



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATIVE DRILLING IN IMPROVING EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS' ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of communicative drilling in improving the English pronunciation skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pancarijang. A pre-experimental research design was employed, involving a single class of 22 students selected through random sampling. The research instruments consisted of a pronunciation test and a questionnaire measuring students' interest in learning pronunciation through communicative drilling. The results revealed a significant improvement in students' pronunciation ability, as indicated by the increase in mean scores from the pre-test (40.94) to the post-test (75.88). Furthermore, the analysis of students' interest showed a high level of engagement and motivation, with 82.2% of students expressing strong or moderate interest in the learning process. Statistical analysis using a paired samples t-test confirmed that the difference between pre- and post-test scores was significant ($p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that communicative drilling is an effective and engaging method for enhancing students' English pronunciation. The study highlights the importance of interactive and repetitive pronunciation practice in fostering both skill development and learner motivation.

Keywords: communicative drilling, pronunciation, English learning, EFL students, eighth-grade students

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of speaking skills in English language learning. Mastery of pronunciation enables learners to communicate meaning clearly and effectively. However, many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners struggle with accurate pronunciation due to various linguistic and psychological factors, such as interference from their mother tongue, lack

of exposure, and low self-confidence. In the context of Indonesian secondary schools, pronunciation is often overlooked in favor of grammar and vocabulary, leading to inadequate oral communication skills.

According to Kenworthy (1987), six major factors influence the acquisition of pronunciation: native language, age, amount of exposure, phonetic ability, personality, and motivation. These factors indicate that



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Pronunciation learning is a complex process that requires appropriate strategies and consistent practice. Despite the importance of pronunciation in achieving communicative competence, it is frequently marginalized in classroom practice and curriculum design.

Teachers often face challenges in selecting effective methods for teaching pronunciation. Many conventional techniques rely heavily on repetition and rote memorization, which may not engage students actively or provide meaningful context. In response to this limitation, communicative approaches have gained attention as they promote interaction, authenticity, and purposeful language use. One such approach is communicative drilling, which combines repetition with meaningful context and student interaction.

Communicative drilling differs from traditional drilling in that it integrates language use within communicative situations. Rather than merely repeating isolated sounds or words, students practice pronunciation through short dialogues, situational role plays, or contextualized sentences. This method encourages learners to focus not only on the articulation of sounds but also on intonation, rhythm, and stress patterns in natural speech.

Recent studies have shown that communicative drilling can improve learners' pronunciation accuracy and fluency while also increasing their motivation. Acton (1984) and Tam (1997) emphasized that this technique helps learners become more conscious of their speech patterns, enhances self-monitoring, and fosters better control over English rhythm and intonation. Furthermore, the interactive nature of communicative drilling can reduce learners' anxiety and promote a more enjoyable learning environment.

In the Indonesian educational context, particularly in rural or under-resourced schools, there is a need for low-cost and effective strategies that can support pronunciation development. Communicative drilling offers a practical solution that teachers can implement without sophisticated tools or native speaker input. However, there is still limited empirical research that examines the effectiveness of this technique in junior high school settings.

This research was conducted to address the gap by investigating how communicative drilling affects the pronunciation skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pancarijang. The study also aimed to explore students' interest and attitudes toward this technique as part of their English learning experience. By assessing both cognitive and affective outcomes, this study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the method. The study is expected to contribute to the improvement of pronunciation teaching practices in EFL classrooms. Specifically, it examines whether communicative drilling is effective in enhancing students' pronunciation and how it influences their motivation and interest. The findings will offer practical implications for English teachers seeking to implement interactive and student-centered techniques in their classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation is a critical aspect of spoken language that directly affects intelligibility and communication. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), pronunciation includes both segmental features (individual sounds) and suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, and intonation). Learners who can articulate sounds clearly and use proper intonation are



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more likely to be understood by their interlocutors, even if their grammar or vocabulary is not perfect. Despite its importance, pronunciation has often been neglected in many language classrooms, particularly in EFL contexts like Indonesia.

Several factors influence pronunciation learning. Kenworthy (1987) identified six significant factors: native language, age, amount of exposure, phonetic ability, personality, and motivation. Among these, native language interference is considered the most prominent factor, as learners often transfer the sound system of their first language into the target language. For Indonesian learners, whose native phonology differs significantly from English, this poses a major barrier to achieving accurate pronunciation.

Furthermore, learners' phonetic ability—often referred to as the "ear for language"—also plays a key role in acquiring pronunciation. Some learners can easily distinguish and reproduce sounds, while others may require more intensive and repeated exposure. Motivation and identity also shape learners' engagement with pronunciation tasks. Learners who are highly motivated and identify with the target language culture tend to show greater improvement in their pronunciation skills (Brown, 2001).

