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Communicative Language Teaching Through Role-Play: Effects on Indonesian EFL Students' Speaking Ability

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Abstract
Speaking remains a challenging skill for many Indonesian EFL learners, particularly when classroom instruction provides limited opportunities for sustained oral interaction. Although role-play has been widely associated with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), further classroom-based evidence is still needed from ordinary public secondary school contexts, especially when students' post-treatment performance is assessed through a task different from the practiced role-play format. This study examined whether role-play implemented within a CLT framework improved the speaking ability of eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Tarakan. A pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design was employed involving one intact class. Thirty students who completed both tests were included in the final analysis. Students' speaking performance was assessed using Brown's (2004) analytical rubric, covering pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The intervention consisted of four structured role-play sessions that progressed from guided practice to more independent performance. The results showed that students' mean score increased from 43.47 in the pre-test to 76.13 in the post-test. Since the post-test scores were not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied. The result indicated a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($Z = -4.802$, $p < .001$), with a large effect size ($r = .88$). Classroom observation also showed gradual improvement in students' participation, confidence, interaction, pronunciation, and readiness to communicate. These findings suggest that role-play can support speaking development by providing meaningful situations, repeated rehearsal, peer interaction, and constructive feedback.
Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching, Role-Play, Speaking Ability, EFL Learners, Indonesian Secondary School*

1. Introduction

Speaking skill has been widely recognized as a central component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it reflects learners' ability to use language for meaningful communication in academic, social, and professional contexts. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires learners to produce language spontaneously, organize ideas coherently, select appropriate vocabulary and grammar, manage pronunciation and fluency, and respond to interlocutors in real time. Fathi et al. (2024) emphasize that speaking is a critical skill for second language learners because it enables them to communicate with both native and non-native speakers and participate meaningfully in real-life situations. Recent studies also indicate that speaking development is closely related to learners' willingness to communicate, confidence, motivation, and access to interactive practice. Meanwhile, Hwang et al. (2024) showed that mobile-assisted language learning supported learners' speaking development, enjoyment, and language-specific grit. These findings suggest that speaking competence cannot be developed through passive

learning alone; rather, it requires active, repeated, and meaningful opportunities for oral interaction.

Despite its importance, speaking remains one of the most difficult skills for many EFL learners to master. Learners may understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, yet still experience difficulty transforming their knowledge into oral performance. This problem is often caused by limited exposure to English, insufficient classroom time for oral practice, speaking anxiety, lack of confidence, low willingness to communicate, teacher-dominated instruction, and limited communicative tasks. Recent review evidence confirms that communicative competence remains a pressing but difficult goal in EFL/ESL classrooms because many learners still lack adequate opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful and supportive learning environments (Elmahdi et al., 2025). In the Indonesian EFL context, Ambawani et al. (2025) also highlight that speaking proficiency is affected by multidimensional barriers, including psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical factors. Therefore, strengthening speaking instruction is not only a linguistic need but also a pedagogical urgency. EFL teachers need to design interactive, contextual, and confidence-building speaking activities that help learners move from passive knowledge of English toward active participation in authentic communication.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) remains highly relevant in EFL classrooms because the primary goal of English learning is not only to understand grammatical forms but also to use language appropriately, confidently, and meaningfully in real communication. CLT views language as a tool for interaction, negotiation of meaning, and social participation; therefore, it encourages learners to practice English through communicative tasks, pair work, group discussion, problem-solving activities, and contextual language use. This orientation is particularly important in EFL contexts where students often have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Faisal (2025) emphasizes that communicative competence has important implications for English teaching in Indonesia because teachers are expected to help learners use English for meaningful interaction rather than focus only on structural accuracy. Similarly, Teng et al. (2025) argue that communicative and task-based language teaching remain central in contemporary language pedagogy because meaningful tasks, learner engagement, and authentic communication can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life language use. Thus, CLT provides a strong pedagogical foundation for developing students' fluency, confidence, interactional ability, and communicative competence.

