

Storytelling in English Speaking Classrooms: Investigating Students' Perception

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of storytelling to support students' speaking development in an EFL classroom. Using a qualitative approach case study design, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with eighth grade students at a junior high school in Karawang, Indonesia. Thematic analysis revealed five main findings: storytelling was applied through collaborative group activities, improved various aspects of speaking skill, increased students' interest and motivation, built their confidence through group performance, and was perceived as useful and effective. Storytelling encouraged students to practice speaking in a low-pressure, engaging environment while fostering vocabulary growth, fluency, and peer support. The collaborative and creative nature of storytelling helped reduce students' fear of speaking and increased their willingness to participate. These findings support the integration of storytelling as an interactive and learner-centered strategy in EFL classrooms to enhance both linguistic and effective dimensions of speaking.

Keywords: Storytelling; Speaking Skills; EFL Learners

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of English language education in Indonesia, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for secondary school students to master. Despite curriculum reforms that prioritize communicative competence, classroom realities continue to reflect limited student engagement, low self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes during speaking activities. In many junior high school classrooms, it is not uncommon to find students reluctant to participate in discussions, depending on scripted answers, or avoiding eye contact when speaking English. This condition highlights a persistent gap between policy expectations and classroom execution. Purwati et al. (2023) noted that Indonesian EFL students often face speaking difficulties due to minimal real-world practice, low motivation, and fear. Moreover, traditional instruction methods, such as grammar-focused lessons or rote memorization, often fail to create meaningful opportunities for verbal communication. To address these challenges, various interactive and learner-centered strategies have been explored. Among them, storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool to support language development, particularly in speaking. Research by Santoso et al. (2023) emphasized that storytelling enhances students' comprehension, creativity, and oral fluency. Similarly, Supriyani et al. (2023) found that storytelling not only improved pronunciation and vocabulary but also boosted students' confidence in speaking English. Furthermore, collaborative learning environments have been associated with increased motivation and peer support, providing a safe space for students to practice speaking (Loes, 2022; Wicaksono, 2024). While existing studies affirm the value of storytelling and collaborative learning individually, few have explored how these strategies work together to support speaking development, especially from the learners' perspective at the secondary school level.

Most previous studies on storytelling in language learning have primarily focused on learning outcomes, such as improved fluency or grammar accuracy, through quantitative measures. However, limited research has investigated students' personal experiences and perceptions when engaging in storytelling as a speaking strategy. This qualitative dimension is crucial in understanding not only *what* works, but *how* and *why* certain methods foster better engagement and learning. Moreover, in Indonesian junior high school, studies exploring students' emotional and cognitive responses to storytelling particularly within collaborative group settings remain scarce. To address this gap, this study investigated the implementation of storytelling as a collaborative speaking activity in an EFL classroom at a junior high school in Karawang. Drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the concept of learning through social interaction, this study examines how storytelling fosters both linguistic development and emotional engagement. Through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, the study aims to explore how students interact with storytelling tasks and how they perceive its role in enhancing their speaking skills. This study seeks to answer two primary questions: (1) How is storytelling applied in English-speaking classrooms? and (2) How do students perceive storytelling in supporting their English-speaking activities? By capturing students' lived experiences and reflections, this research contributes to the growing literature on communicative language teaching and offers pedagogical insights for teachers aiming to foster a more engaging, collaborative, and confidence-building environment for speaking practice in EFL contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the implementation of storytelling in EFL-speaking classrooms and to investigate students' perceptions of its effectiveness. The case study design was selected because it enabled an in-depth exploration of specific classroom phenomena in their real-life educational context, where the boundaries between the event and context were not clearly defined (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). The study was conducted in a junior high school in Karawang, involving one class of eighth-grade students as participants. Five students were purposively selected for individual interviews, based on their levels of engagement and speaking performance during storytelling activities. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate to gain rich, detailed insights into students' experiences, emotions, and perceptions in response to storytelling-based speaking instruction. Data collection was carried out using triangulated methods, namely classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted across four sessions and focused on students' speaking participation, fluency, pronunciation, collaboration, and confidence during storytelling tasks. The observation process included the use of checklists and field notes to record real-time classroom behavior. Semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into how students experienced and interpreted storytelling activities, including their feelings of motivation, interest, and self-confidence in speaking English. Additional documentation, such as students' story drafts, photos of performances, and interview transcripts, served to reinforce and validate the primary data. The use of these diverse sources enhanced the study's credibility and allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both the instructional process and the learners' perspectives. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures as outlined by Creswell (2014), which included six key stages: organizing and preparing the data, reading all data to obtain a general sense, coding the data generating themes, interrelating themes and descriptions, and presenting the data in a narrative format. The coding process was conducted manually by identifying patterns in the observation notes, interview transcripts, and supporting documentation. These patterns were then grouped into themes reflecting key aspects of the

