

# Exploring The Use of Storytelling Technique in Speaking Activities for Junior High School Students

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore storytelling as a learning technique to support speaking practice among junior high school students and to describe their perceptions of the activity. While many studies focus on storytelling's effect on speaking performance, fewer address how students experience it. This study was conducted at SMPN 2 Telukjambe Timur, Karawang, with one eighth-grade class, using a qualitative case study design. Data were gathered through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that storytelling offers students opportunities to speak more fluently, construct sentences carefully, and use clearer pronunciation. Students also reported that preparing and presenting stories encouraged them to practice new vocabulary and apply narrative structures during oral tasks. Beyond language development, storytelling was perceived as enjoyable and motivating, inspiring practice inside and outside the classroom. Despite challenges such as nervousness, hesitation, and forgetting parts of the story, students developed strategies to cope and gradually became more confident speaking before peers. These results show that storytelling is not only a language task but also a supportive approach that fosters motivation, confidence, and participation.

**Keywords:** Junior High School; Perceptions; Qualitative Research; Speaking Activities; Storytelling

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is often regarded as the most important aspect of learning English because it enables learners to communicate ideas, express emotions, and engage with others. This skill integrates vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency, making it both complex and vital. In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, students seldom use it outside the classroom. Consequently, many learners face challenges such as limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, low confidence, and lack of motivation, which frequently result in passive participation during speaking activities (Ramadhani & Syahputra, 2022). Therefore, teachers are encouraged to use approaches that are more engaging and centered on students' needs.

Storytelling is one technique that can provide meaningful opportunities for students to practice speaking. Instead of focusing only on drills, storytelling offers natural situations for using the language and encourages learners to be more expressive. It also creates a supportive environment where students can speak with less pressure (Ramadania, 2018). This approach aligns with sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning happens through interaction and guided support (Vygotsky, 1978) In storytelling activities, students work together, share ideas, and help each other build confidence in speaking.

Several international perspectives also support the use of storytelling in language learning. Students acquire language best when they receive comprehensible input in a low-stress environment, and storytelling provides this kind of input while keeping the atmosphere relaxed (Krashen, 1985). Motivation increases when students feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and connection with others conditions that can be encouraged through storytelling (Ryan &

Deci, 2000). Staying engaged also needs motivational strategies, and storytelling, with its creative and personal nature, serves this purpose (Dörnyei, 2001). Speaking itself is a core skill in language learning, and communicative activities such as storytelling give students a real chance to practice it (Brown, 2000). Storytelling has been shown to significantly contribute to the development of oral language skills. Research comparing the effects of storytelling versus reading stories shows that both methods promote language growth. However, children exposed to storytelling demonstrate better story comprehension and are more skilled at retelling stories orally, while children who listen to stories being read aloud demonstrate more advanced language complexity (Isbell et al., 2004).

Many studies in Indonesia have examined storytelling as a tool for speaking practice. Storytelling gave students freedom to design and tell stories in their own way, which supported their motivation and engagement (Pratama et al., 2024). It also helped students practice vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation while lowering anxiety (Purwasari & Nugraha, 2023). Another study found that storytelling created authentic opportunities for students to speak in front of others, leading to more active participation (Sitanggang et al., 2023). It also made speaking more organized by connecting with narrative text structures (Kaet et al., 2023). More recently, storytelling was shown to support clarity, expression, and confidence, especially when students worked in groups with guidance from peers and tutors (Pakpahan et al., 2025). Overall, these findings suggest that storytelling not only supports language use but also contributes to a more positive and interactive classroom environment.

