

Improving Speaking Skills through Role Play and Drilling Technique

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ABSTRACT

To address the classroom problem of limited pronunciation accuracy and low speaking confidence in EFL speaking activities, this Classroom Action Research aimed to improve Grade 11 students' speaking skills through the combined use of Role Play and Drilling Technique. The participants were 43 students of class XI.H in a senior high school. The research was conducted in two cycles consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observation, and documentation. The results showed that the class mean increased from 57.21 in pre-test 1 to 81.86 in post-test 2, while students reaching the minimum criterion of 75 increased from 0% to 100%. The findings indicate that drilling strengthened pronunciation accuracy through controlled repetition, whereas role play provided meaningful communicative practice. Therefore, the combined sequence improved students' speaking performance by balancing accuracy, fluency, and confidence.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research, Role Play, Drilling Technique, Speaking Skill, Pronunciation, Confidence.

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INTRODUCTION

In EFL learning, speaking is essential because it enables students to express ideas, exchange opinions, and build real-time communication in English. In EFL classrooms, speaking is often more difficult than receptive skills because learners must select vocabulary, organize grammar, pronounce words intelligibly, and respond immediately during interaction (Goh & Burns, 2012; Harmer, 2007; Nation & Newton, 2009). (Ur, 1996) also notes that learners commonly experience inhibition, limited ideas, uneven participation, and mother-tongue use during speaking activities. These problems are frequently found among senior high school students because they are expected to speak more independently, but many still have limited oral practice and high fear of making mistakes (Boonkit, 2010; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Woodrow, 2006).

Preliminary observation in class XI.H showed that many Grade 11 students were passive during speaking activities. Several students could understand written materials, but they had difficulty producing spoken English clearly. Some students mispronounced familiar words, paused frequently, spoke with low voice volume, and avoided eye contact when asked to speak. This condition suggests that the speaking problem was both linguistic and psychological. Linguistically, students needed more pronunciation, stress, intonation, and expression practice. Psychologically, they needed a safer speaking sequence that reduced fear of making mistakes and gave them repeated practice before oral performance. This classroom evidence is supported by previous studies showing that EFL learners often struggle with speaking because of anxiety, limited practice, pronunciation problems, and low confidence (Boonkit, 2010; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Ur, 1996; Woodrow, 2006). Sayow & Marsevani (2024) found that role play improved students' speaking performance in a classroom action research context. (Pebiana & Febria, 2023) also found that a classroom-based speaking intervention using MALL improved students' speaking scores, especially

pronunciation and fluency, while (Prasodjo, 2023) showed that topic-based vlog performance significantly improved students' speaking performance and also supported confidence and expressiveness. These studies are relevant to the present research because they emphasize repeated practice, meaningful performance, and learner confidence in EFL speaking.

However, most previous studies focused on one dominant strategy, such as role play, pair work, mobile-assisted learning, or vlog performance. The present study addresses a narrower classroom gap by combining Drilling Technique and Role Play in a structured sequence for Grade 11 students who had problems in pronunciation and confidence. Drilling was used before role play to build pronunciation accuracy, word stress, and expression familiarity. Role play was then used to move students from controlled practice to meaningful communication. Therefore, this study did not use drilling as mechanical repetition only, but as preparation for communicative role-play performance (Ladousse, 1987; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Thornbury, 2005).

The research question of this study is: How can the implementation of Role Play combined with Drilling Technique improve students' speaking skills in terms of pronunciation and confidence in class XI.H? The objective of this study is to improve students' speaking skills, especially pronunciation and confidence, through the implementation of Role Play and Drilling Technique in two cycles of Classroom Action Research.

Speaking Skill in EFL Context

Speaking is a productive oral skill that requires students to produce language in real time. Harmer (2007) explains that speaking involves the ability to communicate meaning through language use. In speaking activities, students need to combine vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and interactional competence. Because speaking requires immediate response, it is often more challenging than receptive skills for EFL learners. (Goh & Burns, 2012) further argue that speaking development should involve linguistic knowledge, discourse management, and interactional practice. In addition, Ur (1996) argues that effective speaking practice should encourage meaningful oral production rather than only isolated manipulation of language forms.

