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The Effectiveness of Semi-Scripted Role Play in Enhancing Speaking Skills of Students at MAN 1 Palu

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ABSTRACT

Students' speaking skills in EFL classrooms are often limited by low confidence, limited practice, and less interactive teaching techniques. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the effectiveness of semi-scripted role play in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL students at MAN 1 Palu. This research employed a quantitative, quasi-experimental design with two groups: an experimental and a control group. The participants were 34 eleventh-grade students, with 17 in each group. The experimental group was taught using semi-scripted role play, while the control group received conventional speaking instruction. Data were collected through speaking pre-tests and post-tests assessing students' fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, and the Mann-Whitney U test to assess differences between the two groups. The results revealed that students in the experimental group showed greater improvement in speaking skills than those in the control group, and the Mann-Whitney U test indicated a significant difference in post-test scores between the groups at the 0.05 significance level. These findings demonstrate that semi-scripted role-play is an effective teaching technique for improving students' speaking skills by providing structured support while encouraging active, meaningful communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's global era, fluency in English has become an essential skill for effective communication across cultures. Speaking is often regarded as the most important aspect of language learning because it directly reflects learners' communicative competence [9], [17]. Brown defines speaking as an interactive process involving the production and reception of information [3], while Harmer states that speaking enables learners to express ideas,

thoughts, and feelings effectively in real communication [5]. However, many students still encounter difficulties in speaking due to cognitive and affective factors. Problems in fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation remain major challenges [19], while anxiety, low self-confidence, and limited practice opportunities often hinder students' speaking performance [11], [14], [23]. These issues indicate the need for effective instructional strategies to improve students' speaking ability. Therefore, teachers are required to implement interactive and communicative teaching techniques that provide students with opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful contexts. One of the techniques widely suggested in language teaching is role-play, as it allows learners to simulate real-life situations, encourages active participation, and promotes communicative competence [18], [24]. Furthermore, semi-scripted role play offers structured linguistic support while still giving students the flexibility to improvise, making it suitable for learners who still need guidance in developing their speaking skills [20], [21].

Based on preliminary observations and informal discussions with English teachers at MAN 1 Palu, many students experienced difficulties in improving their speaking proficiency. These difficulties were mainly caused by limited speaking practice, low confidence, and the lack of interactive activities that reflect authentic communication. As a result, students were often reluctant to participate in speaking activities. To address this problem, the researcher proposes using semi-scripted role-play as an alternative instructional technique. Role play allows students to practice language in simulated real-life situations and encourages meaningful communication [5], [15]. Rekhavetri et al. also emphasise that speaking activities should promote real communication and active participation to improve fluency [12]. Semi-scripted role play provides structured guidance while still allowing flexibility, helping students gradually build confidence and improve fluency.

Several previous studies have reported the effectiveness of role play in improving speaking skills. Rohmiyati and Asiah found that role play significantly improved students' speaking performance and reduced speaking anxiety [13]. Hidayat reported that semi-scripted role-play increased students' motivation and participation in speaking activities [6], while Moetia et al. showed that role-play promotes active engagement and enhances students' confidence in speaking [10]. However, most previous studies focused on general role play or were conducted in different educational contexts. Limited studies have specifically examined the effectiveness of semi-scripted role-play using a quasi-experimental design that simultaneously measures speaking components such as fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, particularly in the context of MAN 1 Palu. This gap highlights the need for further investigation.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of semi-scripted role play in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL students at MAN 1 Palu. This research is expected to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of semi-scripted role-play as a teaching technique. The findings are expected to benefit English teachers by providing an alternative instructional strategy for teaching speaking, assisting students in improving their speaking competence and confidence, and contributing to research on communicative language teaching in EFL classrooms.

2. METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group. This design was selected to examine the effectiveness of semi-scripted role play in enhancing students' English speaking skills. Quasi-experimental designs are commonly used in educational research when random assignment is not feasible, particularly in intact classroom settings, while still allowing researchers to examine causal relationships between instructional interventions and learning outcomes [1], [2], [4].

