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Improving Students' Speaking Skills through Drama Teaching Technique: A Classroom Action Research at a Junior High School

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A B S T R A C T

This research was conducted because the ninth-grade students of SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak experienced difficulties in speaking English, particularly in pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary. Therefore, this research aimed to improve the speaking skills through Drama Teaching Technique. The researcher applied Classroom Action Research (CAR), which was conducted in two cycles. The first cycle consisted of three meetings, while the second cycle consisted of two meetings. Each cycle involved four stages, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The subjects of this research were 30 students of class IX F at SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak. The researcher used observation checklists, field notes, and speaking performance tests as the tools of data collection. The results of the research showed that Drama Teaching Technique improved the students' speaking skills. The students' mean score increased from 65.52 in Cycle 1 to 78.42 in Cycle 2. In addition, the students showed more active participation, greater confidence, and higher enthusiasm during the teaching and learning process. Therefore, these findings indicate that the Drama Teaching Technique was considered as a way to improve students' speaking skills of ninth-grade students of SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak.

Keyword: *Speaking Skills, Drama Teaching Technique, Classroom Action Research*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the essential skills in English language learning because it allows students to express ideas, feelings, and information directly to others. Speaking is a crucial component of second language learning since it enables learners to communicate directly and effectively in the target language. In a similar vein, Crisianita & Mandasari (2022) state that speaking allows individuals to exchange knowledge and express their views during communication. Mastering speaking is not simply about producing sounds or sentences. Goh & Burns (2012) argues that speaking involves cognitive, physical, and sociocultural processes that operate simultaneously in real communicative situations. Therefore, developing speaking skills requires not only linguistic knowledge but also continuous and meaningful practice.

English is one of the most important subjects for junior high school (SMP) students because it plays a key role in developing communication skills and preparing students to meet the academic demands of the next level of education. English proficiency enables students to access information, broaden their knowledge, and understand developments in science and technology, much of which is communicated in English. At this stage of education, students need to acquire a foundation in English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking plays a crucial role because it enables students to convey ideas, express opinions, ask questions, and interact with others verbally. Therefore, English language

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instruction at the junior high school level should not only focus on vocabulary and grammar but also provide students with opportunities to use English in communicative activities.

Despite its importance, speaking remains one of the most difficult skills for junior high school students to master, particularly in the EFL context where exposure to English is limited outside the classroom. Speaking cannot develop effectively without continuous practice (Safitriani & Jayadi, 2021). This is because speaking is considered one of the most challenging language skills to master, especially for EFL students who have limited opportunities to use English in their daily lives (Kumar, 2021).

Preliminary observations conducted during the PLP II program in Class IX F at SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak, together with informal discussions with English teacher, identified difficulties in three speaking aspects, namely fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Students often hesitated when speaking, struggled to understand the meaning of words, and mispronounced common English vocabulary. Classroom activities also provided limited opportunities for oral practice because lessons often relied on teacher explanations and written exercises, while students tend use their first language. The difficulties in developing speaking skills in a foreign language are commonly caused by fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and low self-confidenc (Wati et al., 2023).

The researcher further identified several factors that contribute to these problems. One of the prominent factors was low student participation during the learning process. As a result, the students tended to be passive during the learning process. According to Severe et al. (2024), students often choose not to participate verbally because they fear negative evaluation from their peers. They worry about making mistakes or appearing less capable in front of others, which leads them to remain silent during classroom interactions. This passivity can affect their speaking skills, as speaking can only be developed through continuous practice. When students remain passive, they have limited opportunities to practice speaking, express their ideas, and build their confidence in using English. Furthermore, when students are given the opportunity to practice speaking in English, they tend to remain silent or wait for the teacher to call on them.

Drama teaching teachnique was selected because it can place language practice in a shared, meaningful context. According to Rosnija (2021), drama includes various genres such as comedy, tragedy, and romance that are performed on stage, providing students with a dynamic and engaging learning experience. Through drama, students work collaboratively to perform dialogues or short scenarios, which encourages them to participate more actively while practicing pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency in a meaningful context. In this study, the technique was implemented through scripted role-play and mime. Role-play gave students opportunities to rehearse and perform dialogue as characters, while mime supported meaning-making through gesture and facial expression. Rehearsing a shared script also provided repeated encounters with vocabulary and opportunities to practice pronunciation, and intonation. Drama activities can encourage collaboration and engagement Kucharczyk & Kucharczyk (2022) and provide opportunities for learners to use language in context (Kao & O'Neill, 2000). Previous studies have reported improvements in speaking through drama-based activities, including pronunciation and fluency (Harmawati, 2017), accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility (Marwati, 2020), and speaking proficiency and self-confidence (Kumar et al., 2022). Almutairi & Alfarwan (2024) also reported gains in several speaking aspects among university EFL learners.