Although many studies have shown the contribution of storytelling in speaking practice, most of these studies focus on measurable aspects of performance, such as fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Much less attention has been paid to how students themselves view and experience storytelling as part of their English language learning process. This gap is important to address because students' feelings of confidence, motivation, or anxiety greatly affect their willingness to participate in speaking activities. By focusing on classroom practices and student perceptions, this study aims to provide a clearer picture of how storytelling not only supports speaking performance but also shapes students' attitudes toward learning English. This study was therefore designed to address two main questions: (1) how storytelling gives students chances to practice speaking, and (2) how junior high school learners perceive its use in English classes. By looking at both classroom practice and student perspectives, this study aims to give a clearer picture of how storytelling can support speaking practice and shape students confidence in using English.

## METHOD

This research applied a qualitative case study design to examine how storytelling was used in English classes. A case study was selected because it allows the researcher to look closely at what happens in the classroom and how students respond in a real learning situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study took place at SMPN 2 Telukjambe Timur, Karawang, with participants from one eighth-grade class consisting of students aged 13–14 years. This group was chosen because junior high school learners are at a stage where they are able to take part in creative and interactive speaking activities such as storytelling. Data were gathered through three instruments: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observation was used to note how students practiced speaking during storytelling lessons. The observation focused on several aspects of speaking performance, including fluency, vocabulary and grammar use, pronunciation, motivation, difficulties, and confidence. Notes and checklists were prepared to record both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with six students to obtain more detailed information

about their experiences. The interviews included open-ended questions, which allowed students to share their opinions freely while still addressing the research focus. To ensure comfort and clarity, the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, then transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Documentation was collected to support and verify the findings. The documents consisted of student drafts or story scripts, photographs of storytelling activities, and video recordings of performances. These materials served as additional sources to strengthen the interpretation of the data.

All data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps included reading and reviewing all data, identifying key words or ideas, grouping them into initial codes, and organizing the codes into broader themes. The themes were then refined and described in relation to the research questions. This process helped provide a clear picture of how storytelling was practiced and how students perceived it. Using several instruments and data sources allowed the researcher to cross-check information through triangulation, which increased the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. In this way, the study was able to capture not only classroom observations but also the individual voices of students.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### A. Storytelling and Students' Speaking Performance

##### 1. Fluency

One of the most noticeable aspects was related to students' fluency. At the beginning of the sessions, many learners paused frequently, hesitated in the middle of sentences, or struggled to continue their stories. This tendency was noted both in classroom observation and in their personal reflections. Over time, however, their delivery became smoother and more connected. For example, one student shared, *"I feel my English speaking became more fluent. Before performing, I practiced many times at home. If before I often paused, now I can speak more smoothly from beginning to end."* (S1). Another explained, *"When practicing at home, I tried to speak without reading the text, so when I performed it was already more fluent, even though sometimes there were still a few pauses."* (S2). The data suggest that repeated rehearsal, both inside and outside the classroom, helped reduce hesitation and increased students' ability to sustain speech. Observations also showed that some students who had been silent at the beginning of the program later became more willing to speak for longer stretches of time. By the final sessions, several students were able to extend their stories beyond the initial drafts, adding spontaneous details to make their performances more engaging. These changes illustrate how storytelling created opportunities for continuous speech, which gradually contributed to smoother oral production.

##### 2. Vocabulary and Grammar

Another important finding relates to vocabulary expansion and grammar awareness. Since students were required to prepare their own storytelling texts, they were motivated to search for new words and consider sentence structure more carefully. One participant recalled, *"When I made the story, I thought, 'What is this word in English?' Then I looked it up... I learned new words like giant and suddenly."* (S4). Another added, *"When writing the story, I had to find new words to make it more interesting. So, I learned many new vocabularies and tried to make my sentences more correct."* (S6). Observation notes confirmed that learners became more aware of narrative conventions, such as using the simple past tense and sequence markers like then or suddenly. Although grammar errors were still observed, students increasingly showed self-correction during performance. For example, one learner initially used present tense forms but immediately repaired the sentence after noticing the mistake. These moments suggest that

storytelling encouraged students not only to memorize new words but also to monitor and adjust their grammar use during oral delivery.