Moreover, communicative competence involves more than producing grammatically correct sentences; it includes the ability to use language according to context, purpose, audience, and social situation. Yalew (2025) found that pragmatic awareness instruction can enhance EFL learners' communicative competence, indicating that students need opportunities to practice language in socially and contextually appropriate ways. This is supported by Feng et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of language competence and intercultural communicative competence in helping EFL learners communicate across diverse cultural and social contexts. In addition, recent studies on CLT implementation in EFL classrooms indicate that communicative activities can support learners' motivation, participation, and speaking performance when they are adapted to classroom realities, teacher support, and learners' needs (Khaydarbek, 2025; Saputri et al., 2025). Therefore, CLT is not only a teaching approach but also a practical response to the continuing challenge of helping

EFL learners move from passive knowledge of English toward active, purposeful, and contextually appropriate communication.

Role-play is particularly compatible with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) because it requires learners to use language in simulated but socially meaningful situations. Instead of responding to decontextualized classroom prompts, students assume specific roles, pursue communicative purposes, negotiate meaning, and respond to interlocutors in context. Role-play can improve learners' speaking performance, confidence, participation, and communicative competence because it gives students repeated opportunities to use English in interactive and realistic situations (Fransiska, 2025; Sukmara, 2025). This technique supports speaking development through several interconnected mechanisms. First, role-play creates opportunities for pushed oral production. Learners are required to formulate utterances to achieve communicative goals, which may encourage them to recognize gaps in their linguistic knowledge and extend their use of language beyond passive understanding. This is consistent with output-based perspectives on second language development, which argue that language production can promote noticing, hypothesis testing, and linguistic restructuring (Swain, 1985). Classroom-based evidence also showed that structured role-play activities can improve students' fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, confidence, and active involvement in speaking tasks (Ardhana & Sadikin, 2025; Piscesa & Aji, 2024).

Second, role-play provides interactional practice because learners must listen, respond, clarify, repair misunderstandings, and sustain communication with others. In this process, speaking is no longer treated as an isolated display of memorized sentences but as a collaborative act of meaning-making. Rehearsal and repeated performance may also help learners proceduralize their language resources, allowing them to retrieve words, expressions, and grammatical patterns more quickly and fluently over time. Sukmara (2025) found that role-play enhanced students' speaking performance, linguistic competence, confidence, and reduced speaking anxiety by creating a supportive and interactive learning environment. Similarly, Fransiska (2025) reported that cooperative role-play activities increased students' speaking confidence, speaking performance, participation, and peer interaction. Third, role-play may reduce affective pressure in speaking activities. When students speak through an assigned role or scenario, the task can feel less personally threatening than speaking only as themselves. This may increase their willingness to communicate because attention shifts from self-exposure to task completion. In classrooms where fear of making mistakes, low confidence, and anxiety often limit oral participation, this sense of affective safety becomes pedagogically important (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Mercer & Gkonou, 2020). Recent studies further confirm that role-play can help students become more active, confident, and less hesitant in English-speaking activities (Ardhana & Sadikin, 2025; Fransiska, 2025; Sukmara, 2025).

Previous empirical studies generally report positive outcomes from role-play in speaking instruction. Some studies comparing scripted and unscripted formats show that the amount of task support can influence how students experience and perform the activity (Romadhona et al., 2023; Tsai & Piamsai, 2025). Other work indicates that feedback quality, rehearsal time, and participation management may shape the extent of speaking improvement (Hidayat et al., 2024). The discussion is extended by recent studies showing that simulated content creation, AI-character role-play, and classroom games can create additional opportunities for speaking practice, engagement, confidence, and fluency (Saputra & Yuliati, 2026; Situmorang et al., 2026; Yumna et

al., 2026). These variations indicate that role-play should be treated as a designed pedagogical sequence rather than an automatically successful technique. Its value depends on task design, sequencing, feedback, student readiness, and contextual feasibility. In addition, speaking pedagogy is increasingly discussed in relation to anxiety, modality, AI, and pronunciation tools (Asnur et al., 2025; Hasanah et al., 2025; Khoiriyah et al., 2025). In the North Kalimantan context, Ramli et al. (2025) further show that technology use in EFL classrooms is shaped by teacher readiness, facilities, and local constraints. Although these studies are not direct replications of the present intervention, they help situate this study within current discussions on communicative practice, speaking support, and feasible technology-informed pedagogy.

