

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF STORYTELLING TECHNIQUE TO ENHANCE SPEAKING SKILLS IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study investigates a storytelling technique that can enhance the English language experience of eighth grade students. Using a qualitative case study design, the research explored students' motivation, confidence and overall speaking experience. Six students participated in semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Thematic analysis revealed a narrative of transformation. Initially, the students showed enthusiasm and actively participated in discussions about storytelling techniques and narrative text structure (pre-storytelling). This enthusiasm became the basis for deeper engagement. Next, the students embark on a journey of deconstructing the story (storytelling guide). The study the building blocks of the story, exploring narrative elements and linguistic features. Finally, the students reach the pinnacle of their learning by presenting the chosen story, demonstrating a new understanding of narrative structure and expressing a surge of confidence (after storytelling). Further interviews reinforced this narrative. The students reported a significant increase in motivation and confidence when speaking English, with initial nervousness dissipating after repeated practice. Although initial challenges such as pronunciation anxiety were identified, the students expressed confidence that these would diminish with continued practice. The storytelling technique emerged as a powerful tool, fostering a positive and engaging learning environment that empowered students as active participants, instilled confidence in their speaking abilities.

Keywords: Storytelling Technique; EFL Students; Speaking Skills

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is the key to success, as evidenced by the close relationship between language proficiency and achievement (Nunan, 1991, cited in Ambarita et al., 2022). This underscores the importance of creating engaging speaking activities that encourage student participation and enjoyment in the English classroom. Effective communication is the cornerstone of everyday life, and fluency in English opens up many opportunities in the modern era. Brown (2000) emphasizes speaking as a core skill, which requires students to actively process and produce information through spoken language. Furthermore, Richards and Rodgers (1986) highlight speaking ability as the foundation of language itself.

However, traditional methods often fail to foster a truly engaging learning experience, leading to a lack of student participation, choosing the right method according to the age and characteristics of the students is crucial, the researcher noted the traditional lecture method used in the observed classes. Storytelling offers an interesting alternative. It is an interactive activity that not only engages students' imagination, but also provides a platform to practice communication skills (Sitanggang et al., 2023). Research by Juhansar et al. (2022) and Lohing et al. (2022) confirmed the effectiveness of storytelling in improving speaking skills. In addition, Natasia & Angelianawati (2022) support its use for beginners, citing Haven (2000) who highlights its engaging and practical nature. Irawati et al. (2022) further demonstrated its

effectiveness in improving speaking skills for eleventh grade students. Although previous research has explored storytelling techniques in the EFL classroom, the main focus has been on students' experiences. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the experiences of eighth grade students specifically, using a case study design.

The following section will explore the theoretical underpinnings of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and its relationship to effective language acquisition. Then, we will study the importance of speaking skills (Safira et al., 2020; Akhter et al., 2020) and the different types of speaking identified by Brown (2004). The concept of narrative text (Anderson & Anderson, 2003; Prasetyo & Priyana, 2008) and its structure (Barwick, 2006) will be explored, followed by a discussion of storytelling techniques (Miller and Pennycuff, 2008 cited in Safira et al., 2020; Hartono et al., 2021; Haven, 2000; Irawati, 2003 cited in Hidayati, 2019) and the three-step approach in teaching using storytelling (Morrow, 1986). Before Storytelling, prepare students by introducing the lesson objectives and key concepts. Guide them on story structure and offer support. Guideline Storytelling, students learn story elements (plot, characters, etc.) through teacher prompts and discussion. After Storytelling, students independently retell the story, receiving feedback afterwards. By examining the experiences of eighth grade students through this theoretical lens, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how storytelling techniques can enhance learning and empower students as confident and skillful motivators or speakers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach exploring the experiences of eighth grade students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through storytelling techniques in their speaking classes. The journey began in a junior high school in Karawang, Indonesia, where storytelling has become an integral part of the English curriculum.

Site and Participants

Six students aged 14-15 were selected to participate. There were Ranjani and Kinanti, a confident duo with a strong grasp of English, both with diverse language backgrounds, Javanese and Sundanese. Nanda, Fauzan, Cantika and Adinda joined the exploration and all names are pseudonyms, representing different levels of English proficiency - intermediate and low - and Indonesian ethnicity, Javanese and Sundanese.

