevant studies. The full detailed search strings and results per database are summarized in Table 1.

Sources	Link	Keyword	Num
ERIC	https://eric.ed.gov	("Role-Playing" AND "Arabic Language Skills") AND (Learners OR Students)	723
Google Scholar	https://scholar.google.com/scholar	("Role-Playing" AND "Arabic Language Skills") AND (Review Article) AND (2017–2025)	422
Springer Nature Link	https://link.springer.com/search	("Role-Playing" AND "Arabic Language Skills") AND (Articles,	360



		2015–2025)	
Wiley Online Library	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch	("Role-Playing" AND "Arabic Language Skills") AND (Articles, 9 years)	1754
Total			3259

Table 1. Search strategy

Inclusion Criteria

Participants

The participants included in this review are learners of Arabic as a second or foreign language across different levels of education (beginner to advanced). Participants include university students, diploma students, and non-native Arabic speakers. No restrictions were applied based on gender, religion, or nationality.

Intervention

The intervention considered in this review is the use of role-playing strategies in Arabic language learning. Role-play activities include structured dialogue simulations, communicative role assignments, and dramatization tasks designed to enhance skills in speaking, listening, vocabulary acquisition, and overall communicative competence.

Outcome

The primary outcomes measured are improvements in Arabic language skills, particularly speaking, listening, dialogue competence, self-confidence, and vocabulary development. Secondary outcomes include learner motivation, attitude towards role play, and classroom engagement.

Study Design

This review includes quasi-experimental studies, quantitative surveys, and intervention-based studies assessing the effect of role-playing on Arabic language learning outcomes. Only peer-reviewed empirical studies written in English were included.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies not published in English or not focused on Arabic language learning were excluded. Editorials, opinion papers, conference abstracts, narrative reviews, systematic reviews, book chapters, single-case studies, and descriptive reports without intervention were excluded. Studies investigating interventions other than role-playing or outcomes unrelated to Arabic language skills were also excluded. Peer-reviewed full papers published in conference proceedings were eligible for



inclusion if they reported original empirical research and fulfilled all predefined inclusion criteria.

Study Selection and Data Extraction

Two reviewers (MY and M) independently screened all titles and abstracts retrieved from the database search according to the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. In cases of disagreement, discussions were held to reach consensus, and if necessary, the final decision was made by the senior researcher (IM, RLI). Full-text articles of potentially relevant studies were then assessed for eligibility using the same procedure.

Data extraction was performed independently by the two reviewers (MY and M) using a standardized form. Extracted information included the author(s), year of publication, country, study design, sample size, type of intervention, instruments used, outcomes measured, and key findings. This process ensured consistency and minimized the risk of bias in data collection.

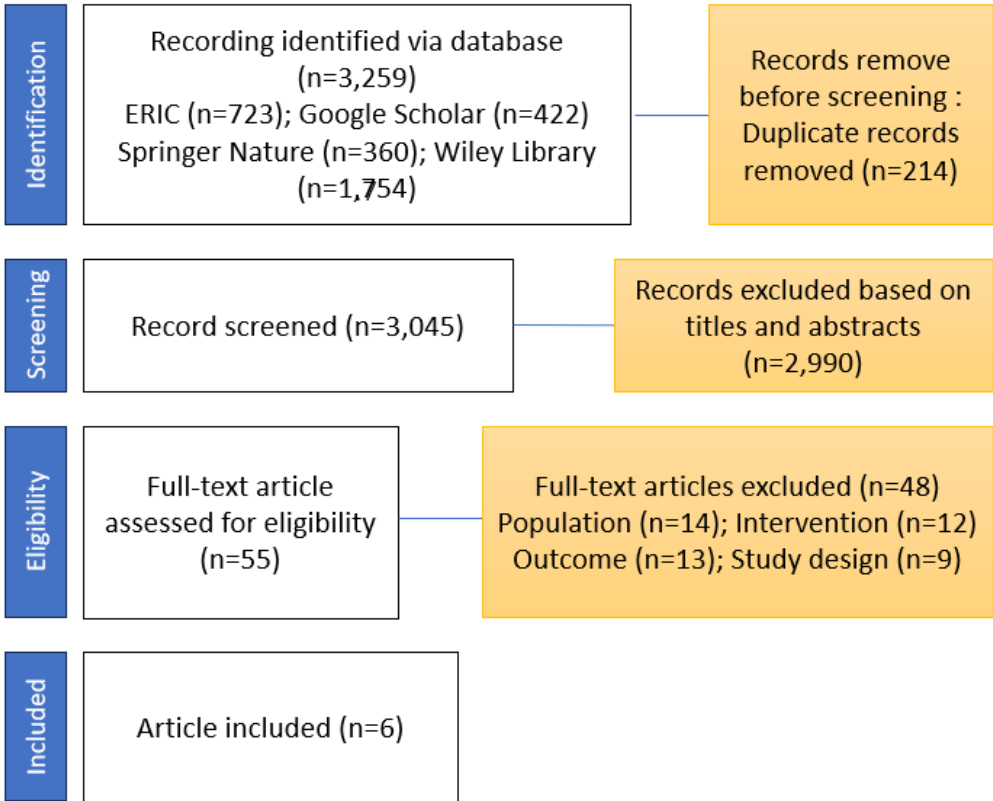
Methodological Quality Assessment (JBI)

