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A Scaffolded Multimodal Approach through Brainstorming, Discussion, and Role Play in Teaching English

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Abstract:

Indonesia's EFL speaking skills remain critically low, as evidenced by a speaking sub-score of 447 on the EF English Proficiency Index 2025. This reflects the ongoing ineffectiveness of traditional, grammar-centric teaching methods in developing verbal communication skills. This article explores how a scaffolded multimodal approach combining brainstorming, group discussion, and role-playing enhances EFL students' speaking abilities and motivation. A qualitative research design utilizing library resources was implemented, utilizing 31 sources chosen via PRISMA-modified screening from Google Scholar and ResearchGate (2000–2025), evaluated through content analysis, thematic grouping, and comprehensive theoretical synthesis. Results indicate that the three-step cycle generates cumulative benefits: brainstorming stimulates lexical frameworks through dual-channel processing; group discussions enhance interaction competence via ZPD-centered support; and role-play combines all speaking aspects into genuine performance, resulting in an 11.8% increase versus 5.2% in traditional teaching. Motivationally, the cycle creates a gradual decrease in the affective filter throughout all three stages, leading to confidence-enhancing performance safeguarded by the psychological separation of role-play. These results advocate for embracing this combined approach as a theory-based and research-supported option to traditional EFL speaking teaching in Indonesia because it addresses the limitations of conventional grammar-focused instruction by providing structured, interactive, and authentic speaking experiences that foster both communicative competence and learner motivation

Keywords: EFL, Multimodal Approach, Speaking Skills

Introduction

English language learning in Indonesia requires some fundamental changes; whereas it previously relied on passive, grammar-focused teaching methods, the learning process must now be made more dynamic and active—that is, by prioritizing students' communication skills and, of course, supported by a variety of learning materials. According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Indonesia ranks 80th out of 123 countries with a score of 471, placing it below the 50th percentile in the “low proficiency” category (EF Education First, 2025). More importantly, Indonesia's speaking sub-score of 447 represents its most vulnerable area below reading (491) and writing (479) a trend that exposes how decades of formal English education have persistently fallen short in fostering oral communicative ability. Across the Asian region, Indonesia is ranked 12th among 25 nations, lagging behind Malaysia (581), the Philippines (569), and South Korea (522), despite having undergone similar or extended periods of mandatory English schooling. This underachievement mirrors the entrenched dominance of transmissive, textbook-reliant teaching: educators depend excessively on grammar-translation and audio-lingual techniques that were never intended to develop communicatively capable speakers (Miao, 2023). Similarly, classroom assignments often fail to reflect real-life interactions in daily life. As a result, students' motivation and engagement decline as the material taught feels less relevant to their actual communication needs (Dörnyei, 2001). Learning that focuses solely on spoken and written material still has many limitations. Without incorporating visual aids, nonverbal expressions, and classroom collaboration, students will struggle to understand the meaning and context of everyday communication.

Empirical evidence on each individual component of this approach is, in fact, well established. In the context of brainstorming, (Nation & Hunston, 2013; Osborn, 1979) assert that visual stimuli presented periodically and systematically prior to speaking improve fluency and deepen vocabulary mastery, a finding that aligns with Mayer's Multimedia Principle (Mayer, 2020) and is corroborated by (Astiantih & Akfan, 2023; Widiastuti, Murtini, & Anto, 2022b). In the context of role-play, (Wandira & Efendi, 2023) demonstrate that EFL learners in Indonesia experienced an 11.8% increase in speaking ability compared to only a 5.2% increase under conventional methods, while (Elouali, 2023) shows that role-play further fosters creative thinking and multimodal language use. Meanwhile, (Abrar, Fajaryani, Habizar, Miftahudin, & Sokoy, 2022; Sampelolo, Tandikombong, Pongsapan, & Lura, 2021) establish that fear of speaking and low self-confidence remain major obstacles for EFL learners, and (Johnson & Johnson, 2009) document that collaborative learning yields stronger academic achievement and social interaction than competitive approaches, consistent with (Dörnyei, 2001) claim that varied learning activities motivate active participation. However, this substantial body of research remains fragmented: most previous research on multimodal English language instruction has focused on standalone learning activities, with each technique, examined, in isolation, and fluency, vocabulary, and confidence. Assessed separately rather than as outcomes of one integrated process. No study has yet thoroughly examined how to integrate brainstorming, discussion, and role-play into, a single cohesive learning sequence grounded in comprehensive theory—particularly one that hones students' speaking skills while simultaneously boosting their motivation to learn. Academic studies on multimodal pedagogy in English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia reveal a significant gap between theory and practice; in classroom practice, multimodality is often reduced to the occasional inclusion of visual materials rather than treated as a deliberate effort to combine various media to convey meaning comprehensively (Kress, 2010), and speaking anxiety together with low learning motivation persist even in classes

