

## Improving Expressive Language of Children Aged 5–6 Years Through Role-Play Method at Tk Insan

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Article history:**

Received: August 10, 2025

Accepted: August 30, 2025

Available online on:

August 31, 2025

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**Keywords:**

*role-play, expressive language,  
Early Childhood*

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### ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a crucial stage for developing expressive language, which is strongly influenced by stimulation and the learning environment. This study aimed to enhance the expressive language skills of children aged 5–6 years at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok through the role-play method. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) using the Kemmis & Taggart spiral model consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection over three cycles. Each cycle included three meetings with themes such as doctor, market vendor, and fruit and vegetable seller. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and field notes, then analyzed using descriptive percentages and qualitative verification. The results indicated significant improvement: from only 2 children developing as expected initially, to 3 in cycle I (50.39%), 6 in cycle II (67.18%), and 8 in cycle III (79.29%). Role-play proved effective in fostering vocabulary, sentence structure, intonation, expression, and social interaction,

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while also boosting confidence, imagination, and social skills.

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### **Introduction**

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a stage of child development from birth to six years old, focusing on providing stimulation to support optimal growth and development before entering primary education. Early childhood is often referred to as the “golden age” because of the child’s high sensitivity to motor, cognitive, socio-emotional, and especially language stimulation, which is greatly influenced by experience and the surrounding environment. Among these five aspects, language development is the most important because education and experience strongly affect subsequent language development.

Suardi et al. (2019) stated that language has been used since birth. Children begin to master language when they learn their first language, commonly called the mother tongue. Children need various abilities to use language to convey their goals and encourage others to support their future objectives. The ability to express language is a sign of general child development because it encompasses cognitive, sensory-motor, psychological, and emotional skills from the child’s surrounding environment and is highly sensitive to delays or impairments of other systems (Helvianis & Rantina, 2021).

Language development is an example of the interaction of each developmental aspect (Fitriana, 2019). Children are introduced to aspects of language through social interactions with adults, as the

physical structures for producing sounds become perfect and the necessary neural connections to link sounds become active. According to Jalongo in Husna & Eliza (2021), grapho-phonics, syntax, and pragmatics form language. Language is the way people communicate. It encompasses all forms of communication, including spoken, written, signs, or gestures using words, sentences, sounds, and images.

It is explained that language is a communication system that includes speech, writing, signs, and gestures using vocal and non-vocal symbols. Language shapes thought, feelings, and behavior and reflects the moral values of the family and the nation (Zhang et al., 2021). Behaviorist theory states that the external environment shapes language responses through stimuli and conditioning. Nativist theory suggests the existence of an innate device (Language Acquisition Device) that enables children to acquire language easily (Levickis et al., 2023). Meanwhile, constructivist theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in the development of language and cognition. Furthermore, the functions of language are explained as a tool of communication, an enhancer of intelligence, and a builder of identity. This foundation becomes the basis for understanding the need for expressive language stimulation in children aged 5–6 years.

Expressive language is defined as the verbal and non-verbal ability to convey thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Aspects of vocabulary, sentence formation, intonation, facial expressions, and body language are the main indicators (Bruce et al., 2022). The development of expressive

language reflects the child's cognitive, sensory-motor, psychological, and emotional maturity. Experts argue that stimulating speaking ability is crucial for social interaction. Disorders in expressive language may risk academic and emotional difficulties later in life. Therefore, early intervention is needed to prevent prolonged delays. Understanding this concept serves as the basis for designing measurement instruments.

According to Yulida (2020), expressive language is a communication tool for children, especially speaking, to express their desires and opinions. Hurlock in Azmi et al. (2023) stated that stimulating speaking ability is very important. Speaking is included in expressive language ability. The ability to speak is an expression in the form of words, which can be receptive (understood and received) or expressive (spoken).

According to Suhartono in Nida et al. (2019), expressive language is a child's ability to express their thoughts or feelings through the use of speech sounds. This includes conveying specific intentions by uttering sounds that can be understood by those around them. Thus, based on these opinions, it can be concluded that expressive language is a way for children to express their feelings to others verbally and non-verbally, encompassing the use of vocabulary and sentence structure, verbal expression, interaction or response ability, and the use of language in social interaction.

The development of expressive language is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors include cognition, genetics, and

prematurity, which may affect a child's ability to process experiences. External factors include the quantity and quality of linguistic input from the environment, caregiver responsiveness, and family socioeconomic status (Holzinger et al., 2020). Innate temperament and the context of bilingualism also impact vocabulary development pace. Parental mental health, particularly postpartum depression, may reduce the frequency of language stimulation for the child. All these factors interact and must be considered comprehensively in interventions. Therefore, language stimulation should be designed holistically, incorporating emotional support and responsiveness.