The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools, with the appraisal checklist selected according to the design of each included study. Specifically, the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies was applied to quasi-experimental studies, whereas the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies was used to assess survey-based studies. Two reviewers (MY and M) independently evaluated each study using the appropriate JBI checklist. Any discrepancies in the quality assessment were resolved through discussion and consensus. If consensus could not be reached, the disagreement was referred to senior reviewers (IM and M) for final arbitration. Studies were not excluded solely based on their methodological quality; instead, the appraisal findings were used to evaluate the strength of the evidence and to inform the interpretation of the review findings.

RESULTS

Figure 1 illustrates the PRISMA flow diagram representing the screening and selection process of studies included in this systematic review. A total of 3,259 records were initially identified through four electronic databases: ERIC (n = 723), Google Scholar (n = 422), Springer Nature Link (n = 360), and Wiley Online Library (n = 1,754). After the removal of 214 duplicates, 3,045 records remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 2,990 records were excluded for not meeting the eligibility criteria based on their titles and abstracts. A total of 55 full-text articles were then retrieved and assessed for eligibility. During this full-text review phase, 49 articles were excluded for the following reasons: population mismatch (n = 14), irrelevant intervention (n = 12), inappropriate or incompatible outcomes (n = 13), and unsuitable study design (n = 10). Ultimately, 6 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for the Screening Process



Study Characteristics

Author	Design (Sample Size)	Educational Level	Intervention (Case)	Duration of Intervention	Role-Playing Components	Instrument (Outcomes)	Findings
Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023, Saudi Arabia	Quasi-experimental (N = 50; 25 experimental, 25 control)	University students (Advanced-level learners of Arabic as a Second Language, Qassim University)	Role-play strategy compared with traditional textbook-based instruction	One academic semester (First Semester 2022/2023)	Simulation of authentic real-life dialogue situations; students assumed different roles, expressed opinions, practiced listening, respect, and self-esteem in dialogue	Dialogue Skills Assessment Scale	Role-play significantly improved dialogue skills (self-esteem, listening, expressing opinions, respecting others) compared with traditional methods.
Che Mat, Awang, Nokman, Musilehat, Abu Bakar, & Yusoff, 2019, Malaysia	Quantitative survey (N = 331 UiTM students)	University students (Arabic as a Third Language, UiTM campuses)	Students' participation in role-play activities during Arabic learning	Not reported (cross-sectional survey)	Drama-based group role-play emphasizing participation, clear role assignment, interaction, responsibility, emotional engagement, and	SmartPLS Confirmatory Analysis (Attitude & Subjective Role Play Value Scales)	Attitude toward role play and subjective role play value positively predicted Arabic language proficiency; motivation



					cooperative learning		played an important mediating role.
Saja, Mazlan, Surtahman, Norwahi, & Yeap, 2023, Malaysia	Quantitative survey (N = 291 students)	University students (Arabic as a Third/Foreign Language, UiTM)	Role-play assessment integrated into Arabic language course	Conducted throughout one semester; final role-play assessment in Week 14	Group role-play (4–5 students); dialogue based on specific themes; lecturer feedback; blended learning/video recording; speaker–message–listener interaction	Questionnaire (7-point Semantic Differential Scale), SPSS, PLS-SEM	Role-play enhanced communicative ability, confidence, motivation, creativity, attentiveness, and lecturer facilitation improved learning engagement.
Raja Sulaiman, Nik Din, Embong, Awang, Mustafa, Noruddin, & Talib, 2017, Malaysia	Quantitative (N = 30 diploma students)	First-semester Diploma students in Arabic Language and Literature (UniSZA)	Role-playing technique in Al-Muhadathah I (Arabic Communication Course)	One semester	Students memorized dialogue scripts, discussed in groups, enacted assigned roles, listened, interacted, and simulated authentic	Questionnaire + SPSS Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$)	Students reported improved Arabic speaking ability, greater confidence, and richer vocabulary through role-playing activities.