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Although these studies confirm the benefits of drama for speaking development, most of them were conducted in different educational levels and contexts. Research that specifically examines the implementation of Drama Teaching Technique through Classroom Action Research at the junior high school level, particularly in the context of SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak, is still limited. This gap motivated the present study, which focused on applying role-play and mime as the two drama techniques considered most appropriate for the students' proficiency level. This research aimed to answer the question of how does Drama Teaching Technique improve the speaking skills of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak, particularly in fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation through Drama Teaching Technique?

METHOD

This study used Classroom Action Research (CAR) to address an identified classroom problem through planned, action, observation, and reflection. It followed the cyclical model described by Kemmis et al. (2013), consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. CAR was appropriate because the researcher could implement a teaching response, examine students' performance and classroom participation, and revise the action in response to evidence from the first cycle. The process in action research can be show in the scheme takes from Kemis and McTagart below:

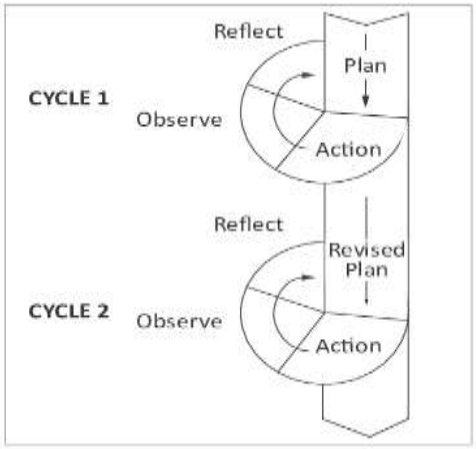


Figure 1. Classroom Action Research Cycle

The participants of this research were 30 students of Class IX F at SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak. This class was selected based on preliminary observation and discussion with the English teacher, which identified speaking difficulties in class. The researcher acted as the teacher during the implementation of the action, while the English teacher served as the collaborator and observed the teaching and learning process.

The study was conducted in two cycles. Cycle 1 consisted of three meetings using narrative text with the Timun Mas script. The stages included preparing the lesson plan and instruments, introducing the material and drama activity, supporting students as they practiced and performed in groups, observing classroom participation, and reflecting on the performance results and implementation. Reflection on Cycle 1 identified continued dependence on scripts, hesitation, and pronunciation errors. Cycle 2 therefore consisted of two meetings and incorporated a consistent model script, warm-up and ice-breaking activities, mime to support gestures and facial expressions, focused pronunciation drills, vocabulary practice, and intonation practice before the performance. The same Timun Mas drama was used to provide continued practice with the dialogue and vocabulary.

Data were collected through three instruments, namely observation checklists, field notes, and speaking performance tests. The observation checklist recorded predetermined

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indicators of teacher and student activities. The collaborator's field notes documented classroom conditions and student responses that were not fully captured by the checklist. The speaking test required students to perform a drama entitled Timun Mas in groups, each students was assessed individually from the performance using a rubric adapted from Brown (2001), focusing on fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The performance was vidoe-recorded and reviewed by the researcher for scoring.

Data analysis was conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data from observation and field notes were described to explain the classroom condition and students' participation during the implementation of the action. Quantitative data from the speaking test were calculated using the mean score formula to determine students' progress between cycles. The action was considered successful if students achieved a mean score of at least 70, in line with the school's minimum mastery criterion or KKM.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

How Does Drama Teaching Technique Improve the Speaking Skills of Ninth-grade Students of SMPN 5 Pontianak?

In Cycle 1, the implementation of Drama Teaching Technique was carried out in three meetings focusing on narrative text combined with role-play activities using the script Timun Mas. The results of the performance test administered to 30 students showed a mean score of 65.52, which falls into the "poor" category. The distribution of students' scores in Cycle 1 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Speaking Scores in Cycle 1

Category	Score Range	Number of Students
Very good	≥86	0
Good	76-85	2
Fairly good	66-75	18
Poor	56-65	7
Very poor	≤55	3
Mean score	-	65.52

Reflection on Cycle 1 revealed that although students' participation increased compared to the initial condition, several problems remained unresolved. Many students still depended heavily on the script during their performance, showed low confidence, and made frequent pronunciation errors. These issues indicated that fear of making mistakes and limited opportunities for natural spoken practice were still major obstacles. Based on these reflections, improvements are necessary for the next cycle. Therefore, the researcher conducted the second cycle to revise and correct the weaknesses in the first cycle. To fulfill the weakness in cycle 1, the researcher made some improvements on the technique. Based on this reflection, the researcher made several modifications for Cycle 2, including the use of a consistent model script to reduce students' burden in memorizing new material, the addition of warm-up and ice-breaking activities to build students' confidence, and the inclusion of mime as a complementary technique to strengthen gesture and facial expression.