The indicators of expressive language development achievement in children aged 5–6 years show that children are considered developing as expected if they can use diverse vocabulary, form complex sentences, and tell stories. Expressive language development in children aged 5–6 years is observed when they talk with peers or adults, where they can express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in simple sentences (Sari et al., 2019; Sari et al., 2020). A person's ability to use language to convey thoughts and emotions includes verbal or non-verbal behaviors, such as reading books attentively, using simple words to express feelings or ideas, and telling stories with simple words (Kusbudiyah, 2018). Conversational interaction skills and the use of language in various social contexts become benchmarks. Non-verbal language is also considered a part of children's self-expression. These indicators map each aspect into clear operational measures. Teachers can use these

indicators as a reference for classroom observation. With measurable indicators, evaluating children's language progress becomes more objective. This review strengthens the need for valid research instruments.

Role-play provides children with the opportunity to simulate real-life situations and engage in meaningful verbal interactions (Yulianeta et al., 2023). Bruner's theory emphasizes learning through social contexts that motivate the use of vocabulary. Vygotsky added that interaction during role-play enriches vocabulary and linguistic creativity. According to Piaget, children construct collective symbolism when role-playing through concrete objects and stories. The goals of role-play include developing empathy, problem-solving, and spontaneous communication. The steps include planning the situation, introducing new vocabulary, performing roles, and reflecting on the outcomes. This method has proven effective in enhancing expressive language in early childhood learning.

Role-play is also known as pretend play, fantasy, make-believe, or symbolic play. According to Piaget in Siska (2011), the early stages of role-play can demonstrate a child's behavior. He explained that the application of stories using objects and repetition is a sign of enjoyable role-play that makes the child remember the experience. For Piaget, collective symbolism means that a child's involvement in role-play and their effort is higher than that of other children. He also described children's spoken conversations with themselves as idiosyncratic

soliloquies.

According to Sayekti et al. (2022), role-play is a teaching method in which students are assigned by the teacher to dramatize a social situation that contains a problem, allowing them to find solutions to the issues arising from the social context. The foundation of children's play is derived from Erik Erikson's theory, which states that humans build the ability to face experiences by creating appropriate situations and mastering reality through trial and planning, all of which children construct through play.

Ramani et al. (2019) explained that the purpose of role-play in the learning process is to give students the ability to dramatize behaviors or facial expressions of individuals in social relations with others in a storyline related to social life.

According to Vygotsky in Gunarti et al. (2010), the goals of role-play are to enable children to explore feelings, meaning that they can process their emotions according to their abilities, such as being polite, angry, authoritative, or sad; to gain insight into attitudes, values, and perceptions; to develop skills and attitudes in solving problems encountered; to foster creativity by constructing storylines from children's own initiatives; to train comprehension; to improve concentration; to support cognitive development; to enhance imagination; to create an enjoyable atmosphere; and to achieve the ability to communicate spontaneously or speak fluently.

Erikson in Halifah (2020) categorized role-play into two types.

Micro role-play involves children playing roles through characters represented by small objects, such as cages with small animals or miniature dolls. Macro role-play involves children playing roles as characters by using real objects of larger size, such as wearing costumes or using a cardboard box made into a toy car.

According to Nurbiani (2019), the steps in the role-play method are that teachers must prepare a story script and explain the techniques to the children in carrying out the role-play. Teachers should provide children with the freedom to choose roles according to their interests, encourage children to respond to each other's roles, and allow them to conclude their performances.

A study conducted in August 2024 at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok showed that the expressive language ability of Group B children had not yet developed optimally. Out of eight children, six were still experiencing language delays, two were beginning to show progress, and one had met expectations. The children struggled to express feelings through words, facial expressions, intonation, and gestures, and were reluctant to talk about topics outside classroom activities. They also rarely retold learning experiences in front of their classmates, which could potentially hinder language skills. Teachers need to enhance expressive language stimulation in the school environment so that children are able to communicate ideas, feelings, and desires more effectively. The researcher then designed a study entitled “Improving Expressive Language of Children Aged 5–6 Years through Role-Play



Method at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok” to examine the effectiveness of role-play in addressing these challenges.