Speaking at Senior High School Level

At the senior high school level, students are expected to move beyond memorized sentences and begin using English for transactional and interpersonal communication. They need practice in expressing opinions, asking and answering questions, negotiating meaning, and performing short dialogues. Burns (2019) emphasizes that speaking instruction should include preparation, practice, feedback, and opportunities for repeated performance. Therefore, a Grade 11 speaking lesson should not only ask students to perform immediately, but should provide staged support so that learners can build accuracy and confidence before performing.

Pronunciation in Speaking

Pronunciation is important because it affects how clearly a speaker's message is understood. Gilakjani (2016) emphasizes that pronunciation instruction helps learners produce intelligible speech and avoid misunderstanding. (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010) also explain that pronunciation teaching should include segmental sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation because these features influence intelligibility. In the context of this study, pronunciation improvement was directed toward clearer word production, more accurate word stress, and more appropriate intonation through modeling and repeated practice.

Confidence in Speaking

Confidence influences students' willingness to participate in speaking activities. Brown (2001) states that learners who feel anxious or insecure tend to avoid communication. (Woodrow, 2006) also found that anxiety can affect second-language speaking performance, especially when learners must speak in public or interact spontaneously. A supportive classroom environment is therefore necessary so that students can practice without excessive

fear of mistakes. In this study, confidence was observed through students' willingness to speak, voice audibility, eye contact, peer interaction, and participation in role-play performance.

Role Play in Speaking

Role play is a speaking strategy in which students act out specific roles and situations. [Ladousse \(1987\)](#) argues that role play can create enjoyable and meaningful language use because students speak for a clear communicative purpose. [\(Nunan, 2004\)](#) also emphasizes that communicative tasks should give learners opportunities to use language to achieve outcomes. Therefore, role play is relevant for increasing speaking confidence because students do not merely repeat sentences; they use expressions in a social context. This position is also supported by [\(Kayi, 2006\)](#), who identifies role play as a speaking activity that encourages learners to use language in realistic social contexts. In Indonesian EFL settings, [\(Sayow & Marsevani, 2024\)](#) also reported that role play could improve students' speaking skill through classroom action research.

Drilling Technique in Pronunciation and Fluency

Drilling is a controlled practice technique that uses repetition to strengthen accuracy. [Harmer \(2007\)](#) notes that drilling can help students practice pronunciation and language patterns. In speaking lessons, drilling can be useful when students need to become familiar with new words, short expressions, stress patterns, and intonation before performing more open communication activities. [Nation & Newton \(2009\)](#) explain that controlled practice can support fluency when it helps learners retrieve language more quickly. However, [\(Richards & Rodgers, 2014\)](#) caution that drills should not remain purely mechanical because excessive repetition may limit learners' communicative use of language. In this study, drilling was used as a bridge toward role play, not as the final speaking activity.

Classroom Action Research in Speaking Improvement

Classroom Action Research is suitable for solving practical classroom problems through repeated cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. [Burns \(2010\)](#) describes action research as a systematic inquiry conducted by teachers to improve classroom practice. [Kemmis et al., \(2014\)](#) explain that action research develops through reflective cycles intended to improve educational practice in a specific classroom context. In this study, reflection after Cycle 1 was used to revise the teaching action in Cycle 2, especially by increasing guided pronunciation practice and making role-play scenarios more structured.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to improve a practical speaking problem in class XI.H through two reflective cycles. The research was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle consisted of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In the planning stage, the researcher prepared lesson plans, role-play scenarios, pronunciation drilling materials, observation sheets, documentation sheets, and speaking-test rubrics. In the acting stage, the researcher implemented Role Play and Drilling Technique. In the observing stage, students' speaking performance, participation, and confidence were recorded. In the reflecting stage, the results were evaluated to revise the teaching action in the next cycle. The study used pre-test and post-test speaking tests in each cycle to measure students' speaking performance before and after the action. The use of two cycles was considered appropriate because the first cycle was used to diagnose the remaining problems after the initial action, while the second cycle was used to apply revised treatment until the criterion of success was reached [\(Burns, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014\)](#).