In Cycle 2, which was conducted in two meetings, the researcher provided more focused pronunciation drills, introduced new vocabulary, and practiced intonation before students performed the drama again. The results of the performance test showed a considerable improvement, with the mean score increasing to 78.42, which falls into the "good" category. The distribution of students' scores in Cycle 2 is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2. Distribution of Students' Speaking Scores in Cycle 2

Category	Score Range	Number of Students
Very good	≥86	6
Good	76-85	14
Fairly good	66-75	10
Poor	56-65	0
Very poor	≤55	0
Mean score	-	78.42

The mean score increased by 12.90 points between cycles. The total scores for each assessed speaking aspect also increased, as shown in Table 3. The percentages of improvement for each aspect are reported as recorded in the thesis.

Table 3. The percentages of improvement

Speaking Aspect	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Improvement
Fluency	90	108	20.00%
Pronunciation	97	116	19.59%
vocabulary	107	130	21.50%

All three aspects of speaking skills also improved, namely fluency increased by 20.00%, pronunciation by 19.59%, and vocabulary by 21.50%. The highest improvement was found in the vocabulary aspect. This may be attributed to the use of the same drama script (Timun Mas) in both cycles, which provided students with opportunities to learn and practice vocabulary repeatedly.

Qualitative findings. The observation and field-note descriptions indicated changes in students' classroom participation across the cycles. In Cycle 1, students were still hesitant, depended on the script, and were not consistently confident when performing. In Cycle 2, most students responded positively and participated more actively in classroom activities. In addition, this improvement was evident during the warm-up activities, where students appeared more enthusiastic and engaged than in Cycle 1. The classroom atmosphere also felt lively and interactive compared to the previous cycle. Furthermore, during the performance test, students practiced Drama Teaching Techniques through group drama performances. The researcher observed a considerable improvement in the students' speaking skills. Compared to their previous performances, the students performed better and more fluently during the activity. Most students also no longer relied heavily on the script because they had begun to memorize and deliver the dialogue more effectively. Therefore, the researcher and collaborator decided to stop this cycle.

Discussion

The increase in the class mean from 65.52 to 78.42, together with higher total scores in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary, indicates improvement in the assessed speaking performance during the two CAR cycles. The Cycle 2 mean exceeded the school criterion of 70. Because the study involved one class and did not use a second rater, the result should be interpreted as evidence of improvement in this classroom rather than proof that the technique will produce the same outcome in every context.

The design of the activities offers a practical explanation for the improvement. Role-play required students to deliver dialogue for particular characters, while rehearsal provided repeated opportunities to produce the same language. Mime added gestures and facial expressions that could Enable students to convey meaning through dialogue, gestures, and facial expressions. Warm-ups and ice-breakers were help students enter the performance activity more comfortably, while pronunciation and intonation practice directly addressed problems observed in the first cycle. The repeated script may also have supported vocabulary

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learning by allowing students to meet the same words several times in context. These interpretations are consistent with Kao & O'Neill (2000) discussion of drama as a context for language use and with Kucharczyk & Kucharczyk (2022) account of drama as a collaborative learning activity.

The findings are also broadly consistent with previous studies. Harmawati (2017) reported improvements in pronunciation and fluency through drama, while Marwati (2020) described gains in accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. Kumar et al. (2022) found that drama techniques supported speaking proficiency and self-confidence, and Almutairi & Alfarwan (2024) reported improvements in several speaking aspects among university EFL learners. The present study adds classroom-based evidence from ninth-grade students in Pontianak, while its small and context-specific sample means that the findings should not be generalized without further investigation.

Several limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the researcher was the sole rater of speaking performance, which may have introduced scoring subjectivity. Second, the action research took place over a short period because the participants were nearing the completion of junior high school. Third, the study involved only one class of 30 students. Future studies could extend the practice period, involve a second trained rater, and examine the technique in other classes or school contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that Drama Teaching Technique considered improve students' speaking skills of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Pontianak. Quantitatively, students' mean speaking score increased from 65.52 in Cycle 1 to 78.42 in Cycle 2, with improvement observed in fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Qualitatively, students who were initially passive and lacked confidence considered became more active, enthusiastic, and willing to perform in front of the class. These results suggest that drama, particularly through role-play and mime, can serve as a meaningful alternative for teaching speaking in junior high school classrooms. For future research, it is recommended to involve a second rater to improve the objectivity of speaking assessment, extend the duration of implementation, and explore the use of Drama Teaching Technique across different educational levels or speaking aspects to obtain more comprehensive findings.

DECLARATION

Author Contributions: Oktavia Abriwani contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and writing the original draft. Bambang Nurakhim contributed to supervision, validation, and critical revision of the manuscript. Suhardi contributed to supervision, data interpretation, and review and editing of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Use of Generative AI: The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely to assist with language editing, grammar checking, and improving the clarity of the manuscript. The authors independently conducted the research, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

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