### **Methods**

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach using the Kemmis & Taggart spiral model, which includes four recurring stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. According to Asrori & Rusman (2020), Classroom Action Research is a type of study conducted in the classroom. This study is a qualitative type of Classroom Action Research (CAR), with the Kemmis model as its framework. The term “CAR” originates from “Classroom Action Research,” which means research carried out in the classroom setting. Classroom Action Research refers to the understanding of learning through deliberate actions carried out collaboratively within the classroom. These actions are performed by the students under the guidance of the teacher.

Data were collected through non-test techniques, namely participatory observation using structured observation sheets, semi-structured interviews, photo and video documentation, and narrative field notes. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to be directly involved in role-play activities to monitor the dynamics of interaction and children’s language use. Teacher interviews and visual documentation enriched contextual understanding, while field notes recorded spontaneous reflections and interesting phenomena during the learning process.

Data analysis was divided into quantitative and qualitative categories. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the percentage of improvement in observation scores (formula  $P = F/N \times 100\%$ ) to determine success, with the target set at  $\geq 75\%$ . Qualitative data were analyzed through the stages of reduction, presentation, and verification to summarize narrative findings. The validity of the data was ensured through methodological triangulation, which included observation, documentation, and field notes. Research procedures—ranging from preliminary study, three CAR cycles, to final reflection—were described in detail to guarantee replicability and reliability of the findings.

### Results and Discussions

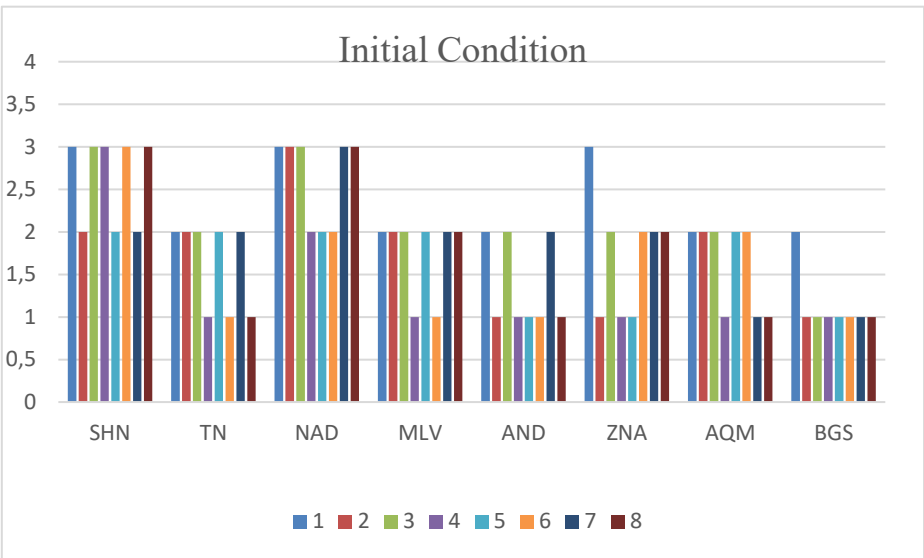
Based on the problems identified, the next step taken by the researcher to improve expressive language ability was by applying the role-play learning model to children aged 5–6 years through Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok in three cycles, each cycle consisting of three meetings. The initial observations carried out at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok provided data on the expressive language ability of children aged 5–6 years before the intervention was given.

During the learning process, it was found that the lecture method applied by the teacher did not encourage students to engage in two-way communication. The sources used were limited to textbooks, pencils, and crayons for coloring, and the children appeared disengaged from

the tasks instructed by the teacher.