In terms of teaching strategies, traditional pronunciation instruction has relied heavily on imitation and repetition techniques, such as minimal pair drills and read-aloud exercises. While these methods are effective

to some extent, they often lack communicative value and fail to engage students meaningfully. As a result, there has been a pedagogical shift towards more communicative and interactive approaches to pronunciation teaching.

Communicative drilling is one such technique that integrates pronunciation practice into meaningful language use. Unlike mechanical drills, communicative drills are context-based and involve real-life communication scenarios. Harmer (2001) emphasizes that this technique allows students to internalize language structures while simultaneously focusing on accurate pronunciation. The communicative element helps learners connect form with function, thereby enhancing both fluency and intelligibility.

Research by Tam (1997) and Acton (1984) supports the effectiveness of communicative drilling. These studies suggest that communicative drills encourage learners to monitor their pronunciation more actively and foster awareness of stress, intonation, and rhythm. Additionally, the interactive nature of the technique helps reduce learners' anxiety and promotes a more positive attitude toward pronunciation practice, which is essential for long-term improvement.

In the Indonesian context, limited studies have explored the application of communicative drilling in junior high school settings. However, several researchers have pointed out the lack of pronunciation focus in existing curricula and the need for more



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engaging strategies. Maharida (2017) found that drilling techniques, when implemented communicatively, significantly improved students' pronunciation accuracy and increased their confidence in speaking English.

Given the theoretical and empirical support, communicative drilling holds great potential as a pronunciation teaching strategy, especially in EFL environments. This literature review thus establishes a strong foundation for examining the effectiveness of communicative drilling among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pancarijang. By addressing both cognitive outcomes (accuracy and fluency) and affective responses (motivation and interest), this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on interactive pronunciation pedagogy.

METHOD

This research employed a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test format. The objective was to examine whether the use of communicative drilling could significantly improve students' pronunciation ability. The design involved administering a pre-test to measure the students' initial pronunciation performance, applying the treatment using communicative drilling techniques, and finally administering a post-test to assess improvement. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to observe the effect of the treatment on a single group without a control group, which is suitable for classroom-based studies with limited sample sizes.

The population of this research consisted of all eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pancarijang in the academic year 2018/2019. The total number of students was 65, divided into three classes: VIII.1, VIII.2, and VIII.3. Using a cluster random sampling technique, one class (VIII.3) was randomly selected as the sample. The selected class consisted of 22 students, including 10 male and 12 female students. This sampling method was considered practical and efficient for classroom-based interventions.

To gather data, two main instruments were used: a pronunciation test and a questionnaire. The pronunciation test was administered before and after the treatment to assess students' improvement. The test included a set of words and sentences that students were required to pronounce, which were evaluated based on articulation, stress, and intonation. The questionnaire, developed using a Likert scale, aimed to measure students' interest and attitudes toward the communicative drilling technique. It consisted of 20 items: 10 positive statements and 10 negative statements.

The treatment involved applying communicative drilling techniques in English lessons over four weeks. Each session focused on a specific aspect of pronunciation, such as vowel sounds, consonants, word stress, and intonation patterns. Students were guided through structured activities that included listening to models, repeating phrases in context, engaging in pair or group dialogues, and practicing pronunciation within meaningful communicative tasks. The teacher facilitated feedback and correction throughout the sessions to enhance accuracy.

To analyze the data, quantitative methods were used. The students' scores from the



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pre-test and post-test were calculated to determine the mean and standard deviation. A paired samples t-test was conducted using SPSS software to assess the statistical significance of the difference between pre- and post-test scores. Additionally, students' responses to the questionnaire were tabulated and interpreted to evaluate their interest levels, using percentage analysis and mean score classification.

This methodological framework allowed the researcher to examine not only the impact of communicative drilling on students' pronunciation performance but also the extent to which the students were engaged and motivated throughout the learning process. By combining test results and interest data, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of both the cognitive and affective outcomes of the instructional intervention.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented based on two main data sources: students' pronunciation test scores (pre-test and post-test) and the results of the questionnaire measuring their interest in learning pronunciation through communicative drilling. The analysis focuses on changes in students' performance and perceptions following the implementation of the communicative drilling technique.

The results of the pronunciation test show a significant improvement in students' performance after receiving the treatment. Prior to the intervention, most students were categorized in the "poor" and "very poor" levels of pronunciation proficiency. After the treatment, there was a marked increase in the number of students achieving "average" and "good" levels. This change suggests that

communicative drilling had a positive impact on their pronunciation skills.