Site and Participants

The participants were 43 Grade 11 students of class XI.H in a senior high school, selected because preliminary observation identified pronunciation difficulties, low confidence, and passive participation during speaking activities. To maintain confidentiality, the name of the school is not disclosed.

Research Procedure

Cycle 1 began with Pre-test 1 to identify students' initial speaking ability. The pre-test was an individual speaking test in which students responded to a simple role-play prompt using familiar daily-life expressions. After that, the students received basic drilling activities focusing on common expressions, word stress, pronunciation accuracy, and intonation. The drilling activity included teacher modeling, choral repetition, individual repetition, substitution drill, and short expression practice. Students then performed simple role-play dialogues in pairs. Post-test 1 was conducted after the first action to measure improvement. Reflection from Cycle 1 showed that several students still needed more pronunciation modeling, more time for pair rehearsal, clearer role cards, and more confidence-building support. In each speaking test, students were assessed individually through oral role-play performance using the same four rubric aspects: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence.

Cycle 2 began with Pre-test 2 using a different but equivalent oral task. The action in Cycle 2 revised the previous cycle by applying a more structured Drill-to-Role Play Sequence: (1) teacher modeling of target expressions, (2) choral and individual drilling for pronunciation and word stress, (3) controlled pair rehearsal, (4) contextual role-play performance, and (5) short reflection and corrective feedback. The treatment in Cycle 2 was intended to improve students' accuracy in producing sounds and stress patterns before they were asked to communicate in a social situation. Post-test 2 was conducted after the second action using a different task prompt from the previous tests, but with an equivalent level of difficulty.

Data Collection Techniques

The instruments consisted of speaking-test tasks, an observation sheet, a documentation sheet, and an analytic speaking rubric. The data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observation, and documentation. Speaking tests were used to measure students' speaking achievement before and after each cycle. The test focused on pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence during oral performance. Classroom observation was used to record whether students were willing to speak, how clearly they pronounced target expressions, whether they used audible voice, whether they made eye contact, and whether they participated actively during pair rehearsal and role play. Documentation consisted of lesson plans, role-play materials, assessment rubrics, observation sheets, and students' performance records. The combination of these three data sources was sufficient for this Classroom Action Research because it captured the product of learning through test scores, the process of learning through observation, and supporting evidence through documentation (Burns, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014).

Research Instrument and Scoring Rubric

Speaking performance was assessed by scoring each student's oral performance using an analytic rubric with four equally weighted aspects: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence. The main instrument was a speaking test assessed with an analytic rubric adapted from common speaking-assessment principles. (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Hughes, 2003) emphasize that oral performance assessment should use clear criteria so that speaking ability can be judged more consistently. In this study, the rubric covered four aspects: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence. Each aspect was scored on a 1-25 scale, so the maximum total score was 100. Pronunciation assessed sound clarity, stress, and intonation. Fluency assessed smoothness, pauses, and continuity of speech. Vocabulary

assessed word choice and expression appropriacy. Confidence assessed willingness to speak, voice audibility, eye contact, and participation. The score category was determined using the following classification.

Table 1. Score Classification

Score Range	Category
85-100	Very Good
75-84	Good
60-74	Fair
0-59	Poor

Data Analysis Technique

Quantitative data were analyzed by calculating the mean score, standard deviation, and the percentage of students who achieved the minimum criterion. The mean was calculated using the formula $M = \Sigma X/N$, where M refers to the mean score, ΣX refers to the total score, and N refers to the number of students. The percentage of students achieving the minimum score was calculated using $P = F/N \times 100\%$, where F refers to the number of students who achieved a score of 75 or above. Standard deviation was added to the individual score table to show the variation of each student's scores across Pre-test 1, Post-test 1, Pre-test 2, and Post-test 2. Qualitative observation data were analyzed descriptively by comparing students' classroom participation, confidence, and pronunciation behavior across the two cycles. The quantitative analysis compared changes in class mean, aspect mean, standard deviation, and mastery percentage across the four tests, while qualitative data were interpreted from observation notes to explain changes in pronunciation behavior, participation, and confidence.

