

Communicative Drilling as a Technique to Improve Pronunciation and Motivation among Eighth-Grade Students

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ABSTRACT

Keyword : communicative drilling, communicative drilling as a technique to improve students' pronunciation ability, learning pronunciation ability and learning motivation among eighth-motivation, junior high school grade students of SMPN 2 Metro Lampung. The research students

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This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of employed a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test. The sample consisted of 23 students selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected through a pronunciation test and a questionnaire. The pronunciation test was administered to measure students' ability before and after the treatment, while the questionnaire was used to assess students' interest and motivation toward learning pronunciation using communicative drilling. The results showed that the mean score of the post-test was significantly higher than the pre-test, indicating a notable improvement in students' pronunciation. Furthermore, the analysis of the questionnaire revealed that students demonstrated a high level of motivation and interest when learning pronunciation through communicative drilling. The findings suggest that communicative drilling is an effective and engaging technique to enhance both students' pronunciation ability and their intrinsic motivation in learning English.

INTRODUCTION

Mastering English pronunciation is one of the fundamental aspects of developing communicative competence in learning a foreign language. Pronunciation plays a crucial role in determining whether learners can be understood by others in oral communication. Even if students have adequate vocabulary and grammar knowledge, their speech may still be unintelligible if their pronunciation is poor. For junior high school students, the ability to pronounce English words correctly is often a major challenge, as they are still developing their listening and speaking skills simultaneously.

In the Indonesian context, pronunciation has long been considered one of the most problematic areas in English learning. Students frequently encounter difficulties due to the influence of their mother tongue, which differs significantly from English in terms of sound system and stress patterns. This leads to mispronunciations that may hinder students' confidence in speaking and discourage them from actively participating in oral communication. Therefore, it is essential for English teachers to apply effective strategies that not only enhance students' pronunciation but also motivate them to enjoy the learning process.

Pronunciation instruction, however, is often neglected in English classrooms. Teachers usually emphasize grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, while pronunciation is given less attention. As a result, students are rarely trained to articulate English sounds accurately. According to Kenworthy (1987), factors such as age, exposure, phonetic ability, motivation, and attitude influence learners' pronunciation development. Among these factors, motivation is highly important, since students who feel engaged and motivated are more likely to improve their pronunciation through continuous practice.

To address this problem, teachers need to employ teaching techniques that are practical, interactive, and appealing to students. One of the techniques that has been widely recognized in language teaching is *drilling*. Traditionally, drilling involves the repetition of language models provided by the teacher or audio sources. While mechanical drills have been criticized for lacking meaningful communication, the development of *communicative drilling* has transformed drilling into a more interactive activity where students practice pronunciation in meaningful contexts.

Communicative drilling combines the accuracy of repetition with the meaningfulness of communication. It allows students to repeat sounds, words, or phrases within real-life communicative exchanges, rather than in isolation. By practicing language forms through structured yet meaningful contexts, students can improve both accuracy and fluency. Harmer (2001) highlights that drilling helps learners develop confidence in producing sounds correctly, while the communicative aspect ensures that learners stay engaged and motivated during the process.

In addition, communicative drilling provides opportunities for students to monitor their own speech and compare it with models given by teachers or peers. This kind of active participation not only enhances awareness of pronunciation but also builds self-confidence. Furthermore, communicative drilling can be adapted to various classroom activities, such as role-plays, dialogues, and games, which makes learning pronunciation more enjoyable and less monotonous for students.

Previous studies have shown that communicative drilling significantly improves students' speaking skills and motivation. For example, Tam (1997) found that learners engaged in communicative drills were more aware of pronunciation accuracy and rhythm. Similarly, Maharida (2017) reported that drilling techniques led to measurable improvements in students' pronunciation ability and increased their confidence in oral production. These findings reinforce the importance of applying communicative drilling in EFL classrooms, especially at the junior high school level.