Taken together, the literature supports role-play as a promising CLT technique, but it also leaves an identifiable space for the present study. What is still needed is focused evidence that examines role-play as a bounded pedagogical intervention, documents pre- and post-change in a mainstream Indonesian public high school context, and tests whether improvement persists on a non-role-play speaking task. Such evidence would not only strengthen the empirical case for role-play but also clarify whether its benefits extend beyond familiarity with the treatment format itself. This issue was evident at SMAN 1 Tarakan. Preliminary classroom observations revealed that many eleventh-grade students were reluctant to communicate in English. Their responses were generally brief, fragmented, and marked by frequent pauses. Although some students appeared to understand the ideas they wanted to express, they had difficulty articulating those ideas orally. Others hesitated to continue speaking even when the teacher encouraged. These classroom patterns suggest that students' speaking difficulties are not merely related to their knowledge of linguistic structures but also to limited opportunities for practice, low confidence, and a lack of readiness to use English orally. Therefore, speaking instruction needs to provide purposeful, sustained, and practical opportunities for students to practice spoken English in a supportive and meaningful learning environment.

This study was designed to address that need. Based on these concerns, this study aims to provide grounded evidence on the role of role-play in supporting students' speaking ability within a CLT framework. Conceptually, the study is positioned through a clear instructional sequence: CLT principles provide the communicative orientation, role-play translates this orientation into structured classroom interaction, and speaking assessment captures students' ability to produce more sustained, comprehensible, and responsive oral language. Guided by this framework, the study addresses the following research question: Does the implementation of role-play within a CLT framework significantly improve students' speaking ability?

2. Method

A pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was used because the study was conducted in a natural classroom setting involving one intact class. Reorganizing students into experimental and control groups was not feasible due to the existing school schedule, administrative arrangements, and class grouping. Therefore, this design allowed the researcher to implement role-play as a practical classroom intervention while comparing students' speaking performance before and after the treatment. Although the absence of a control group limits strong causal claims, the design was appropriate for obtaining initial classroom-based evidence of students' speaking improvement within a CLT framework.

The study was conducted at SMAN 1 Tarakan. One eleventh-grade class (XI-K) was selected through cluster random sampling. In this study, the sampling unit was the class rather than individual students. The selected class was drawn from the available eleventh-grade classes after consultation with the school. Therefore, the term cluster random sampling is used cautiously to refer to class-level selection; if the selection was mainly administrative, the design is better understood as intact-class sampling. The class originally enrolled 36 students, but only 30 completed both the pre-test and post-test; therefore, only those 30 were included in the final statistical analysis. The remaining six students were excluded because they did not complete either of the two speaking tests or were absent from the required testing session; consequently, their scores could not be paired for Wilcoxon analysis. The independent variable was the implementation of role-play activities within a CLT framework, while the dependent variable was students' speaking ability. Data were collected through individual speaking tests administered before and after the treatment. In both tests, students selected a picture and orally described it for up to 3 minutes after a brief preparation period of approximately 10-15 minutes. Students were instructed to describe the people, setting, actions, possible events, and their interpretation of the picture. During preparation, they were allowed to organize ideas but not to write a full script. The picture-description task was used in both testing points so that students' speaking performance could be compared on the same task type. Although the treatment centered on role-play, the use of a picture-description test was deliberate: it allowed the study to examine whether any improvement extended beyond the practiced role-play format itself.

Students' speaking performance was assessed using Brown's (2004) analytical rubric covering five aspects of speaking ability: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Pronunciation assessed students' clarity and accuracy in producing English sounds; grammar measured their ability to use appropriate sentence structures; vocabulary evaluated the range and suitability of words used during speaking; fluency focused on the smoothness, continuity, and natural flow of speech; and comprehension assessed students' ability to understand the task and communicate relevant responses. Each aspect was scored on a scale of 1 to 5. The rubric was reviewed through expert judgment as a content-validity procedure to ensure alignment among the speaking construct, task demands, and scoring descriptors. The validation process examined whether the descriptors were suitable for senior high school EFL learners, whether the five components represented the intended construct of speaking ability, and whether the task instructions matched the scoring criteria. To support scoring consistency across the two testing points, the same external rater assessed both the pre-test and post-test using the same rubric. However, because the original study archive did not retain inter-rater coefficients or a detailed revision log following the expert review, reliability is reported procedurally rather than statistically. This limitation should be considered when interpreting the precision of the speaking scores.