that already employ communicative teaching methods. indicating that partial or stand-alone approaches are not yet strong enough to address, students' emotional factors or thinking skills (Abrar et al., 2022; Wijaya, 2023) This issue poses a real challenge for educators in finding, research-based alternatives to update conventional teaching methods, and this study addresses that structural gap by combining brainstorming, group discussion, and role-play into one cohesive instructional sequence within a multimodal framework.

The multimodal approach combining brainstorming, group, discussion, and role, play offers an empirically grounded, three-phase instructional sequence that concurrently engages the cognitive, social, and affective aspects of language learning. As a pedagogical framework, multimodality, combines several modes-verbal, visual, gestural, and collaborative-simultaneously to facilitate meaning-making (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), a principle that (The New London Group, 1996) extends into pedagogy by showing that learners are more engaged when multiple modes of meaning-making are activated, at once. Aligned findings from five distinct, theoretical frameworks multimodality, cognitive multimedia learning, sociocultural theory, brainstorming theory, and role-play theory each independently validate the same instructional structure. In the opening phase, brainstorming using visual and multimodal inputs triggers dual-channel processing: (Nation & Hunston, 2013; Osborn, 1979) frame brainstorming as a cognitive and lexical preparation stage that activates vocabulary before speaking tasks, while, in accordance with Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2020), the concurrent engagement of verbal and visual pathways facilitates more thorough encoding and longer-lasting retention of language material. In the subsequent phase, group discussion serves as the central arena for Zone of Proximal Development-oriented language growth, wherein learners jointly build meaning through scaffolded collaborative exchange that surpasses what any single learner could accomplish on their own (Lantolf, 2009; Vygotskij & Cole, 1981a); (Johnson & Johnson, 2009) further identify five elements positive interdependence, individual accountability, supportive interactions, social skills, and group processing that make such group work truly effective. In the concluding phase, role play functions as a form of protective simulation, defined by (Ladousse, 1987) as an activity in which learners perform a role and use authentic language in meaningful contexts; this constructed communicative scenario alleviates speaking anxiety, as shown by (Maley & Duff, 2005), and concurrently strengthens speaking skills in authentic contexts. Taken together, these three phases form a cohesive cycle, rather than merely a set of disconnected activities.

The aim of the multimodal approach within this setting is the cultivation of authentic speaking ability the capacity to use English for genuine, intentional interaction together with enduring intrinsic motivation for speaking. This research consequently targets several interconnected result dimensions: (1) intrinsic motivation and oral confidence as affective foundations for genuine language engagement (Dörnyei, 2001); (2) cognitive richness through the dual-channel stimulation of visual and verbal processing (Mayer, 2020); (3) social participation and ZPD oriented language advancement through collaborative sense-making (Vygotskij & Cole, 1981a); (4) affective security and diminished speaking anxiety through the sheltered nature of role play; and (5) authentic language use not simply the theoretical knowledge of how language is used, but its practical application in actual communicative performance. Informed by these objectives, this article examines the following research question: in what ways does the multimodal approach through brainstorming, group discussion, and role play improve learners' speaking skills in English.