Instruments

For the data instruments, the authors used a two-pronged approach. First, classroom observation took place. Armed with an observation sheet, a camera, and a keen eye for detail, the researcher carefully documented the classroom environment. These surreptitious observations recorded students' interactions and actions as they participated in storytelling activities, ensuring that the natural flow of learning was not interrupted. Furthermore, to gain deeper insights, six students participated in semi-structured interviews, a safe space to share their experiences in storytelling. Conducted in Indonesian, with teacher permission and consent from the students, these interviews allowed for open communication. A voice recorder recorded their voices as they spoke about their motivations, confidence levels, challenges faced, and their overall impressions of storytelling in the speaking classroom.

Data Analysis

The collected data, both visual and verbal, then began the journey of analysis. Following the path laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis was the guide for data analysis. The author carefully combed through the interview transcripts and observation notes, looking for connections between students' experiences and existing knowledge. Recurring themes began to emerge, like threads woven together - student motivation, confidence levels, difficulties

encountered, and unique experiences at each stage of the storytelling process: pre-storytelling, the storytelling activity itself, and post-storytelling reflection. After careful examination, the identified themes were refined. Redundancies were eliminated, and each theme was given a clear and descriptive name, reflecting its essence. Finally, the findings were woven into a cohesive narrative, a testament to the students' storytelling journey in the English speaking classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A. Before Storytelling

The students' excitement was evident from the very beginning. The teacher kicked things off by explaining the lesson goals, storytelling techniques, and different types of stories. Students participated actively, answering questions and expressing interest in using storytelling. The classroom buzzed with anticipation as the teacher introduced the concept of narrative text. Students eagerly participated, answering questions about their favorite stories and genres (e.g., fable, fairy tales, mysteries, legends).

Ranjani (Pseudonym) : *"I prefer legends. Because it's richer in the nusantara, and there are lots of lessons and you can get richer morals."*

Kinanti (Pseudonym) : *"I myself prefer fable stories. Maybe because previously I was used to listening to stories in that genre."*

Based on this statement, the variety of genres preferred by each student meant that this initial enthusiasm was carried throughout the observed learning, with students showing attention during the explanation of narrative text structure and its various types (e.g. orientation, complication, resolution).

B. Guideline Storytelling

Next, the teacher delved deeper and came the exploration of the building blocks of a story. Explaining the structure of narrative text and its language features. The teacher meticulously explained the generic structure, which is the basic framework of most stories. This framework starts with introducing the characters and setting, followed by the problem the characters face, how they resolve it, and the concluding message. Linguistic features like past tense, adverbs of time, and descriptive adjectives were also unpacked.

Nanda (Pseudonym) : *"It's fun and exciting, basically it's fun because we speak according to our speaking style so we can speak freely and find out the extent of our abilities."*

Ranjani (Pseudonym) : *"It's good because studying makes you feel more interesting, you don't get bored easily and you also know more about the uses of this techniques."*

Based on this statement, this new knowledge was tested when students were tasked with finding a narrative text and identifying its structure, a challenge they accepted enthusiastically because of their different views on the use of this storytelling technique. Students are given homework to find and analyze narrative texts with the type of text they are free to choose.

C. After Storytelling

The following class witnessed the culmination of their learning. Finally, students presented their chosen stories to the class. The teacher used a fun activity to pick students, and most presented with enthusiasm and confidence. Students, some initially hesitant but all determined, took turns presenting their chosen stories. They confidently explained the generic structure of their narratives, drawing connections between the elements (e.g., characters, setting, conflict) and the overall message.

Adinda (Pseudonym) : *"It's quite helpful and can help us to increase our knowledge of new vocabulary because if we say kan sometimes we remember it better."*

Nanda (Pseudonym) : *"Of course. Because storytelling focuses on telling or retelling a text. If the text matches what we like, it can definitely make things easier."*

Based on this statement, the classroom atmosphere turned into a lively stage, full of storytelling energy and supportive applause from classmates. Various statements that make them more enthusiastic when they retell the story. The author observed that students explained the structure of the story well and some students even shared the moral lessons they had learned interestingly.

D. Student Motivation and Confidence

Storytelling seemed to boost student motivation and confidence. Interviews with students revealed a heartening outcome. Many reported a surge in motivation and confidence when it came to speaking English. Students we interviewed reported feeling more motivated to speak English, comfortable talking in front of the class, and experiencing a newfound confidence.