The intervention lasted six weeks. In Week 1, students completed the pre-test. In Weeks 2 to 5, they participated in four 90-minute role-play sessions. Each session followed a structured pedagogical sequence: scenario introduction, language modelling, pair or group rehearsal, performance, and feedback. In the scenario introduction stage, the teacher presented the communicative situation, roles, and expected outcome. In the language-modelling stage, useful expressions, turn-taking phrases, and pronunciation examples were demonstrated. In the rehearsal stage,

students practiced in pairs or groups while preparing short exchanges. In the performance stage, selected pairs or groups enacted their role-play in front of the class. In the feedback stage, the teacher provided brief comments on pronunciation, vocabulary choice, grammar accuracy, fluency, and communicative effectiveness. Across sessions, the level of guidance was gradually reduced, allowing students to move from more supported performance to more independent oral production. In Week 6, students completed the post-test. Ethical consideration was addressed by obtaining permission from the school and by informing students that their speaking scores would be used for research purposes without disclosing their identities. The data were analyzed using SPSS 25. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the distribution of scores. Because the sample size was below 50, normality was checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The pre-test scores met the normality assumption, but the post-test scores did not. Accordingly, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to determine whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant at the .05 level. To strengthen the interpretation beyond p-values, an effect size was also calculated for the Wilcoxon result using $r = |Z| / \sqrt{N}$.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**		**Std. Deviation**
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
PreTest	30	24	56	43.47	1.297	7.104
PostTest	30	64	92	76.13	1.540	8.435
Valid N (listwise)	30					

The number of participants in this study was 30 students. In the pre-test, the minimum score obtained by the students was 24 and the maximum score was 56. The mean score was 43.47, which indicates the average speaking performance of the students before the treatment. The standard error of the mean was 1.297, showing the extent to which the sample mean might differ from the population mean. The smaller value of the standard error suggests that the mean score can be considered a reliable representation of the students' speaking ability in the pre-test. Meanwhile, the standard deviation was 7.104, which reflects the dispersion of students' scores around the mean. This means that most students' pre-test scores were relatively close to the average, with a moderate variation among individual performances.

In the post-test, the minimum score increased to 64, while the maximum score reached 92. The mean score also improved significantly to 76.13, indicating an overall increase in students' speaking performance after the treatment. The standard error of the mean was 1.540, slightly higher than in the pre-test, but still considered relatively small. This implies that the sample mean in the post-test also provides a reliable estimate of the population mean. Furthermore, the standard deviation was 8.435,

which indicates that the distribution of scores around the mean became slightly wider compared to the pre-test. This means that while students' speaking performance generally improved, there was greater variation in the extent of improvement among individual students.

Table 2. Normality Tests

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PreTest	.230	30	.000	.934	30	.062
PostTest	.177	30	.018	.923	30	.033
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Since the number of participants was 30, which is less than 50, the Saphiro-Wilk test results showed that the pre-tests had a significance value of 0.062, which was greater than 0,05. This indicates that the pre-test scores were normally distributed. On the other hand, the post-test had a significance value of 0.033, which was lower than 0.05. This means that the post-test scores were not normally distributed. In conclusion, based on the Shapiro-Wilk test, the pre-test scores were normally distributed, while the post-test data were not normally distributed.

Test 3. Homogeneity of Variances Test

Test of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PrePost	Based on Mean	2.877	1	58	.095
	Based on Median	3.081	1	58	.084
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3.081	1	57.663	.085
	Based on trimmed mean	3.076	1	58	.085

The result of the homogeneity of variances using Levene's test. discovered that the significance values were 0.095 (based on mean), 0.084 (based on median), 0.085 (based on median with adjusted df), and 0.085 (based on trimmed mean). Since all significance values were greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data were homogeneous. This indicates that the variance of the scores between groups was equal, and therefore, the assumption of homogeneity was fulfilled.

Test 4. Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test

Ranks				
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
PostTest - PreTest	Negative Ranks	0[a]	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	30[b]	15.50	465.00
	Ties	0[c]		
	Total	30		
a. PostTest < PreTest				
b. PostTest > PreTest				
c. PostTest = PreTest				

Test Statistics[a]	
	PostTest - PreTest
Z	-4.802[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed that all 30 students showed an improvement in their speaking scores. Specifically, none of the students had lower post-test scores than their pre-test scores (negative ranks = 0), while all students demonstrated higher post-test scores compared to their pre-test scores (positive ranks = 30). Furthermore, no ties were found, indicating that every student's score increased after the treatment. The mean rank of positive differences was 15.50, with a total sum of ranks of 465.00. The statistical test produced a Z value of -4.802 with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.000. Since the significance value was lower than the threshold of 0.05, it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. This finding indicates that the role-play had a significant improvement on students' speaking ability.