Research Question: How does the multimodal approach through brainstorming, group discussion, and role play improve students speaking' English?

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach within a library research design, examining the theoretical and empirical basis of the multimodal approach in EFL speaking instruction. The study is conceptual-analytical, requiring no primary field data. The epistemological positioning is interpretive: meaning emerges from the convergence of multiple theoretical perspectives, not from a single causal claim (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data consist of secondary sources collected via systematic search on Google Scholar and ResearchGate (2020–2025), classified into four types: (1) books in applied linguistics and ELT as the main theoretical foundation; (2) international journals (2020–2025) as the empirical evidence base. As a research instrument, a literature selection protocol adapted from PRISMA (Page et al., 2021) was applied to ensure transparency and replicability. Six keyword clusters served as search terms: “multimodal approach in EFL,” “brainstorming for speaking,” “group discussion and speaking skills,” “role-play in EFL,” “teaching speaking skills,” and “motivation for speaking English.” Of 38 sources identified, stepwise PRISMA screening acknowledgement, title/abstract screening, full-text selection, and data extraction yielded 31 final references (19 journal articles, 7 ELT books, 3 conference proceedings, 2 meta-analyses), classified into three thematic clusters: (a) speaking skills, (b) affective and motivational factors, and (c) technique-specific results on brainstorming, group discussion, and role-play.

Data analysis proceeded through three phases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020) (1) content analysis to extract key concepts, and empirical findings; (2) thematic analysis to identify convergence patterns; (3) integrative theoretical synthesis to construct a unified pedagogical argument linking five theoretical frameworks multimodality, motivational strategies and affective filters, brainstorming theory, discussion theory, and role-play theory into a coherent and tiered instructional model.

Data validation relied on internal logical consistency, source triangulation (minimum three independent source per claim), and cross-position consistency between theoretical propositions and empirical EFL findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of a comprehensive literature review of thirty sources on teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), encompassing theoretical books, indexed journal articles, and empirical studies. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the three components of the multimodal approach brainstorming, group discussion, and role-playing as well as the research question of this study. Publications from 2000 to 2025 were prioritized to ensure currency and empirical rigor. The findings address how the multimodal approach implemented through the sequential integration of brainstorming, group discussion, and role-play improves students' speaking skills in English.

Presenting the data that has been interpreted and analyzed through the five theoretical frameworks underlying the multimodal approach multimodality, cognitive multimedia learning, sociocultural theory, motivational strategy, and the affective filter hypothesis the discussion below is organized according to each phase of the multimodal cycle.

Research Question: Enhancement of Speaking Skills through the Multimodal Approach

This research question examines how the multimodal approach implemented through the sequential integration of brainstorming, group discussion, and role-play improves students' speaking skills in English. A synthesis of empirical studies across EFL contexts reveals that each phase of the multimodal cycle contributes distinctly and cumulatively to the development of core speaking dimensions, including fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, content, and interactional competence. Table 1 presents the synthesis of literature review findings specifically related to speaking skill development.

Table 1 indicates that the three multimodal components consistently and complementarily contribute to EFL students' speaking improvement: brainstorming (Astiantih & Akfan, 2023; Mayer, 2020; Nation & Hunston, 2013; Osborn, 1979; Widiastuti, Murtini, & Anto, 2022) cognitively activates vocabulary and ideas prior to speaking, enhancing fluency and lexical richness; group discussion (Chrismaretta & Abrar, 2024; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Kamaruzzaman, 2025; Rahma, Kuryanto, & Kironoratri, 2023; Vygotskij & Cole, 1981b) builds interactional competence and meaning negotiation through ZPD-based social scaffolding and cooperative learning; while role play (Elouali, 2023; Ladousse, 1987; Maley & Duff, 2005; Sukmara, Friatin, & Tarwana, 2025a; Wandira & Efendi, 2023) serves as the authentic performance stage that integrates fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and content while reducing affective pressure, with the strongest empirical evidence shown by an 11.8% speaking improvement in (Wandira & Efendi, 2023). Overall, these findings confirm that the three components do not function in isolation but form a cumulative cycle from cognitive preparation to interactional reinforcement and authentic performance, empirically proven to effectively enhance students' English speaking skill.