In this design, two groups of participants were involved: an experimental group and a control group. Both groups were given a pre-test (O_1 and O_3) to measure their initial speaking proficiency. The experimental group then received a treatment (X) consisting of semi-scripted role-play activities, while the control group was taught using conventional speaking instruction. After the treatment period, both groups were administered a post-test (O_2 and O_4) to measure improvement in speaking skills. The research design can be symbolised as follows:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Experimental Group} : O_1 \quad X \quad O_2 \\ \text{Control Group} \quad : O_3 \quad O_4 \end{array}$$

where O_1 and O_3 represent the pre-tests, X denotes the treatment, and O_2 and O_4 indicate the post-tests.

The study population consisted of all eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Palu in the 2025/2026 academic year. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample, as this technique allows researchers to choose participants based on characteristics relevant to the research objectives [4]. Based on similarities in academic background and English proficiency, class XI A was selected as the experimental group, and class XI C as the control group, with each class comprising 17 students. This sampling strategy has also been employed in previous EFL speaking studies conducted in school contexts [1], [4].

The independent variable of this study was the use of semi-scripted role play, while the dependent variable was students' English speaking skills. Speaking performance was measured through fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, which are widely recognised as core components of speaking proficiency in EFL research [7], [8]. A speaking test was used as the main instrument to assess students' speaking skills before and after the treatment. The test required students to perform role-play tasks and short spoken responses based on given situations.

The treatment consisted of semi-scripted role-play activities designed to provide structured support while allowing students to improvise parts of the dialogue. Each role-play scenario included a communicative context, key expressions, role descriptions, and guided prompts. The treatment was conducted over six instructional meetings, each lasting 2×45 minutes. During each session, students worked in pairs or small groups to practice speaking in realistic situations, gradually increasing their level of improvisation. This approach aligns with communicative language teaching principles, which emphasise meaningful interaction

and learner engagement [4], [25]. Previous studies have shown that semi-scripted role play is effective in reducing speaking anxiety and improving students' confidence and participation [16], [22].

To complement the quantitative data, classroom observations were conducted during the treatment sessions. Observation is commonly used in educational research to gain insights into students' engagement, participation, and interaction during learning activities [4]. Observational notes focused on students' use of English, confidence in speaking, and interaction dynamics during role-play activities. Similar observational techniques have been applied in prior role-play-based speaking studies to support quantitative findings [4].

The collected data were analyzed using quantitative statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviation, were used to summarise students' speaking performance before and after the treatment. A normality test was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk test to assess the data distribution. As the data did not meet the assumption of normality, a non-parametric statistical test was applied. The Mann–Whitney U Test was used to compare post-test scores between the experimental and control groups and to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference. This test is appropriate for comparing two independent groups when normality assumptions are violated [4]. The results were interpreted at the $p < 0.05$ significance level. In addition, the effect size was calculated to determine the magnitude of the treatment's impact on students' speaking skills [1].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate a significant improvement in students' English speaking skills after the implementation of semi-scripted role play. The pre-test results showed that students in the experimental group had a moderate level of speaking performance, with a mean score of 60.0, while the control group obtained a similar mean score of 57.7. After the treatment, the experimental group demonstrated a substantial increase in speaking performance, achieving a post-test mean score of 77.9. In contrast, the control group showed only a slight improvement, with a post-test mean score of 59.2. This indicates a mean gain of 17.9 points in the experimental group, compared with only 1.5 points in the control group.

Most students in the experimental group experienced clear improvements in fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, with several showing substantial score increases. Meanwhile, improvement in the control group was limited and relatively inconsistent. Statistical analysis using the Mann–Whitney U Test confirmed that the difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant ($Z = -3.915$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the improvement was not due to chance. Furthermore, the calculated effect size ($r = 0.67$) indicated a large effect, suggesting that semi-scripted role-play had a strong impact on students' speaking skills.