Criteria of Success

The research was considered successful if at least 75% of the students achieved a minimum speaking score of 75. In addition, students were expected to show better pronunciation clarity, stronger participation, and higher confidence during speaking activities. Because the criterion of success was achieved in Cycle 2, no further cycle was required.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings are presented based on the results of Pre-test 1, Post-test 1, Pre-test 2, and Post-test 2. The score data show that the students' speaking ability increased in each stage of the classroom action research. The class mean improved from 57.21 in Pre-test 1 to 69.81 in Post-test 1. After reflection and revision in Cycle 2, the mean increased again to 72.44 in Pre-test 2 and reached 81.86 in Post-test 2.

Table 2. Summary of Students' Speaking Scores

Test	Mean Score	Category	Students Achieving ≥ 75	Percentage
Pre-test 1	57.21	Poor	0	0.00%
Post-test 1	69.81	Fair	10	23.26%
Pre-test 2	72.44	Fair	15	34.88%
Post-test 2	81.86	Good	43	100.00%

Table 2 shows a consistent increase in students' speaking achievement. In Pre-test 1, none of the students achieved the minimum score of 75. In Post-test 1, 10 students, or 23.26%, achieved the criterion. In Pre-test 2, the number increased to 15 students, or 34.88%. In Post-test 2, all 43 students achieved the minimum criterion, indicating that the criterion of success was met in Cycle 2.

Table 3. Mean Score Improvement Across the Research Stages

Comparison	Interpretation	Gain	Gain (%)
Pre 1-Post 1	Cycle 1 action	12.60	22.03%
Post 1-Pre 2	Retention after reflection	2.63	3.76%
Pre 2-Post 2	Cycle 2 action	9.42	13.00%
Pre 1-Post 2	Overall improvement	24.65	43.09%

The largest overall gain occurred between Pre-test 1 and Post-test 2, with an improvement of 24.65 points or 43.09%. The gain from Pre-test 2 to Post-test 2 was also substantial, showing that the revised action in Cycle 2 had a stronger effect than the transition between Post-test 1 and Pre-test 2.

Table 4. Speaking Aspect Mean Scores

Test	Pr.	Fl.	Voc.	Conf.	Mean	Cat.
Pre-test 1	55.35	56.05	58.26	59.19	57.21	Poor
Post-test 1	70.12	69.06	70.35	69.72	69.81	Fair
Pre-test 2	72.63	71.95	72.09	73.09	72.44	Fair
Post-test 2	82.91	80.95	81.33	82.23	81.86	Good

Table 4 indicates that all speaking aspects improved from the poor category in Pre-test 1 to the good category in Post-test 2. Pronunciation increased from 55.35 to 82.91, while confidence increased from 59.19 to 82.23. This pattern suggests that the combination of drilling and role play influenced both accuracy and affective readiness to speak.

Classroom observation supported the quantitative data. During Cycle 1, several students still depended on written dialogue and spoke with low voice volume. After reflection, Cycle 2 provided clearer modeling, repeated pronunciation practice, and more structured pair rehearsal. As a result, more students were willing to speak without reading the script completely, and their pronunciation became more intelligible during role-play performance. These findings are consistent with (Sayow & Marsevani, 2024), who reported that role play improved speaking skill, and with (Pebiana & Febria, 2023), who found that repeated classroom intervention supported pronunciation and fluency. The improvement occurred because the drilling stage first gave students controlled pronunciation practice, while the role-play stage allowed them to use the practiced expressions in a meaningful social context. Therefore, the score improvement was not only a numerical increase, but also reflected better readiness, clearer pronunciation, and greater willingness to speak.