Kinanti (Pseudonym) : *"Maybe if it is often applied, it can definitely be in terms of self-confidence, especially speaking in front of the class so that you can get used to or be more confident to speak, not nervous which can make you discouraged."*

Nanda (Pseudonym) : *"I think it does exist. at first I was shy, but after applying it I became more confident. Because if confidence has increased, motivation will also increase and when we speak, we can also be more comfortable."*

Based on this statement, the nervousness of performing in front of the class gradually subsides with repeated practice. Storytelling, with its various elements, can increase motivation and confidence if practiced further and gradually.

E. Student Difficulties in Learning Speaking

Presentations are not all smooth sailing. The students initially face challenges such as nervousness, fear of mispronouncing words, and sometimes confusion when speaking. However, most students believed that with more practice, these difficulties would fade away. Overall, this study shows that storytelling techniques can be a powerful tool in the EFL classroom. The students reported increased motivation and confidence, actively participated in the activities, and demonstrated the ability to present the story and explain its structure.

Cantika (Pseudonym) : *"I was probably nervous at first. Afraid of mispronouncing the vocabulary."*

Nanda (Pseudonym) : *"Like being inhibited when talking. Because again, the constraint is shyness in front of the class in the eyes of friends so sometimes it's a bit rushed when talking."*

Based on this statements, little difficulties existed as they began to speak but although initial nervousness was common, the students believed that this would diminish with practice. These findings highlight the potential of storytelling techniques to create a more confident and motivated English speaking classroom experience.

Discussion

A. Pre-Storytelling

The first part of the study, called "pre-storytelling," was like setting the stage for a play. Just like the students in other studies (Sembiring & Ginting, 2019; Ambarita et al., 2022), the students in this study were enthusiastic and curious about using stories to learn English. This initial enthusiasm, similar to what Safira et al. (2020) found, created a positive and engaging learning environment.

B. Guideline Storytelling or While Storytelling

The next part, "storytelling guide", is where students learn the building blocks of a good story. This structured approach is similar to what Lohing et al. (2022) used in their study, where students' speaking skills improved greatly after learning about storytelling. As suggested by Morrow (1986), the students in this study practiced sequencing events, using transition words, and making their speech clear and organized. This is important because speaking clearly and being organized is an important part of good communication..

C. After Storytelling

Furthermore, "after storytelling" is like a celebration of what the students have learned. Similar to Ambarita et al. (2022), data from this study showed that students participated more and felt more confident as the activity progressed. This is in line with Astawa & Wardana's (2022) idea that using stories, especially fairy tales, can help eighth graders to speak English better. The results of the interviews with the students confirmed this. Students like Ranjani (pseudonym) and Kinanti (pseudonym) felt more confident and motivated, similar to the students in Natasia & Angelianawati's (2022) study. These findings support what Haven (2000) said about storytelling helping people to love learning.

D. Students Motivation and Confidence

Next section, some students such as the students in the Juhansar et al. (2022) study, felt nervous and worried about saying the wrong words at first. However, as in this study and Astawa & Wardana's (2022) study, this anxiety reduced with practice. The positive and supportive environment created by the storytelling technique most likely helped to reduce this anxiety, as suggested by Nawa's (2023) study on student perceptions.

E. Students Difficulties in Learning Speaking

The last section, the entirety of this study along with other studies, shows that storytelling can be a powerful tool in the EFL classroom. With little difficulty faced by students and then massively applied, this technique will create a positive and engaging environment that helps students develop their speaking skills with confidence and enthusiasm. Further research, such as that conducted by Rahayu et al. (2023) who examined the use of storytelling aids, could be a promising way to explore this further. By understanding these ideas and using the power of storytelling, we can help the next generation of English speakers to become confident and skilled.

CONCLUSION

Storytelling techniques successfully addressed the challenges identified in this study. Students become more active participants in their learning, gain a deeper understanding of how stories are structured, and develop greater confidence in their speaking abilities. Implementing storytelling techniques in the classroom fosters a learning environment brimming with motivation and confidence, allowing students to blossom as confident and articulate speakers. The results confirmed the positive influence the author expected, highlighting how storytelling creates a more enjoyable and active learning environment. This suggests that storytelling, with its engaging nature, can effectively address public speaking anxiety a common challenge for EFL learners. Students evolved into more active participants, gained a deeper understanding of narrative structures, and most importantly, developed a newfound confidence in their speaking abilities. Furthermore, implementing storytelling techniques fosters a more motivated and confidence-building learning environment.

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