storytelling implementation, such as speaking skill development, collaborative interaction, motivation, and student confidence. This analytical approach allowed the researcher to synthesize meaningful findings that aligned with the research questions and provided a holistic view of how storytelling influenced students' speaking experiences in the EFL classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study explored the implementation and impact of storytelling in an EFL-speaking classroom, focusing on both the instructional application and students' perceptions. Using a qualitative approach and case study design, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Karawang. The study was carried out across four storytelling sessions, encompassing the stages of introduction, group collaboration, performance, and reflection. Thematic analysis of the data revealed five major themes that describe how storytelling supported students' speaking development and influenced their learning experience.

Two major themes emerged from data: (1) the application of storytelling in the classrooms, and (2) Students' perceptions of storytelling in support English-speaking activities. These are presented in detail below, supported by excerpts and observational notes.

1. Storytelling is Applied Through Collaborative Group Activities

The implementation of storytelling in the classroom was carried out through collaborative group activities. Students were divided into small groups and assigned visual prompts (e.g., picture sequences) to develop and perform a narrative. This process facilitated in front of the class. Working in groups helped reduce students' nervousness and allowed them to share speaking responsibilities, fostering a supportive environment for language production.

S1 Stated:

"After working in groups, trusting each other, especially when going forward to tell stories, it's like being relaxed, so confident to tell stories in English."

S4 stated:

"When practicing with a group, I'm not ashamed to talk."

These reflections show that the group structured allowed students to overcome hesitation and build confidence through social interaction and peer support.

2. Storytelling Supports Speaking Skills Development

Storytelling contributed significantly to students' development of various speaking components, including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and sentence construction. The process of preparing and delivering stories encouraged students to explore new vocabulary, practice sentence patterns, and rehearse pronunciation. Unlike rote memorization, storytelling involved meaningful and contextual language use.

S2 stated:

"I learned new vocabulary in English and how to pronounce the words."

S3 stated:

“During the rehearsal, I learned what the correct sentences were, and repeating them made me speak more fluently.”

These accounts confirm that storytelling not only provided speaking practice but also deepened linguistic awareness.

3. Students Show Increased Interest and Motivation

Students expressed heightened interest and motivation during storytelling activities. The creative and interactive nature of storytelling made the speaking class more engaging. Students enjoyed developing stories and appreciated the opportunity to express themselves more freely than in traditional speaking drills.

S1 stated:

“Usually speaking lessons scare me, but the story is exciting, and I want to try speaking.”

S5 stated:

“I felt more motivated to speak English even though I was still nervous.”

These sentiments reflect how storytelling activities lowered the affective filter and fostered a more positive attitude toward speaking English.

4. Students build confidence through group performance

Storytelling through group performance helped students manage stage fright and develop speaking confidence. Presenting as a team reduced the fear of making mistakes and created a shared sense of responsibility. The presence of peers during performances provided reassurance and encouragement.

S3 stated:

“When performing with a group, I don’t feel embarrassed, because it’s a group so I’m not too afraid of being wrong.”