Besides, the observation results during the treatment indicated that the role-play treatment gradually supported students' participation, engagement, interaction, and oral communication progress. Across the four meetings, students were introduced to different real-life communicative situations, including sending a package, ordering food in a restaurant, booking a hotel room, and booking a flight ticket. Each session followed a structured sequence consisting of topic introduction, vocabulary and expression modeling, video-based example, pair rehearsal, classroom performance, and feedback. During the early meetings, several students still needed encouragement to speak more loudly, improve pronunciation, and build confidence. However, as the sessions progressed, students became more familiar with the role-play format and showed better readiness to perform. By the third and fourth meetings, more students demonstrated greater confidence, clearer pronunciation, and more active participation in pair performances. The observation also showed that repeated rehearsal, peer interaction, and constructive feedback helped students sustain short conversations more effectively. Overall, the classroom observation supported the test

results by showing that role-play created a more interactive and supportive environment for students to practice speaking within a CLT framework.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of role-play within a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework contributed to a clear improvement in students' speaking performance. The increase from pre-test to post-test was substantial both descriptively and statistically, suggesting that role-play functioned not merely as an enjoyable classroom activity but as a meaningful form of speaking practice. In practical classroom terms, the treatment provided students with repeated opportunities to use English in structured communicative situations, which appeared to help them speak more confidently and effectively after the intervention.

This result is consistent with the principles of CLT, which emphasize the use of language for meaningful interaction. During the treatment, students were not simply asked to memorize vocabulary or answer decontextualized questions. Instead, they were required to take roles, respond to partners, negotiate meaning, and sustain short conversations based on real-life situations. This supports the view that communicative competence remains a central goal of English language teaching, particularly in EFL contexts where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom (Faisal, 2025; Teng et al., 2025). Yalew (2025) also emphasizes that contextual and pragmatic language practice can enhance learners' communicative competence because students need opportunities to use language according to social situations and communicative purposes. In this study, role-play translated CLT principles into classroom practice by giving students a clear reason to speak and interact.

The improvement can also be explained by the students' initial speaking difficulties. Preliminary observations showed that many students were hesitant to speak, produced short responses, paused frequently, and struggled to elaborate their ideas orally. Role-play appeared to address these difficulties by providing clearer speaking conditions. Students were given scenarios, useful expressions, rehearsal time, peer support, and feedback before performing. This structure may have reduced the pressure of immediate spontaneous speaking and helped students prepare their utterances more confidently. The finding supports recent studies showing that interactive speaking activities can improve learners' fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, motivation, and confidence when students are given meaningful opportunities to practice oral communication (Fathi et al., 2024; Hwang et al., 2024). In this sense, role-play helped students move from passive knowledge of English toward more active oral production.

Through rehearsal and performance, students had to retrieve vocabulary, organize sentences, pronounce expressions, and maintain the flow of communication. Such repeated practice may have helped students use available language resources more quickly and fluently. This interpretation is consistent with Swain's (1985) output hypothesis, which argues that language production can promote noticing, hypothesis testing, and linguistic restructuring. Role-play can improve students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, confidence, and participation because it requires learners to use language actively in communicative contexts (Fiani & Nahak, 2025; Tsai & Piamsai, 2025). Therefore, the improvement in students' speaking scores may be understood as the result of repeated, purposeful, and supported oral production during the treatment.

In many EFL classrooms, students are reluctant to speak not only because of limited linguistic competence but also because of anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low confidence. In this study, speaking through assigned roles and scenarios appeared to make oral performance less personally threatening. Students could focus on completing the communicative task rather than exposing themselves directly as individual speakers. This may have encouraged them to participate more actively and take greater risks in speaking English. This interpretation is consistent with the concept of willingness to communicate, which highlights the importance of confidence and emotional safety in language learning (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Mercer & Gkonou, 2020). Recent studies also indicate that role-play can reduce speaking anxiety and increase students' confidence, motivation, and engagement when it is conducted in a supportive classroom environment (Fiani & Nahak, 2025; Fransiska, 2025).