					communication situations		
Al-Sultan & Daif-Allah, 2024, Saudi Arabia	Quasi-experimental (N = 26; 13 experimental, 13 control)	Beginner-level university learners of Arabic as a Second Language (Qassim University)	Role-play strategic approach for vocabulary development compared with traditional instruction	Not specifically reported	Students enacted roles in authentic, imaginary, or educational situations to practice vocabulary in communicative contexts and cooperative learning	Vocabulary Test (Pre/Post)	Experimental group demonstrated significantly greater vocabulary acquisition than the control group (p = 0.011).
Abdelhafid, Mustapha, Ismail, & Hassan, 2024, Malaysia	Quasi-experimental (Single-group pretest-posttest; N = 40)	University students majoring in Arabic (Malay learners at a public university)	Classroom role-playing activities based on daily-life situations	Not reported	Role-play scenarios derived from daily life; oral interaction; teamwork; teacher-student interaction; emotional expression; collaborative learning	Pre/Post Oral Communication Test + Motivation Questionnaire	Oral communication improved from "very good" to "excellent"; motivation remained high; role-play increased interaction, teamwork, self-confidence, and emotional expression.

Table 2. Data Characteristics from the Study



Table 2 presents the characteristics of six studies conducted in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia that investigated the effectiveness of role-playing in teaching Arabic as a second or foreign language. All studies were conducted at the higher education level, involving university students learning Arabic as either a second or third language. Although the interventions differed in their instructional objectives, including dialogue skills, communicative competence, vocabulary development, oral communication, and learner motivation, they consistently employed role-playing as an active learning strategy designed to promote authentic language use, student engagement, and collaborative learning.

Among the reviewed studies, Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan (2023) employed a quasi-experimental design involving 50 advanced-level learners of Arabic as a second language at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The intervention was implemented over one academic semester and required students to participate in simulations of real-life dialogue situations in which they practiced expressing opinions, active listening, respecting others, and maintaining self-esteem. Compared with traditional textbook-based instruction, role-playing significantly improved students' dialogue skills across all assessed dimensions.

In Malaysia, Che Mat et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative survey involving 331 undergraduate students from three Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) campuses. Rather than implementing an experimental intervention, the study examined students' participation in classroom role-play activities and their perceptions of these activities. The findings demonstrated that positive attitudes toward role play and higher subjective role-play value significantly predicted Arabic language proficiency, with motivation acting as an important mediating factor. The role-playing activities emphasized cooperative learning, clear role assignment, emotional engagement, and active participation.

Similarly, Saja, Mazlan, Surtahman, Norwahi, and Yeap (2023) surveyed 291 UiTM students enrolled in Arabic as a third or foreign language course. The role-play activities were integrated throughout the semester and culminated in a final assessment during Week 14, in which students worked collaboratively in groups of four to five members. The intervention incorporated thematic dialogues, lecturer feedback, blended learning, and video-recorded performances. Their analysis using SPSS and PLS-SEM indicated that role-playing significantly enhanced communicative competence, confidence, motivation, creativity, and attentiveness, while lecturer facilitation played a crucial role in maximizing learning outcomes.

Another Malaysian study by Raja Sulaiman et al. (2017) investigated the effectiveness of role-playing among 30 first-semester diploma students enrolled in an Arabic communication course (Al-Muhadathah I). The intervention lasted one semester and involved memorizing dialogue scripts, group discussions, role enactment, and simulations of authentic communication situations. Students reported improvements in Arabic speaking ability, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence, highlighting the value of role-playing in reducing communication anxiety and encouraging active classroom participation.

Evidence from Saudi Arabia was further strengthened by Al-Sultan and Daif-Allah (2024), who conducted a quasi-experimental study involving 26 beginner-level learners of Arabic at Qassim University. Although the duration of the intervention was not explicitly reported, students in the experimental group participated in role-playing activities that required them to assume different roles in authentic, imaginary, and educational situations to practice newly learned

vocabulary in meaningful communicative contexts. The study demonstrated statistically significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition compared with traditional instruction, confirming the effectiveness of role-play in supporting early language development.