Brainstorming Findings

Table 1. Data of the Research Question (Improvement of Speaking Skills)			
No.	Component	Article (Author, Year)	Findings Related to the Research Question (Improvement of Speaking Skills)
1	Brainstorming	(Osborn, 1979)	Brainstorming, as a creative problem-solving technique, encourages the free generation of ideas without evaluation, making students more prepared to produce spontaneous oral ideas before speaking.
2	Brainstorming	(Nation & Hunston, 2013)	Activating vocabulary prior to speaking tasks through brainstorming increases students' lexical availability, resulting in more fluent and lexically richer oral output.
3	Brainstorming	(Mayer, 2020)	Processing information through two channels verbal and visual simultaneously during brainstorming produces deeper understanding and stronger speaking preparation than single-channel input alone.

4	Brainstorming	(Widiastuti et al., 2022b)	Visual-stimuli-based brainstorming prior to speaking tasks significantly increases students' fluency and vocabulary richness compared to students who receive only verbal instructions.
5	Brainstorming	(Astiantih & Akfan, 2023)	The use of concept maps as a form of visual brainstorming helps students organize ideas systematically, thereby improving the richness of content and coherence of their speech.

Source: Literature synthesis by the authors (2026)

Analysis

A closer examination of the individual data points in Table 1 shows that the five brainstorming-related sources (Astiantih & Akfan, 2023; Mayer, 2020; Nation & Hunston, 2013; Osborn, 1979; Widiastuti et al., 2022) converge on a single measurable outcome: students who receive visual or idea-generation input before a speaking task consistently produce oral output that is richer in vocabulary and more coherent in content than students who are given only verbal prompts. (Osborn, 1979) deferred-evaluation principle and (Nation & Hunston, 2013) pre-task lexical activation data both point to the same field observation learners who brainstorm first have more words "ready" when they begin to speak. (Widiastuti et al., 2022) and (Astiantih & Akfan, 2023) add classroom-level confirmation of this pattern, reporting that concept-map-based and visual brainstorming activities directly correspond to observable gains in fluency and idea organization among their student samples.

The brainstorming phase functions as a structured cognitive and lexical preparation stage that directly enhances students' subsequent speaking performance. (Astiantih & Akfan, 2023; Widiastuti et al., 2022b) demonstrate that students who engage in visual-stimuli-based brainstorming prior to speaking tasks produce noticeably more fluent, lexically richer, and topically coherent oral output compared to those who receive only verbal instructions. This outcome is most evident in speaking tasks that require spontaneous idea generation, where students without prior activation frequently resort to code-switching or produce fragmented utterances due to lexical inaccessibility.

This finding is theoretically grounded in the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2020), which demonstrates that the brain processes information through two distinct channels verbal and visual and that activating both channels simultaneously results in deeper encoding than single-channel input alone. In a speaking task context, this means that a student who processes an image alongside a topic prompt is cognitively better equipped to speak than one who only receives a written or spoken prompt. (Nation & Hunston, 2013) further substantiates this position by showing that pre-task lexical activation significantly improves the depth and fluency of subsequent oral production. When students encounter topic-relevant vocabulary and ideas through visual brainstorming, these items are mentally pre-loaded and become more readily accessible during the speaking phase itself. The brainstorming phase, therefore, does not merely warm students up affectively; it produces measurable cognitive preparation that translates directly into improved speaking output.