These findings suggest that semi-scripted role play effectively enhanced students' ability to speak English more fluently and confidently. The structured support provided through guided scenarios and key expressions appears to reduce speaking anxiety while encouraging active participation. In line with previous studies, the interactive and

communicative nature of role play increases motivation and improves speaking performance, demonstrating that semi-scripted role play can serve as an effective instructional technique in EFL speaking classrooms.

3.1 Results

Before the treatment, a speaking pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups to measure students' initial speaking performance. The pre-test assessed three aspects of speaking skills: fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. The results indicated that students' speaking performance in both groups was relatively similar at the beginning of the study. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 60.0, ranging from 50 to 72, while the control group achieved a mean score of 57.7, ranging from 50 to 65. The small difference in mean scores (0.4) confirms that both groups had comparable speaking ability prior to the treatment.

Table 1. Pre-Test Results of Experimental Group

No	Students Initial	Score
1.	ARN	55
2.	AR	58
3.	AFP	52
4.	AK	60
5.	AT	63
6.	AA	57
7.	F	50
8.	MAM	65
9.	MKA	68
10.	MN	60
11.	MFI	55
12.	M	70
13.	NF	72
14.	N	59
15.	N	53
16.	RHA	62
17.	TA	66

Table 2. Pre-Test of Control Group

No	Students Initial	Score
1.	AM	54
2.	AR	56
3.	F	50
4.	FTP	59
5.	HT	60
6.	JP	55
7.	LAZ	52
8.	MFY	60
9.	MDR	62
10.	MRA	58
11.	MRA	55
12.	N	63
13.	SR	65
14.	SS	57
15.	SUMHM	51
16.	SF	59
17.	SZ	61

To understand the students' baseline speaking performance, the pre-test scores of both groups were analysed using descriptive statistics, including the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Test

Group	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	17	50	72	60.0	6.38
Control	17	50	65	57.7	4.41

After implementing semi-scripted role-play, a post-test was administered using the same speaking rubric. The post-test results revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group. The mean score increased from 60.0 to 77.9, with scores ranging from 66 to 88. In contrast, the control group showed only a slight increase in performance, with the mean score rising from 57.7 to 59.2 and scores ranging from 53 to 67. This substantial gap between the post-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups indicates that students who received semi-scripted role-play instruction performed considerably better than those who received conventional instruction. After several meetings, a post-test was administered.

Table 4. Post-Test Results of Experimental Group

No	Students	Score
1.	ARN	70
2.	AR	72
3.	AFP	68
4.	AK	75
5.	AT	78
6.	AA	73
7.	F	66
8.	MAM	80
9.	MKA	83
10.	MN	76
11.	MFI	71
12.	M	85
13.	NF	88
14.	N	79
15.	N	67
16.	RHA	81
17.	TA	84

Table 5. Post-Test Results of Control Group

No	Students	Score
1.	AM	57
2.	AR	59
3.	F	53
4.	FTP	60
5.	HT	63
6.	JP	57
7.	LAZ	54
8.	MFY	60
9.	MDR	64
10.	MRA	60
11.	MRA	56
12.	N	65
13.	SR	67
14.	SS	59
15.	SUMHM	53
16.	SF	60
17.	SZ	63

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Post-Test

Group	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	17	66	88	77.9	6.49
Control	17	53	67	59.2	4.14

To examine the data distribution, a Shapiro–Wilk normality test was performed. The results showed that all pre-test and post-test data had p-values below 0.05, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, a non-parametric statistical test was required for further analysis.

Table 7. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test

Group	Sig. (p-value)	Interpretation
Experimental Pre-Test	0.043	Not normal
Control Pre-Test	0.032	Not normal
Experimental Post-Test	0.047	Not normal
Control Post-Test	0.029	Not normal

The Mann–Whitney U Test was used to compare the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The test produced a Mann–Whitney U value of 35.000, with a Z-score of -3.915 and a significance value of 0.000. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant difference between students taught using semi-scripted role-play and those taught using conventional methods, was rejected. Conversely, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted.