Finally, Abdelhafid, Mustapha, Ismail, and Hassan (2024) employed a quasi-experimental single-group pretest-posttest design involving 40 Malay undergraduate students majoring in Arabic at a Malaysian public university. Students participated in classroom role-playing activities based on daily-life situations, promoting authentic oral interaction, teamwork, teacher-student collaboration, and emotional expression. Although the intervention duration was not specified, the results indicated substantial improvements in oral communication, with students' performance increasing from "very good" to "excellent" while maintaining consistently high motivation. Furthermore, role-playing enhanced teamwork, interaction, and self-confidence, enabling learners to communicate more naturally and express their emotions more freely.

Overall, the reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that role-playing is an effective pedagogical strategy across higher education settings for teaching Arabic as a second or foreign language. Despite variations in study design, intervention focus, and outcome measures, the evidence indicates that role-playing improves multiple dimensions of language learning, including speaking proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, dialogue skills, communicative competence, learner motivation, self-confidence, creativity, teamwork, and classroom engagement. The interventions commonly incorporated authentic real-life scenarios, collaborative group work, lecturer facilitation, and active student participation, suggesting that these components are fundamental mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of role-playing in Arabic language education.

JBI Criteria	Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan (2023)	Al-Sultan & Daif-Allah (2024)	Abdelhafid et al. (2024)
Q1. Is it clear what is the cause and what is the effect?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q2. Were participants similar at baseline?	Yes	Yes	N/A (single group)
Q3. Were participants receiving similar treatment other than the intervention?	Yes	Yes	N/A
Q4. Was there a control group?	Yes	Yes	No
Q5. Were there multiple measurements before and after the intervention?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q6. Was follow-up complete and adequately described?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q7. Were outcomes measured in a reliable way?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q8. Was appropriate statistical analysis used?	Yes	Yes	Yes



Q9. Was the study design appropriate?	Yes	Yes	Yes
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Table 3a. JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies

JBI Criteria	Che Mat et al. (2019)	Saja et al. (2023)	Raja Sulaiman et al. (2017)
Q1. Were inclusion criteria clearly defined?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q2. Were study subjects and setting described in detail?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q3. Was exposure measured validly and reliably?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q4. Were standard criteria used for outcome measurement?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q5. Were confounding factors identified?	No	Unclear	No
Q6. Were strategies to deal with confounding factors stated?	No	Unclear	No
Q7. Were outcomes measured validly and reliably?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q8. Was appropriate statistical analysis used?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3b. JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies

Table 3a presents the methodological quality assessment of the three quasi-experimental studies using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies, which consists of nine appraisal criteria. Overall, the included studies demonstrated good methodological quality. Both studies conducted by Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan (2023) and Al-Sultan and Daif-Allah (2024) fulfilled all appraisal criteria, indicating appropriate use of comparison groups, reliable outcome measurements, suitable statistical analyses, and an overall robust quasi-experimental design. The study by Abdelhafid et al. (2024) also demonstrated satisfactory methodological quality; however, because it employed a single-group pretest–posttest design, the criteria relating to the presence of a control group and comparable treatment between groups were not applicable. Nevertheless, the study reported repeated outcome measurements before and after the intervention and applied appropriate statistical analyses, supporting the credibility of its findings.

Table 3b summarizes the quality appraisal of the three analytical cross-sectional studies using the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies. Overall, these studies adequately described their study populations, settings, exposure measurements, outcome assessments, and statistical analyses. All three studies clearly reported participant characteristics and employed valid measurement instruments. However, methodological weaknesses were observed in the consideration of confounding factors. Che Mat et al. (2019) and Raja Sulaiman et al. (2017) did not identify potential confounding variables or describe strategies to address them, whereas Saja et al. (2023) provided only limited information, resulting in an Unclear rating. Despite these limitations, the studies

demonstrated appropriate analytical procedures and provided consistent evidence regarding the positive association between role-playing and Arabic language learning outcomes. Overall, the JBI appraisal indicates that the included studies are of moderate to high methodological quality, with most meeting the essential criteria for their respective study designs. The principal methodological limitation across the analytical cross-sectional studies was the limited consideration of potential confounding factors, whereas the quasi-experimental studies generally demonstrated stronger internal validity using structured interventions, reliable outcome measurements, and appropriate statistical analyses. Consequently, the body of evidence included in this review can be considered sufficiently robust to support the effectiveness of role-playing in improving Arabic language learning, particularly in enhancing speaking ability, vocabulary acquisition, communicative competence, learner motivation, and self-confidence.