The classroom observation further strengthened the interpretation of the statistical findings. Across the four treatment meetings, students were involved in real-life communicative topics such as sending a package, ordering food in a restaurant, booking a hotel room, and booking a flight ticket. Each session followed a structured sequence consisting of topic introduction, expression modelling, video example, pair rehearsal, performance, and feedback. During the early sessions, several students still needed encouragement to speak louder, improve pronunciation, and build confidence. However, by the third and fourth meetings, more students showed greater readiness to perform, clearer pronunciation, better confidence, and more active interaction with their partners. This classroom progress supports recent findings that role-play can promote fluency, engagement, interaction, and communicative confidence when it is supported by clear scenarios, peer collaboration, and constructive feedback (Saputra & Yuliati, 2026; Situmorang et al., 2026; Tsai & Piamsai, 2025; Yumna et al., 2026).

The present findings are broadly aligned with previous studies reporting positive effects of role-play on speaking development (Farhana et al., 2021; Krebt, 2017; Safitri & Solusia, 2023; Togimin & Jaafar, 2020). They are also supported by more recent studies showing that role-play and other simulated communicative activities can enhance students' speaking performance, confidence, participation, and readiness to communicate in academic, social, and professional contexts (Fiani & Nahak, 2025; Lisa et al., 2025; Tsai & Piamsai, 2025). However, this study offers a specific contribution because the post-test was not another role-play task but a picture-description task. This is important because it suggests that the improvement was not limited to the practiced role-play format. Instead, role-play may have supported broader aspects of speaking ability, including fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, comprehension, and the ability to produce more sustained oral responses.

The findings are also meaningful for Indonesian public-school EFL contexts. Although CLT is often recommended in English teaching, teachers still need practical techniques that can be implemented in ordinary classrooms. The role-play treatment in this study was relatively short and did not require complex technology or major curriculum changes, yet it produced a substantial improvement in students' speaking performance. This suggests that a feasible classroom technique can support speaking development when it is implemented through clear stages of modelling, rehearsal, performance, and feedback. In this sense, role-play can serve as a practical bridge between CLT as a theoretical orientation and speaking instruction as everyday classroom practice.

Because the study used a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, it cannot fully rule out other possible influences on students' improvement, such as test familiarity, regular classroom exposure, or increased comfort with speaking activities over time. Therefore, the result should be understood as strong classroom-based pre-post evidence rather than conclusive causal proof. Another limitation is that the analysis mainly reported composite speaking scores, so the improvement in each separate speaking aspect (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) which could not be examined in greater statistical detail. In addition, scoring reliability was reported procedurally rather than statistically because inter-rater coefficients were unavailable. These limitations do not remove the main pattern of improvement, but they indicate the need for future studies using control groups, larger samples, and more detailed analysis of each speaking component.

Overall, the discussion suggests that role-play improved students' speaking performance because it addressed several classroom problems at the same time. It provided repeated speaking practice, created meaningful contexts for language use, encouraged interaction, and reduced some of the affective pressure that often prevents students from speaking English. Within the CLT framework, role-play therefore appeared to be more than a communicative activity; it functioned as a practical classroom strategy for helping secondary EFL learners speak more actively, confidently, and successfully.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that role-play within a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework significantly improved the speaking ability of eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Tarakan. The increase from pre-test to post-test shows that role-play provided meaningful opportunities for students to practice English through interaction, rehearsal, performance, and feedback. Classroom observation also indicated that students gradually became more engaged, confident, and active in communicating during the treatment. Role-play helped students use English in realistic situations, such as sending a package, ordering food, booking a hotel room, and booking a flight ticket. Therefore, it can serve as a practical classroom strategy for connecting CLT principles with speaking instruction in Indonesian public senior high school contexts.

However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study used a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group. Future researchers are encouraged to use quasi-experimental designs, involve larger samples, analyse each speaking aspect separately, apply inter-rater reliability, and conduct delayed post-tests. Future studies may also integrate digital technologies, such as video-based role-play, mobile speaking applications, speech-to-text tools, AI pronunciation feedback, or online collaborative platforms, to examine how technology-supported role-play can further enhance students' fluency, pronunciation, confidence, interaction, and long-term speaking development.

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