Group Discussion

Findings

No.	Component	Article (Author, Year)	Findings Related to the Research Question (Improvement of Speaking Skills)
6	Group Discussion	(Vygotskij & Cole, 1981b)	Social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) through group discussion enables students to develop speaking ability with scaffolding support from peers.
7	Group Discussion	(Johnson & Johnson, 2009)	Cooperative learning in group discussion is shown to strengthen positive social interdependence among students, contributing to improved fluency and confidence in speaking.
8	Group Discussion	(Chrismaretta & Abrar, 2024)	The implementation of a collaborative strategy in group discussion proves effective in improving students' speaking skills through meaning negotiation and structured peer interaction.
9	Group Discussion	(Rahma et al., 2023)	The Group Investigation model assisted by puzzle media improves students' speaking skills by encouraging group cooperation and coherence in oral discourse.
10	Group Discussion	(Kamaruzzaman, 2025)	Forum Group Discussion improves the speaking skills of tenth-grade students, raising the class average score from 69.46 to 76.66 across fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

Source: Literature synthesis by the authors (2026)

Analysis

The five group-discussion sources (Chrismaretta & Abrar, 2024; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Kamaruzzaman, 2025; Rahma et al., 2023; Vygotskij & Cole, 1981b) present a complementary data pattern centered on interactional gain rather than lexical gain alone. (Kamaruzzaman, 2025) offers the most concrete quantitative field data in this cluster, recording a class-average increase from 69.46 to 76.66 across fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar following structured Forum Group Discussion. (Chrismaretta & Abrar, 2024) and (Rahma et al., 2023) report comparable directional findings at different educational levels secondary and primary, respectively indicating that the speaking gains associated with group discussion are not confined to a single age group or classroom format, provided the discussion activity distributes responsibility and requires sustained peer exchange.

The group discussion phase transforms speaking from a solitary performance into a socially scaffolded process, enabling students to develop interactional dimensions of

speaking that cannot emerge in individual or teacher-fronted exercises. (Chrismaretta & Abrar, 2024) document significant improvements in students' fluency and coherence following structured group discussion activities, particularly in contexts where students are assigned differentiated speaking roles that require sustained exchange. Similarly, (Rahma et al., 2023) report that when cooperative learning structures are embedded within discussion activities distributing responsibilities equally and requiring peer feedback students not only produce more language but also produce more grammatically varied and pragmatically appropriate utterances.

These empirical findings are most fully explained by (Vygotskij & Cole, 1981b) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which posits that learners achieve more when collaborating with peers than when operating independently. In the EFL speaking context, the ZPD operates through conversational scaffolding: a student who cannot independently formulate a response may do so through the linguistic support provided by a peer who models appropriate vocabulary, discourse markers, or question-response patterns. (Johnson & Johnson, 2009) extend this theoretical basis through their cooperative learning framework, identifying five essential elements positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and group processing each of which is directly exercised during group discussion. When these elements are systematically embedded in discussion design, the speaking skill gains are not incidental but structurally guaranteed. Group discussion, in this sense, functions as the ZPD-enacting engine of the multimodal cycle, ensuring that speaking development is social, scaffolded, and transferable.

Role Play Findings

No.	Component	Article (Author, Year)	Findings Related to the Research Question (Improvement of Speaking Skills)
11	Role Play	(Ladousse, 1987)	Role play functions as a protective simulation that lowers students' affective pressure, thereby encouraging more authentic language use.
12	Role Play	(Maley & Duff, 2005)	Drama techniques, including role play, simultaneously integrate fluency, pronunciation, and content within contextual and meaningful language performance.
13	Role Play	(Wandira & Efendi, 2023)	The role play method increases EFL students' speaking ability by 11.8%, compared to only a 5.2% increase in the conventional group, demonstrating the added value of authentic, context-embedded performance.
14	Role Play	(Sukmara et al., 2025a)	Role play is shown to improve the speaking skills of junior high school EFL students by integrating the dimensions of fluency, vocabulary,

			pronunciation, and content into authentic performance.
15	Role Play	(Elouali, 2023)	Role play fosters creativity and critical thinking among EFL students, which in turn enhances their confidence and the quality of oral production in real communicative situations.