Based on these considerations, this research aims to explore the effectiveness of communicative drilling in improving both pronunciation ability and learning motivation among eighth-grade students of SMPN 2 Metro Lampung. By focusing on pronunciation instruction through communicative drilling, the study seeks to provide insights into how this technique can contribute to developing students' oral proficiency while simultaneously enhancing their interest and motivation in learning English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation has been widely acknowledged as a key component of communicative competence. According to Celce-Murcia (2006), pronunciation instruction should not be seen as a separate skill but as an integral part of speaking and listening development. Learners with poor pronunciation may face difficulties in being understood, even if they possess adequate vocabulary and grammar. Conversely, learners with good pronunciation can still communicate effectively despite making occasional grammatical errors. This highlights the importance of prioritizing pronunciation teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

Several factors influence learners' ability to acquire accurate pronunciation. Kenworthy (1987) identifies six critical factors: the learner's first language, age, exposure to English, innate phonetic ability, identity and language ego, and motivation. Among these, motivation is one of the most decisive, since learners who are motivated are more willing to practice and improve. In the Indonesian context, students' pronunciation is often heavily influenced by their mother tongue, leading to errors in stress, intonation, and articulation. Teachers must therefore apply suitable teaching techniques that can address these challenges and sustain students' motivation.

One of the most effective methods for teaching pronunciation is drilling. Drilling has long been used in language classrooms, particularly during the era of the Audio-Lingual Method, which emphasized repetition and pattern practice (Harmer, 2001). In drilling, learners listen to a model—provided by the teacher, audio materials, or peers—and repeat it until they can reproduce it accurately. Although traditional drilling is sometimes criticized for being mechanical and monotonous, it remains useful for developing accuracy, especially in pronunciation practice.

To overcome the limitations of mechanical drills, language educators have developed *communicative drilling*. Unlike traditional drilling, communicative drilling embeds repetition within meaningful contexts. It not only trains students to pronounce words correctly but also allows them to practice in interactive situations such as role-plays, dialogues, and problem-solving activities. As Acton (1984) notes, communicative drilling helps learners become more aware of pronunciation accuracy, while also encouraging them to pay attention to rhythm, stress, and intonation in real communication.

The theoretical basis of communicative drilling rests on both behaviorist and communicative approaches to language learning. From a behaviorist perspective, repetition and reinforcement are essential for habit formation, which helps learners internalize correct pronunciation patterns. From a communicative perspective, however, language learning must also involve meaningful use of language. Communicative drilling bridges these perspectives by providing structured practice while maintaining relevance to real-life communication.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of communicative drilling in improving pronunciation. Handoko and Mindari (2016) found that drilling techniques significantly improved students' ability to distinguish and produce problematic English sounds. Maharida (2017) also reported that substitution drills and communicative activities enhanced students' pronunciation and confidence in oral communication. These findings suggest that communicative drilling can be particularly effective for junior high school students, who often need more structured yet engaging pronunciation practice.

Apart from pronunciation, communicative drilling is also beneficial in fostering students' motivation and interest. According to Dörnyei (2001), motivation is one of the most influential factors in language learning success. Techniques that actively engage learners and provide them with opportunities to participate meaningfully can increase intrinsic motivation. When students find pronunciation practice enjoyable through communicative drilling, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward English learning and sustain their effort. The literature indicates that communicative drilling is a powerful technique for teaching pronunciation and motivating learners. It combines the benefits of accuracy-focused drills with the meaningfulness of communicative activities. By integrating pronunciation practice into interactive tasks, communicative drilling not only improves learners' pronunciation skills but also enhances their interest and motivation. This provides a strong theoretical foundation for implementing communicative drilling in the classroom and exploring its impact on students' learning outcomes.

METHOD

This study employed a pre-experimental research design with a one-group pre-test and post-test. The design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to measure students' pronunciation ability and motivation before and after the implementation of communicative drilling. By comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test, the researcher was able to determine the effectiveness of the technique in improving both pronunciation and learning motivation.