S5 stated:

“When I performed, I forgot, but my friend helped me connect, so I continued talking again.”

These observations suggest that collaborative performance reduced pressure and allowed students to focus on communication rather than perfection.

5. Students perceive storytelling as useful and effective

Students perceived storytelling as not only enjoyable but also effective in supporting their English-speaking skills. They reported that the method helped them organize thoughts, express ideas in their own words, and connect emotionally to the learning content. Unlike rigid speaking tasks, storytelling offered a purposeful and learner-centered experience.

S2 stated:

“Storytelling is really helpful, especially for me who is usually confused about what to say.”

S4 stated:

“I think storytelling is good, because we can learn from stories and talk without having to memorize.”

Students’ feedback indicates that storytelling served as an effective pedagogical tool, allowing them to engage with language authentically while developing confidence and fluency.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that storytelling, when applied in collaborative speaking activities, significantly enhances students’ speaking confidence, motivation, and language development in EFL classrooms. This result aligns with the premise that storytelling is not only a tool for language practice but also a medium for emotional and cognitive engagement. Similar to the findings of Santoso et al. (2023) and Supriyani et al. (2023), students in this study experienced improvements in fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The group –based storytelling format helped students express themselves more naturally, take ownership of their speaking, and feel less intimidated in speaking situations. The collaborative nature of storytelling applied in this study aligns strongly with Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, particularly the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners perform better through social interaction and peer assistance. This was evident in how students supported each other during group preparation and performance, reinforcing the idea that language learning is socially constructed (Loes, 2022; Yang, 2023). Moreover, the affective benefits reported by students, such as reduced fear of making mistakes and increased enjoyment, created through group support and storytelling engagement, lowered students’ affective filters and made them more receptive to language input and output. These results are further corroborated by Rezeki & Ibrahim (2022), who found that storytelling helps students become more expressive and confident in using English, especially when it involves group collaboration. In line with Wicaksono (2024), this study found that storytelling enabled students to develop language meaningfully through peer discussion and self-expression, enhancing both accuracy and spontaneity in speaking. Furthermore, Rai (2024) emphasized the emotional connection built through storytelling, which helps learners retain language more effectively. This resonates with participants in this study who found storytelling to be more memorable and meaningful than conventional speaking exercises. Despite the overall positive outcomes, this study also uncovered some challenges. Certain students still experienced difficulty in pronunciation and required more time to prepare for storytelling performances. While Lander & Brown (2000) and ali et al. (2020) emphasize storytelling’s benefits for all language learners, this study suggest that the effectiveness of storytelling can vary depending on students’ confidence levels and prior exposure to oral tasks. As such, teachers may need to provide more targeted scaffolding were mentioned as a limitation, echoing concerns raised by Asmawati & Asmara (2023) that storytelling activities require careful classrooms planning to maximize ptehir potential without overwhelming learners. In conclusions, this study reinforces the value of storytelling as a communicative and collaborative approach that enhances speaking skills in EFL setting. It not only support linguistic competence but also fosters emotional readiness and learner autonomy. However, to ensure its consistent effectiveness such as time management, individual differences, and scaffolding needs. Integrating storytelling with peer support and reflective practice presents a promising strategy for speaking instruction in junior high school EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the implementation of storytelling as a collaborative speaking activity effectively addressed major challenges in EFL-speaking classrooms, particularly students’ lack

of confidence, limited participation, and fear of speaking. Storytelling provided a meaningful, engaging, and supportive environment where students could practice speaking English with the help of peers, reducing fear of making mistakes and increasing fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation. The group-based format allowed students to share responsibilities, receive feedback, and build self-assurance through repeated preparation and performance. These findings demonstrate that storytelling not only enhances technical speaking skills but also fosters motivation and emotional readiness. Thus, the initial challenge of engaging students more effectively in speaking activities was addressed through an interactive, student-centered approach that integrates creativity, collaboration, and authentic language use in the EFL classroom.

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