Deeper Analysis of Language Learning Effects:

The reviewed studies indicate that role-playing enhances not only overall Arabic language proficiency but also specific domains such as speaking fluency, vocabulary mastery, communicative confidence, and learner motivation. For instance, quasi-experimental studies by Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan (2023, 2024) (Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan, 2023) demonstrated significant improvements in dialogue skills and vocabulary acquisition among non-native learners in Saudi Arabia, showing the superiority of role-play compared to traditional instruction. Similarly, survey-based investigations by (Mat et al., 2019) and (Saja et al., 2023) in Malaysia revealed that students' positive attitudes toward role-play were strongly linked to their Arabic proficiency, with motivation acting as a key mediator in sustaining engagement and learning outcomes. In addition, (Sulaiman et al., 2017) reported that role-playing activities in an Arabic communication course helped diploma students overcome shyness, enriched their vocabulary, and improved spontaneous speaking abilities. A broader survey by (Saja et al., 2023) further emphasized that role-play strengthened multiple language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) while fostering self-confidence, creativity, and memorization capacity, especially when guided by lecturers as facilitators. Finally, the quasi-experimental work of (Karima Aboubaker Abdelhafid, Nik Farhan Mustapha, Muhd Zulkifli Ismail, 2024) confirmed that role-playing based on real-life scenarios significantly improved oral communication performance from "good" to "very good/excellent" while maintaining high levels of learner motivation, teamwork, and emotional expression. Collectively, these findings suggest that role-play functions as a dynamic pedagogical strategy that promotes linguistic competence, learner confidence, and motivation through experiential and interactive learning, making it a valuable approach for Arabic language acquisition among non-native speakers

DISCUSSION

Role-playing has been demonstrated to significantly enhance Arabic language proficiency among non-native learners, as evidenced by the six studies included in this systematic review. However, rather than producing uniform effects across all contexts, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of role-playing varies according to educational level, instructional design, and the specific components incorporated into the intervention. This thematic synthesis provides a clearer



understanding of how and under what conditions role-playing contributes to Arabic language acquisition.

Effectiveness Across Educational Levels

One important pattern identified in this review concerns differences according to educational level. Most included studies were conducted in diploma and university settings, where learners possessed sufficient linguistic foundations to engage in interactive communication. In higher education contexts, role-playing consistently improved communicative competence, speaking fluency, and vocabulary acquisition while simultaneously fostering learner autonomy and confidence. Raja Sulaiman et al. (2017) reported that diploma students became more willing to speak spontaneously and expanded their Arabic vocabulary after participating in role-playing activities. Similarly, Abdelhafid et al. (2024) demonstrated substantial improvements in oral communication among Arabic-major university students following role-playing activities based on authentic daily-life situations. These findings suggest that role-playing is particularly effective for learners who already possess basic linguistic knowledge and are ready to practice functional communication in realistic contexts.

Effectiveness Based on Intervention Components

The reviewed studies also demonstrate that the effectiveness of role-playing depends on the instructional components embedded within the intervention rather than on role-playing alone. Studies employing structured dialogue simulations primarily improved dialogue competence, listening skills, and vocabulary retention because learners repeatedly practiced specific communicative exchanges. Conversely, interventions utilizing authentic daily-life scenarios produced broader improvements in speaking fluency, emotional expression, teamwork, and communicative confidence. Furthermore, studies integrating lecturer facilitation showed greater gains in classroom participation, creativity, and learner engagement than interventions relying solely on student interaction. These findings indicate that role-playing should be viewed as a flexible pedagogical framework whose effectiveness depends on the authenticity of scenarios, the degree of learner interaction, and the quality of instructional guidance.

Effectiveness According to Intervention Duration and Intensity

Although intervention duration varied considerably across the included studies, several patterns emerged. Quasi-experimental studies involving structured role-playing sessions over multiple instructional meetings generally reported measurable improvements in objective language outcomes such as dialogue competence and vocabulary acquisition. In contrast, survey-based studies that evaluated learners' experiences after continuous classroom exposure to role-playing mainly identified improvements in motivational and affective outcomes, including confidence, engagement, and positive learning attitudes. This suggests that longer and systematically implemented role-playing programs may contribute to sustained communicative development, whereas shorter or less structured implementations appear to influence learners primarily through motivational pathways. Nevertheless, direct comparisons remain difficult because most studies did not report intervention duration in a standardized manner, highlighting the

need for future studies to describe implementation protocols more comprehensively.