**Initial Condition**

**Figure 1.** Graph of the initial condition of expressive language ability of children aged 5–6 years.



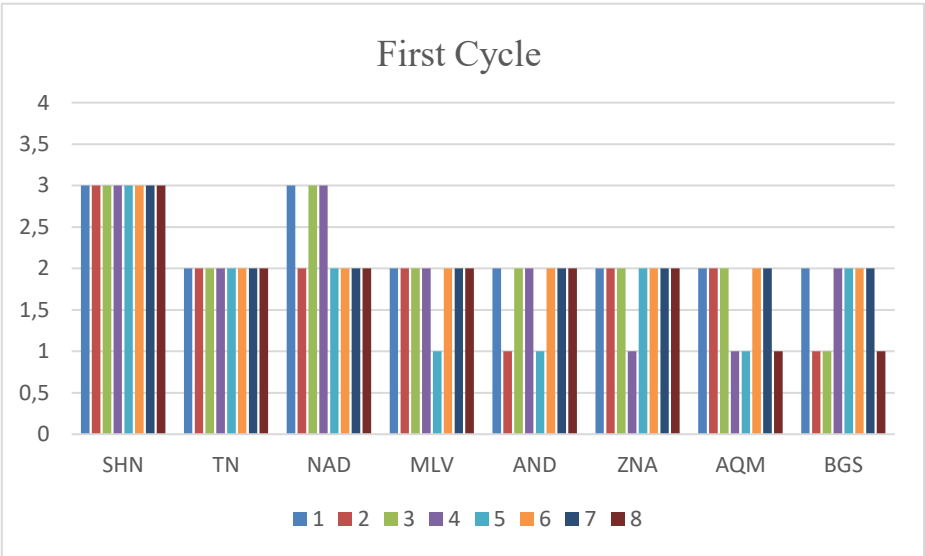
Based on the data above, it can be concluded that the expressive language ability of children before receiving the intervention was relatively low, reaching only 45.3%. Therefore, the researcher together with the teacher needed to take action to improve the expressive language ability of children aged 5–6 years. The action taken was the implementation of the role-play method, which was expected to enhance the language skills of children at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok.

**Research Findings**

Activities conducted in cycle I from the first to the third meeting carried the theme of professions, with the sub-theme of doctor. From

this cycle, the researcher concluded several reflections: the researcher needed to pay more attention to the language used during the delivery of material so that the children could more easily understand the information provided; the researcher needed to motivate children more strongly so they could be more confident when speaking with others; and the researcher needed to understand the children’s character better in order to manage the classroom effectively.

**Figure 2.** Graph of children’s expressive language ability results in Cycle I

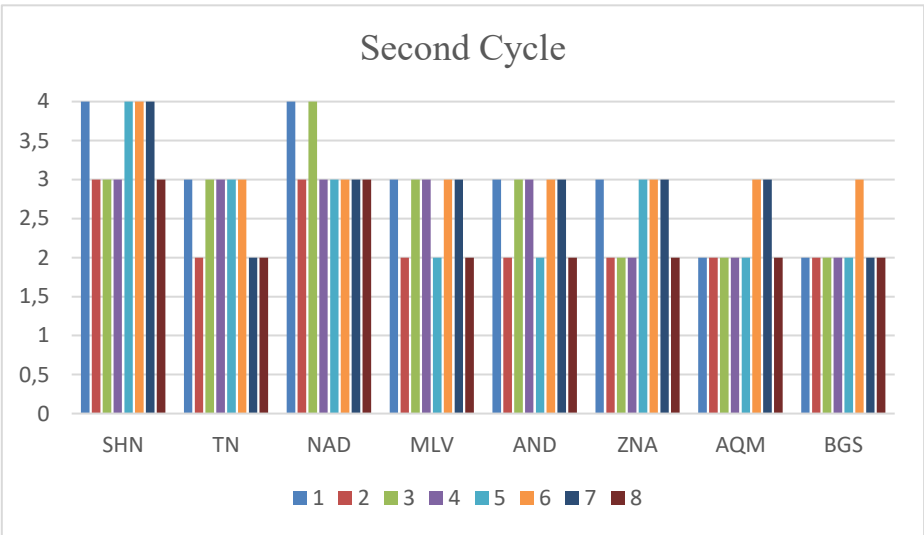


Based on the results of cycle I, there was a noticeable improvement in expressive language ability compared to the pre-intervention results of 45.3%. It was found that expressive language ability in cycle I increased to 50.39%, categorized as “beginning to develop.”

In cycle II, activities were again carried out over three meetings

with the theme of professions, with a focus on the role of doctor. Reflections from this cycle showed that there was an increase in expressive language ability, with children developing as expected. This was observed during role-play and other ongoing learning activities. The children had started to participate more orderly in class, although not all of them showed the same progress. Various media had already been used during the learning process, and the children appeared highly enthusiastic in participating in the activities.