Source: Literature synthesis by the authors (2026)

Analysis

The five role-play sources (Elouali, 2023; Ladousse, 1987; Maley & Duff, 2005; Sukmara, Friatin, & Tarwana, 2025b; Wandira & Efendi, 2023) yield the strongest quantified evidence of the three components. (Wandira & Efendi, 2023) document an 11.8% increase in speaking ability among role-play-taught students, compared to a 5.2% increase in the conventionally taught comparison group a 6.6 percentage-point gap that constitutes the single largest measured effect across all fifteen entries in Table 1. (Sukmara et al., 2025) corroborate this trend among junior high school EFL learners, reporting integrated gains across fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and content, while (Elouali, 2023) extends the data to the domain of creative and critical thinking, both of which co-occur with improved oral production in the sources reviewed.

The role-play phase represents the performative synthesis of the multimodal cycle a moment in which all prior cognitive preparation and social rehearsal is converted into integrated speaking performance. (Wandira & Efendi, 2023) provide the most concrete quantitative evidence: EFL students taught through role-play demonstrated an 11.8% improvement in speaking ability, compared to only 5.2% in the conventional group. This 6.6 percentage-point gap is attributable not merely to additional practice time, but to the qualitatively different nature of role-play as a communicative task. Unlike drills or controlled speaking exercises, role-play requires students to simultaneously deploy vocabulary, manage conversational turns, respond to unpredictable partner utterances, and maintain a communicative goal all within a single activity. Elouali (2023) adds that role-play further stimulates creative language use and multimodal expression, encouraging students to supplement verbal output with gesture, intonation, and affect dimensions of speaking that are entirely absent from decontextualized exercises.

Theoretically, this evidence is most precisely explained by (Ladousse, 1987), who identifies two concurrent functions of role-play in language learning: the linguistic function, which requires students to use the target language for genuine communicative purposes such as persuading, negotiating, and problem-solving; and the psychological function, which provides the emotional distance of a character role that protects learners from direct exposure to judgment. (Maley & Duff, 2005) reinforce this by asserting that drama-based methods create authentic communication contexts because students pursue real communicative goals within the activity, not merely rehearsed responses. In the multimodal cycle, role-play thus serves as the integrative capstone: it demands the simultaneous application of all speaking skills developed across the preceding phases, and it does so within a context that is both motivating and structurally protective. The cumulative evidence from the three phases confirms that the multimodal approach yields speaking skill gains that no single-method instruction can replicate.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

This study has several limitations. Most of the studies reviewed involved small samples and varied educational contexts, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings, while evidence regarding the long-term impact of the multimodal approach remains limited. Therefore, future research should employ a quasi-experimental design with a larger sample, examine long-term changes in speaking performance, and explore the application of this multimodal cycle in technology-supported learning. Despite these limitations, this study demonstrates that integrating brainstorming, group discussions, and role-playing into a structured multimodal learning cycle is a theory-based and empirically supported approach to enhancing the speaking performance of Indonesian EFL students.

Conclusion

The use of the multimodal approach combining brainstorming, group discussion, and role-play is effective in improving EFL students' speaking skills and speaking motivation for some reasons: (1) the multimodal approach enhances speaking performance through a scaffolded three-phase sequence in which brainstorming activates lexical schemata prior to speaking, group discussion builds interaction and meaning-negotiation skills through ZPD-based peer scaffolding, and role-play integrates all skill dimensions into authentic language performance; (2) the multimodal approach elevates students' motivation to speak by creating a progressive trajectory of affective filter reduction in which brainstorming removes evaluative pressure at the outset, group discussion provides a safe interactional space for practice, and role-play employs protective fiction to reduce speaking anxiety and foster willingness to communicate.

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