Table 4.9 Mann-Whitney U Test Output.

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U Test Output

Statistical Test	Value
Mann-Whitney U	35.000
Z-score	-3.915
p-value (Asymp. Sig 2-tailed)	0.000

In addition, effect size analysis was conducted to measure the magnitude of the treatment effect. The effect size value ($r = 0.67$) indicates a large effect according to Cohen's criteria. This result confirms that semi-scripted role play had a strong and meaningful impact on improving students' English speaking skills.

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}}$$

Where:

$$Z = -3.915$$

$$N = 34 \text{ (total participants)}$$

$$r = \frac{-3.915}{\sqrt{34}} = \frac{-3.915}{5.83} = -0.67$$

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study revealed that students in the experimental group demonstrated greater improvement in speaking skills than those in the control group after implementing semi-scripted role-play. Descriptive statistical analysis showed a substantial increase in the experimental group's post-test mean score compared to the pre-test results, whereas the control group experienced only a modest improvement following conventional speaking instruction. Improvement in the experimental group was evident across all assessed aspects of speaking, including fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney U Test indicated a statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the observed improvement was not due to chance. These findings demonstrate that semi-scripted role-play was more effective at enhancing students' speaking skills than conventional teaching methods.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the use of semi-scripted role-play in EFL speaking instruction. Ref. [16] reported that the implementation of semi-scripted role-play had a significant positive effect on students' speaking ability, particularly by improving fluency and increasing students' confidence in oral communication. By providing structured scenarios while offering opportunities for guided improvisation, semi-scripted role-play encouraged learners to participate actively and express ideas more naturally. Similarly, the pre-test and post-test results in Ref. [16] showed statistically significant improvement in students' speaking performance after the treatment. These findings support the results of the present study, reinforcing the effectiveness of semi-scripted role play in developing speaking skills in EFL classroom contexts.

During the implementation of semi-scripted role-play in this study, several challenges were encountered. At the initial stage of treatment, many students showed low confidence and hesitated to speak, fearing grammatical and pronunciation errors. In addition, some students relied heavily on the provided scripts and tended to read rather than communicate spontaneously, thereby limiting natural interaction during role-play activities. Time management also emerged as a challenge, as students required additional time to understand their roles and become familiar with the scenarios before engaging in meaningful interaction. However, as the treatment progressed and students received continuous guidance and encouragement, they gradually reduced their dependence on the scripts, became more confident, and participated more actively in speaking activities.

These challenges are consistent with findings from previous studies on role-play implementation. Ref. [17] found that although semi-scripted role-play was effective in improving students' speaking skills, several difficulties occurred during the early stages of implementation, including a lack of confidence, fear of making grammatical mistakes, and excessive reliance on scripts. As a result, students' oral interaction was initially less natural. However, with repeated practice and consistent teacher support, students gradually gained confidence, reduced their reliance on scripts, and became more active in speaking activities. This suggests that challenges associated with semi-scripted role-play are temporary and can be overcome through appropriate instructional guidance and sustained practice.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that semi-scripted role play can support the development of students' speaking skills by facilitating guided yet meaningful communication in the classroom. The use of structured prompts, combined with opportunities for interaction, encourages students to participate more actively and to practice speaking in a more confident, supportive learning environment. These findings suggest that semi-scripted role-play can be an effective instructional strategy for teaching speaking in EFL classrooms.

However, this study was limited to a specific group of students at one school and conducted over a limited period, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to involve larger samples, longer treatment durations, and different educational contexts to provide broader evidence of the effectiveness of semi-scripted role play. Further studies may also explore its application in other language skills or in combination with different teaching media. This study contributes to the field of English language teaching by providing empirical evidence on the use of semi-scripted role-play to improve students' speaking performance and promote more communicative classroom practices.

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