Individual Speaking Test Scores

The following tables present the individual processed scores for Pre-test 1, Post-test 1, Pre-test 2, and Post-test 2. The individual mean is the average of the four tests, while the final category is based on Post-test 2. The standard deviation column is placed beside the final category information to show the variation of each student's scores across the four testing stages.

Table 5. Individual Test Scores of Class XI.H

#	Name	Pre-test 1	Post-test 1	Pre-test 2	Post-test 2
1	Student A	55	68	70	78
2	Student B	62	78	80	86
3	Student C	66	77	79	85
4	Student D	66	82	84	93
5	Student E	62	74	75	81
6	Student F	51	66	71	83
7	Student G	52	62	63	75
8	Student H	51	61	62	75
9	Student I	51	61	62	75
10	Student J	60	76	80	89
11	Student K	57	73	74	85

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#	Name	Pre-test 1	Post-test 1	Pre-test 2	Post-test 2
12	Student L	53	68	69	75
13	Student M	56	69	72	84
14	Student N	55	65	70	82
15	Student O	61	73	75	82
16	Student P	55	68	72	78
17	Student Q	57	68	72	84
18	Student R	64	79	81	91
19	Student S	54	67	70	82
20	Student T	50	60	63	75
21	Student U	61	72	77	83
22	Student V	65	78	82	93
23	Student W	55	67	68	79
24	Student X	58	69	72	80
25	Student Y	58	68	70	76
26	Student Z	56	68	72	82
27	Student [	54	67	71	77
28	Student \	55	70	73	82
29	Student]	50	60	62	75
30	Student ^	55	65	66	77
31	Student _	52	62	64	75
32	Student `	62	76	81	93
33	Student a	58	68	73	82
34	Student b	64	75	77	86
35	Student c	63	73	75	87
36	Student d	50	66	69	76
37	Student e	55	69	70	82
38	Student f	53	69	71	78
39	Student g	64	77	79	87
40	Student h	58	73	77	87
41	Student i	55	69	71	78
42	Student j	55	65	69	78
43	Student k	66	81	82	89
CLASS MEAN		57.21	69.81	72.44	81.86

Table 6. Individual Mean, Final Category, and Standard Deviation

#	Name	Individual Mean	Final Category	SD
1	Student A	67.75	Good	9.54
2	Student B	76.50	Very Good	10.25
3	Student C	76.75	Very Good	7.93
4	Student D	81.25	Very Good	11.24
5	Student E	73.00	Good	7.96
6	Student F	67.75	Good	13.25
7	Student G	63.00	Good	9.42
8	Student H	62.25	Good	9.84
9	Student I	62.25	Good	9.84
10	Student J	76.25	Very Good	12.12
11	Student K	72.25	Very Good	11.53
12	Student L	66.25	Good	9.36
13	Student M	70.25	Good	11.50
14	Student N	68.00	Good	11.22
15	Student O	72.75	Good	8.73
16	Student P	68.25	Good	9.74
17	Student Q	70.25	Good	11.15
18	Student R	78.75	Very Good	11.15

#	Name	Individual Mean	Final Category	SD
19	Student S	68.25	Good	11.50
20	Student T	62.00	Good	10.30
21	Student U	73.25	Good	9.32
22	Student V	79.50	Very Good	11.56
23	Student W	67.25	Good	9.81
24	Student X	69.75	Good	9.11
25	Student Y	68.00	Good	7.48
26	Student Z	69.50	Good	10.75
27	Student [	67.25	Good	9.74
28	Student \	70.00	Good	11.22
29	Student]	61.75	Good	10.28
30	Student ^	65.75	Good	9.00
31	Student _	63.25	Good	9.43
32	Student `	78.00	Very Good	12.83
33	Student a	70.25	Good	10.01
34	Student b	75.50	Very Good	9.04
35	Student c	74.50	Very Good	9.85
36	Student d	65.25	Good	11.00
37	Student e	69.00	Good	11.05
38	Student f	67.75	Good	10.56
39	Student g	76.75	Very Good	9.54
40	Student h	73.75	Very Good	12.04
41	Student i	68.25	Good	9.64
42	Student j	66.75	Good	9.54
43	Student k	79.50	Very Good	9.68
	CLASS MEAN	70.33	Good	5.28