Cognitive and Affective Mechanisms Underlying Role-playing

The effectiveness of role-playing can be explained through both cognitive and affective mechanisms. Cognitively, role-playing places learners in simulated communicative situations that require active retrieval of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pragmatic expressions in meaningful contexts. Such authentic practice promotes deeper information processing, facilitates vocabulary retention, and strengthens communicative competence. Quasi-experimental evidence from Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan (2023, 2024) supports this interpretation by demonstrating measurable improvements in dialogue skills and vocabulary acquisition compared with conventional instruction.

From an affective perspective, role-playing creates a supportive learning environment that reduces communication anxiety while encouraging active participation and risk-taking in language use. Survey-based studies by Che Mat et al. (2019) and Saja et al. (2023) consistently demonstrated that positive attitudes toward role-playing enhanced learner motivation, which subsequently contributed to greater engagement and improved Arabic language proficiency. These findings suggest that cognitive and affective processes operate simultaneously, allowing role-playing to promote both language performance and learner confidence.

Comparison of Research Designs

Another important finding concerns differences between research designs. Quasi-experimental studies predominantly produced objective evidence of language improvement using pre- and post-intervention assessments, particularly for vocabulary acquisition and dialogue competence. In contrast, survey-based studies mainly explained the psychological mechanisms associated with successful role-playing implementation, emphasizing motivation, confidence, creativity, and learner perceptions. Rather than contradicting one another, these two bodies of evidence complement each other: experimental studies demonstrate that role-playing improves measurable language performance, whereas survey studies explain why learners become more engaged and willing to communicate during language learning.

Overall, the findings indicate that role-playing generates both linguistic and affective benefits. Its effectiveness extends beyond improving speaking fluency and vocabulary mastery to strengthening learner motivation, confidence, collaboration, and classroom engagement. Importantly, these outcomes are influenced by educational context, intervention design, instructional support, and implementation intensity rather than by the role-playing method alone.

A major strength of this review is the inclusion of diverse study designs conducted across Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, allowing comparison between experimental and survey-based evidence. The combination of objective performance measures and attitudinal assessments provides a comprehensive understanding of both cognitive and affective outcomes. Furthermore, adherence to the PRISMA framework and systematic quality appraisal using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools checklist enhanced the methodological rigor of the review.



Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. Considerable heterogeneity existed regarding intervention duration, implementation procedures, assessment instruments, and reporting quality, making direct comparison across studies difficult. Most studies were conducted in higher education settings involving young adult learners, limiting the generalizability of findings to primary and secondary education. In addition, several survey studies relied on self-reported perceptions that may overestimate intervention effectiveness. Future systematic reviews would benefit from a larger number of randomized controlled trials and standardized reporting of intervention characteristics, including session duration, implementation fidelity, and instructional components.

The findings of this review have important implications for Arabic language education. Rather than applying role-playing as a uniform instructional technique, educators should tailor role-playing activities according to instructional objectives and learner characteristics. Structured dialogue simulations may be more appropriate for vocabulary and dialogue development, whereas authentic scenario-based role-playing appears more effective for enhancing communicative fluency and confidence. Integrating lecturer facilitation, peer interaction, and meaningful real-life contexts may further optimize learning outcomes. Future research should prioritize standardized intervention protocols, direct comparisons across educational levels, and investigations examining how intervention duration and specific role-playing components influence different dimensions of Arabic language acquisition. Such evidence would enable educators to identify the most effective role-playing models for learner populations and instructional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review provides strong evidence that role-playing is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing Arabic language skills among non-native learners. Across the six included studies, role-play consistently demonstrated positive impacts on key domains of language learning, including speaking fluency, vocabulary acquisition, dialogue proficiency, communicative ability, motivation, and learner confidence. Despite differences in research design ranging from quasi-experimental interventions to large-scale surveys the findings converge in highlighting the dual cognitive and affective benefits of role-play.

Cognitively, role-play supports authentic application of vocabulary and grammar in communicative contexts, thereby strengthening retention and practical usage. Affectively, it reduces anxiety, increases motivation, fosters creativity, and builds self-esteem, creating a supportive environment that encourages active participation and risk-taking in language use. These outcomes affirm role-play's value as a holistic instructional method that goes beyond linguistic competence to nurture learner confidence and satisfaction.

Given its adaptability, accessibility, and learner centered orientation, role-play represents a promising instructional strategy for integration into Arabic language curricula. Future research should aim to standardize role-play methodologies, broaden its application to diverse learner populations and cultural settings, and explore innovative uses of digital and blended learning platforms to further enhance its effectiveness in modern educational contexts.

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