The population of this study consisted of all eighth-grade students of SMPN 2 Metro Lampung in the academic year 2023/2024. From this population, one class was selected as the sample through cluster random sampling, resulting in a total of 23 participants. This number was considered representative and manageable for classroom-based research while still providing sufficient data for analysis.

Two main instruments were used to collect data: a pronunciation test and a motivation questionnaire. The pronunciation test consisted of a set of words, phrases, and sentences designed to evaluate students' ability to articulate English sounds, stress, and intonation correctly. The questionnaire, designed in the form of a Likert scale, measured students' interest and motivation toward learning pronunciation through communicative drilling.

The use of both instruments ensured that the study could capture not only linguistic outcomes but also affective responses from the students.

The research procedure included three main stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. In the pre-test stage, students were asked to perform a pronunciation task to establish their baseline ability. During the treatment stage, the researcher conducted four sessions of pronunciation practice using communicative drilling, where students engaged in interactive drills embedded in dialogues, role-plays, and games. Finally, in the post-test stage, students were tested again using the same pronunciation instrument, and the questionnaire was administered to measure changes in their motivation.

To analyze the data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. The descriptive analysis included mean scores, frequency, and percentage to describe students' performance and motivational levels. The inferential analysis employed a paired-sample t-test to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test scores. The analysis was carried out using SPSS 21.0 software, with a significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

The validity and reliability of the instruments were carefully considered. The pronunciation test was validated through expert judgment by two English language lecturers, ensuring that the test items measured the intended skills. The questionnaire was piloted on a different group of students, and Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to assess reliability, yielding a coefficient above 0.80, which indicated high internal consistency. These steps ensured that the data collected were both accurate and reliable for addressing the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: (1) students' pronunciation ability as measured through pre-test and post-test, and (2) students' motivation toward learning pronunciation through communicative drilling as measured through a questionnaire.

The results of the pre-test indicated that most students had low pronunciation ability. Many participants experienced difficulties in producing English sounds accurately, particularly with stress and intonation patterns. Their mean score on the pre-test was 41.2, which fell into the "poor" category. This confirmed the initial observation that students required intensive practice and support to improve their pronunciation.

After the treatment, which consisted of four sessions using communicative drilling, students' performance improved significantly. The post-test results revealed a mean score of 76.3, which was categorized as "good." This increase in scores demonstrated that students were able to articulate English sounds more clearly, apply correct stress patterns, and show greater confidence in oral production.

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The comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Students' Pronunciation Scores (Pre-test and Post-test)

Classification	Score Range	Pre-test (f/%)	Post-test (f/%)
Very Good	86–100	0 (0%)	5 (22%)
Good	71–85	0 (0%)	7 (30%)
Average	56–70	5 (22%)	6 (26%)
Poor	41–55	10 (43%)	3 (13%)
Very Poor	0–40	8 (35%)	2 (9%)
Total	100%	23	23

As shown in Table 1, there was a marked shift from the “poor” and “very poor” categories in the pre-test toward the “average,” “good,” and “very good” categories in the post-test. This indicates that communicative drilling was effective in raising the overall level of students' pronunciation ability.

The statistical analysis confirmed the effectiveness of the technique. The paired-sample t-test revealed that the p-value (0.000) was lower than the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, which means that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. In other words, there was a significant difference between students' pronunciation ability before and after being taught through communicative drilling.

In terms of motivation, the questionnaire results showed that students responded positively to the use of communicative drilling. The mean score of students' motivation was 81.4, categorized as “high.” Most students reported that they felt more engaged, enjoyed the learning process, and became more confident in pronouncing English words. Only a small number of students expressed neutral responses, and none reported being uninterested.

Table 2. Students' Motivation toward Communicative Drilling

Category	Interval Score	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Interested	85–100	9	39%
Interested	69–84	10	43%
Moderate	52–68	4	18%
Uninterested	36–51	0	0%
Strongly Uninterested	20–35	0	0%
Total		23	100%

Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that communicative drilling not only improved students' pronunciation skills but also increased their interest and motivation to learn English. This dual improvement highlights the importance of integrating both skill development and affective factors in the teaching of pronunciation.