The classification of students' scores before and after the treatment is summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Classification of Students' Scores in Pre-test and Post-test

Classification	Score Range	Pre-test Frequency (%)	Post-test Frequency (%)
Very Good	86–100	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Good	71–85	0 (0%)	5 (24%)
Average	56–70	0 (0%)	7 (33%)
Poor	41–55	13 (62%)	5 (24%)
Very Poor	0–40	8 (38%)	4 (19%)

From Table 1, it is evident that prior to the treatment, 13 students (62%) were in the "poor" category and 8 students (38%) in the "very poor" category. After the communicative drilling sessions, 7 students (33%) reached the "average" level and 5 students (24%) moved to the "good" category.

The statistical analysis of mean scores and standard deviations further confirms this improvement. The mean score of the pre-test was 40.94 with a standard deviation of 11.87, while the post-test mean score rose to 75.88 with a standard deviation of 13.49.

Gambar 1. Table 2: Mean Score and Standard Deviation

Test	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	40.94	11.87
Post-test	75.88	13.49



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To determine the significance of the difference, a paired samples t-test was conducted. The result showed that the p-value = 0.000, which is lower than the alpha level of 0.05. This indicates that the difference between pre- and post-test scores is statistically significant.

In addition to test performance, the study also assessed students' interest in learning pronunciation using communicative drilling. A questionnaire was administered after the intervention. The results showed that 41.1% of students were "strongly interested," 41.1% were "interested," and 17.7% had "moderate" interest. No students were categorized as "uninterested."

Gambar 2. Table 3: Students' Interest Toward Communicative Drilling

Category	Score Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Interested	85–100	7	41.1%
Interested	69–84	7	41.1%
Moderate	52–68	3	17.7%
Uninterested	36–51	0	0%
Strongly Uninterested	20–35	0	0%

The overall mean score of students' interest was 79.7, indicating a generally positive perception of the communicative drilling technique.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that communicative drilling is an effective technique to enhance students' pronunciation ability. The improvement in

post-test scores compared to pre-test scores demonstrates that students gained a better understanding and control of English phonological features, including stress, intonation, and articulation. This aligns with Acton's (1984) claim that communicative drilling fosters self-awareness in pronunciation.

One of the key strengths of the communicative drilling technique is its emphasis on meaningful context. Unlike mechanical drills that focus solely on repetition, communicative drills allow students to practice pronunciation in authentic situations, which improves both accuracy and fluency. This helps bridge the gap between controlled practice and real-world communication.

The increase in students' engagement and motivation was also a notable outcome of this study. The positive results from the interest questionnaire indicate that students found communicative drilling enjoyable and helpful. This aligns with Harmer's (2001) assertion that communicative techniques enhance student involvement and lower anxiety in the language learning process.

The effectiveness of communicative drilling may also be attributed to its repetitive yet dynamic structure. Repetition helped reinforce correct pronunciation patterns, while variation in communicative tasks maintained student interest. This dual function supports long-term retention and skill transfer beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, the technique provided immediate feedback opportunities, allowing students to adjust their pronunciation in real-time. Teacher modeling, peer interaction, and self-monitoring during drills were crucial components that contributed to this improvement. These findings reinforce

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Tam's (1997) argument that active participation and feedback are essential for pronunciation development.

In terms of pedagogical implications, this study suggests that communicative drilling can be a valuable addition to the pronunciation curriculum in EFL contexts, especially where access to native speakers or advanced technology is limited. The simplicity and adaptability of the technique make it suitable for a wide range of classroom settings.

Nevertheless, the study had certain limitations. It did not involve a control group for comparison, and the duration of the treatment was relatively short. Future research could incorporate longer-term interventions and compare communicative drilling with other pronunciation techniques to determine its relative effectiveness.

In conclusion, the discussion supports the view that communicative drilling is not only effective in improving students' pronunciation skills but also in fostering their interest and motivation. As pronunciation continues to be a challenge in EFL learning, communicative drilling offers a promising approach that balances linguistic accuracy with meaningful engagement.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of communicative drilling is effective in improving the English pronunciation ability of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pancarijang. The significant increase in students' post-test scores compared to their pre-test scores indicates that the technique positively impacted their ability to articulate sounds,

apply correct stress, and use proper intonation. The structured and interactive nature of communicative drilling enabled students to practice pronunciation in meaningful contexts, resulting in better learning outcomes.

In addition to improving pronunciation performance, communicative drilling also fostered a high level of student interest and motivation. The questionnaire results revealed that a majority of students were either strongly interested or interested in learning through this technique. This suggests that communicative drilling not only supports cognitive development but also positively influences students' affective responses, such as engagement and confidence in speaking English.

Therefore, it is recommended that English language teachers incorporate communicative drilling into their pronunciation teaching practices. This technique offers a practical, low-cost, and student-centered approach that can be adapted to various classroom conditions. Future research should consider longer intervention periods and comparisons with other pronunciation strategies to further validate the effectiveness of communicative drilling across different educational contexts.

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