**Figure 3.** Graph of children’s expressive language ability results in Cycle II

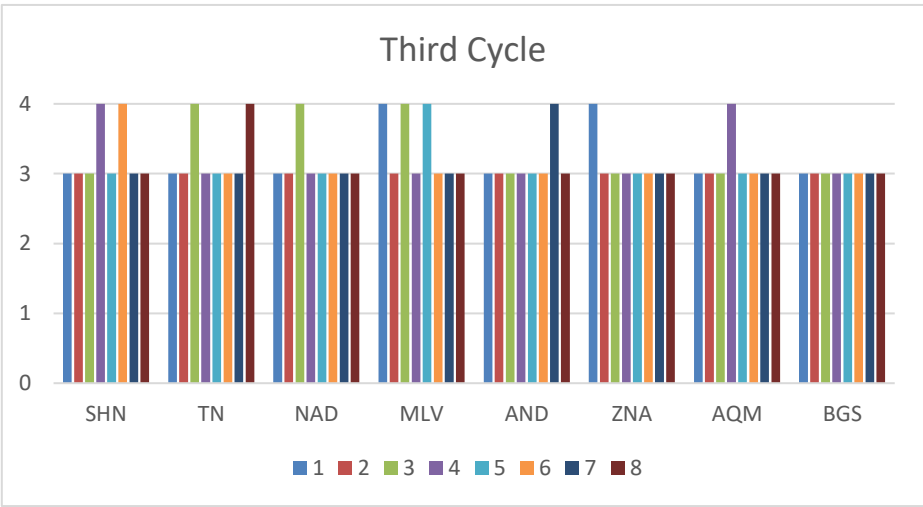


The improvement in expressive language ability in cycle II was greater compared to cycle I, rising from 50.38% to 67.18%, which fell into the category of “developing as expected.” However, these results had not yet reached the targeted indicator of 75%, so the researcher and teacher decided to continue to cycle III until the expected indicator was

achieved.

In cycle III, starting from the first meeting, the children were already using a wider range of vocabulary in their communication. They responded quickly when a peer asked a question and were able to use simple but appropriate sentences. Observations and learning outcomes in cycle III revealed improvements in expressive language ability, now categorized as “developing very well.” This was particularly evident during role-play as sellers and buyers, where the children began to use more varied vocabulary, responded appropriately to questions, constructed simple sentences, listened attentively when others were speaking, and expressed themselves with suitable expressions during communication.

**Figure 4.** Graph of children’s expressive language ability results in  
Cycle III



From the observations and learning results in cycle III, it was found

that the expressive language ability of children had reached the “developing very well” category. During role-play as fruit and vegetable sellers and buyers, the children showed progress in using varied vocabulary, responding appropriately, forming correct simple sentences, listening attentively, and displaying suitable expressions when communicating.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that there is a strong link between learning outcomes and the stimulus provided, which directly influences the final results. The study demonstrated that improvements in expressive language include the ability to use varied vocabulary, form both simple and complex sentences, apply intonation in speech, use expressions and body language in communication, respond appropriately, listen attentively, and use interrogative sentences in conversation. All of these aspects significantly impacted the final results of each cycle. These aspects were also included in the research instrument framework under the title “Improving Expressive Language of Children Aged 5–6 Years through Role-Play Method at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok,” with the results showing development as expected, achieving a percentage of 79.29%.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the role-play method effectively enhances the expressive language skills of children aged 5–6 years at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok. The gradual increase from cycle I to cycle III shows that structured role-play activities provided children with meaningful opportunities to use vocabulary, construct sentences,

and practice appropriate expressions in communication. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in enriching language development, as well as Bruner's view that language acquisition is strengthened through contextualized and interactive learning experiences.

Furthermore, the success of role-play in this study is consistent with previous research that highlights its impact on children's confidence, imagination, and social interaction skills. By simulating real-life scenarios, children were not only able to expand their vocabulary but also develop spontaneity and fluency in communication. These results affirm that role-play is not merely a recreational activity but a pedagogical strategy that supports expressive language development, while simultaneously fostering social competence and emotional growth in early childhood education.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the study, it is evident that there was a significant improvement in the expressive language ability of children aged 5–6 years at TK Insan Cendikia–Legok through the application of the role-play method. In the initial assessment, only two children developed as expected; after cycle I, in which the children played the role of doctor, the number increased to three children (50.39%); in cycle II, where the children role-played as market vendors, it rose to six children (67.18%); and in cycle III, where the children played the roles of fruit and vegetable sellers, the number increased to eight children



(seven categorized as very good and one as developing as expected, 79.29%). These results show that role-play interventions gradually succeeded in enabling more children to reach the expected indicators of expressive language development.

The role-play method was proven to be effective not only in enriching vocabulary and sentence formation but also in creating an enjoyable and interactive learning atmosphere. Children learned to respond to questions, express feelings through intonation, facial expressions, and gestures, and interact with peers based on real-life experiences. In addition to language improvement, role-play also had a positive impact on children's confidence, imagination, and social skills. Thus, role-play can be considered an engaging learning strategy to enhance the expressive language ability of children aged 5–6 years.

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