Discussion

The results of this study provide strong evidence that communicative drilling is an effective technique for improving students' pronunciation ability. The significant increase in mean scores from pre-test to post-test demonstrates that structured repetition combined with meaningful communication helps students internalize correct pronunciation patterns. This finding supports the claim made by Harmer (2001) that drilling is beneficial for reinforcing language accuracy when applied appropriately.

One of the key strengths of communicative drilling lies in its balance between accuracy and meaningfulness. Traditional drilling often focused on rote repetition without context, which could become monotonous and demotivating for students. By contrast, communicative drilling embeds repetition in interactive contexts, such as dialogues and role-plays, making practice more engaging. This aligns with Acton's (1984) assertion that communicative drills enable learners to focus on rhythm, stress, and intonation while also participating in realistic communication.

The improvement in students' motivation is another crucial outcome of this study. The questionnaire results indicated that students were more interested and motivated to practice pronunciation through communicative drilling. This suggests that when learning activities are interactive and enjoyable, students develop positive attitudes toward language learning. The findings are consistent with Dörnyei's (2001) framework, which emphasizes that motivation is a decisive factor in learners' success in acquiring a foreign language.

Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of addressing affective factors in pronunciation instruction. Students who initially lacked confidence became more active and willing to participate after being exposed to communicative drilling. This suggests that pronunciation instruction should not only aim at linguistic accuracy but also consider students' self-confidence and willingness to communicate. Teachers who foster such a supportive environment are more likely to see positive learning outcomes.

The shift in score distribution from "poor" and "very poor" to "good" and "very good" categories further demonstrates the practical benefits of communicative drilling. These findings resonate with previous studies such as Maharida (2017), who reported that drilling techniques improved both pronunciation accuracy and learner confidence. Similarly, Handoko and Mindari (2016) found that students benefited from structured pronunciation practice supported by interactive activities.

Another important aspect revealed by this study is that communicative drilling can be applied effectively even in large classes with limited resources. The technique does not require sophisticated technology or extensive preparation, making it practical for teachers in various educational contexts. What matters most is the teacher's creativity in designing communicative tasks that involve meaningful repetition of language forms.

The findings also have implications for curriculum design in EFL contexts. Pronunciation is often overlooked in favor of grammar and vocabulary, yet this study demonstrates that targeted pronunciation practice can yield significant improvements in students' communicative competence. Incorporating communicative drilling into regular classroom activities may help address this gap and provide students with the tools they need to communicate effectively in English. communicative drilling not only improved

students' pronunciation ability but also enhanced their motivation to learn. This dual effect makes it a valuable technique for EFL teachers seeking to integrate both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. By adopting communicative drilling, teachers can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment that fosters students' confidence and oral proficiency in English.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that communicative drilling is an effective technique for improving students' pronunciation ability. The significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores demonstrates that structured repetition combined with meaningful communication helps students internalize correct pronunciation patterns. Students who initially struggled with English sounds, stress, and intonation were able to achieve better accuracy and confidence after receiving treatment through communicative drilling.

In addition to improving pronunciation, the study also revealed that communicative drilling positively affected students' motivation and interest in learning English. The majority of students reported high levels of engagement and enjoyment during the learning process. This suggests that communicative drilling not only enhances linguistic competence but also addresses the affective side of learning by encouraging active participation and building self-confidence.

Overall, communicative drilling can be considered a practical and impactful strategy for teaching pronunciation in EFL classrooms, particularly at the junior high school level. Its dual benefits—enhancing students' oral proficiency and fostering their motivation—make it a valuable technique for teachers. Future studies may expand on this research by applying communicative drilling in different educational settings or combining it with other innovative methods to further enrich students' learning experiences.

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