Discussion

The action hypothesis of this study was that students' speaking skills would improve if controlled drilling was implemented before communicative role-play performance. This is consistent with previous studies, including (Pebiana & Febria, 2023; Sayow & Marsevani, 2024), emphasizing repeated practice and meaningful performance. The two-stage CAR design was critical: Stage 1 addressed foundational pronunciation skills, while Stage 2 implemented a revised Drill-to-Role Play sequence, enhancing Stage 1 outcomes and ensuring the results were significant.

The improvement in pronunciation can be explained by the function of drilling as controlled oral practice. Harmer (2007) states that drilling helps learners practice pronunciation and language patterns, while (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Gilakjani, 2016) emphasize that pronunciation instruction supports intelligibility. In this study, students repeatedly practiced target words, expressions, word stress, and intonation before performing role play. Repetition helped students recognize sound patterns, while teacher modeling and correction reduced recurring pronunciation errors. This explains why pronunciation increased from 55.35 in Pre-test 1 to 82.91 in Post-test 2.

The improvement in confidence can be explained by the communicative function of role play. (Kayi, (2006); Ladousse, (1987); Nunan, (2004) argue that role play gives learners a role, situation, and communicative purpose. The students did not speak only to answer teacher questions; they spoke as participants in a social situation. This reduced hesitation and made the speaking task more contextual. The finding is also in line with Sayow and (Sayow & Marsevani, 2024), who found that role play improved students' speaking skill in a classroom action research setting. In the present study, the confidence mean increased from 59.19 to 82.23, indicating that students became more willing to speak after receiving preparation and rehearsal.

The results are also supported by studies conducted by lecturers from Universitas Internasional Batam. Marsevani & Habeebanisya (2022) emphasized the usefulness of interactive pair work in supporting speaking practice. Pebiana & Febria (2023) found that a Classroom Action Research intervention using MALL improved speaking scores, with noticeable improvement in pronunciation and fluency. Prasodjo (2023) found that topic-based vlog tasks significantly improved speaking performance and supported confidence and expressiveness. Although these studies used different strategies, they are consistent with the present finding that repeated preparation, meaningful performance, and learner-centered speaking practice can improve EFL learners' oral performance.

The two-stage cycle was important because Cycle 1 did not fully solve the classroom problem. In Cycle 1, students improved from 57.21 to 69.81, but only 23.26% reached the minimum criterion. Classroom observation showed that several students still depended on written dialogue, mispronounced common words, and spoke with low voice volume. Therefore, Cycle 2 was not merely a repetition of Cycle 1. It introduced a revised treatment through a more explicit Drill-to-Role Play Sequence: modeling, choral drilling, individual drilling, pair rehearsal, contextual role-play performance, and reflective feedback. This sequence became the procedural novelty of the study because the drilling stage was not treated as an isolated mechanical activity, but as a preparatory step that helped students enter role-play performance with clearer pronunciation, stronger recall of expressions, and better confidence.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of Role Play combined with the Drilling Technique successfully improved the speaking skills of Class XI.H students, particularly in pronunciation and confidence, with the success criterion achieved in Cycle 2. Drilling helped students develop accurate pronunciation, stress, intonation, and useful expressions, while role play enabled them to apply the practiced language in meaningful communication. This Drill-to-Role Play sequence offers a practical strategy for balancing speaking accuracy and confidence in EFL classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to use drilling before role play, especially for students who lack confidence, while schools should provide sufficient time for oral practice. For future research, researchers should use actual classroom score data, involve multiple classes, compare the strategy with other speaking techniques, and employ inter-rater assessment. Interviews or questionnaires could also examine students' confidence, anxiety, and motivation. Further studies may investigate the individual effects of drilling and role play, their combined effectiveness, long-term retention, and applicability across different topics, proficiency levels, and educational contexts.

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