### 3. Pronunciation and Clarity

Pronunciation was another area where changes were visible. At the beginning, many students spoke too softly, with unclear articulation, and often mispronounced words such as *adventure*, *through*, and *enough*. The teacher's feedback and peer corrections played an important role in raising awareness of these issues. As one student explained, *"I practiced a lot at home and with my seatmate so they could tell me if I pronounced a word wrong."* (S1). Another reflected, *"I paid more attention to my voice and the way I spoke so that my friends could understand and not feel bored while listening."* (S4). Peer practice sessions, where students rehearsed with classmates before performing for the whole class, proved to be an effective strategy. In these sessions, students gave each other feedback on volume, articulation, and intonation. By the end of the storytelling cycle, most participants were able to speak more audibly, use better intonation, and maintain eye contact with the audience. Documentation in the form of photographs and performance recordings showed students delivering their stories with more natural body language and clearer pronunciation compared to the initial meetings.

### 4. Confidence in Speaking

Perhaps the most important outcome of the storytelling activity was the growth of students' confidence. At the start, many students avoided eye contact, clutched their scripts tightly, or rushed through their lines due to nervousness. As the sessions progressed, however, they gradually became more comfortable. One student admitted, *"At first I felt scared, but after trying several times, I became braver and more comfortable speaking."* (S6). Another stated, *"Now, storytelling makes me more confident, especially when speaking in front of my friends."* (S3). Observation data supported these reflections. By the last meeting, students who had been reluctant to perform began volunteering, smiling, and even adding expressive gestures such as hand movements and varied intonation. Confidence was not built instantly but grew through repeated practice, teacher encouragement, and supportive peer feedback. This pattern highlights how storytelling can create a classroom environment where students gradually feel safer to speak and less afraid of making mistakes.

## A. Students' Perceptions of Storytelling

### 1. Motivation

Students consistently described storytelling as enjoyable and motivating. They highlighted that it was different from usual lessons, which often relied on drills or textbook dialogues. One learner said, *"This activity was fun and different from usual lessons, so I felt more motivated to practice."* (S1). Another added, *"I became more motivated to practice at home because I wanted to tell the story fluently during the performance."* (S5). These accounts indicate that storytelling sparked intrinsic motivation, as students not only engaged actively in class but also continued practicing independently at home. Several participants mentioned that they rehearsed in front of a mirror or with family members, suggesting that storytelling inspired them to take initiative in their learning process.

### 2. Difficulties

Despite the positive experiences, students also reported facing several challenges. Nervousness was a common issue, especially when speaking in front of the whole class. One student shared, *"I once forgot the text in the middle of the story, so I paused for a long time before continuing."* (S2). Another admitted, *"I still get nervous, so I speak too fast. Usually, I take a deep breath before starting."* (S6). Pronunciation also remained a challenge, particularly with words that were not part of their everyday vocabulary. Observation notes recorded that some students

spoke too quickly or too softly, which affected clarity. Nevertheless, many learners developed personal strategies to cope with these difficulties. For example, some chose to rehearse multiple times, focus their eyes away from the audience to reduce nervousness, or use story maps to avoid forgetting key points. These strategies show that while storytelling placed students in demanding speaking situations, it also encouraged them to find ways to manage performance anxiety.

### 3. Confidence

Finally, storytelling was widely perceived as a meaningful way to build confidence. One student reflected, *“At first I felt scared, but after several times, I became braver and more comfortable speaking.”* (S6). Another confirmed, *“Now, storytelling makes me more confident, especially when speaking in front of my friends.”* (S3). Students explained that confidence grew gradually through repeated exposure and supportive feedback. By the final sessions, most participants were no longer reluctant to face the audience, and some even volunteered eagerly to present. Observations noted that students’ body language became more expressive, with clearer gestures, more direct eye contact, and stronger vocal projection. These changes suggest that storytelling transformed speaking from an intimidating task into a more enjoyable and rewarding experience.

## Discussion

The results of this study reveal that storytelling created a supportive environment for students to practice speaking, addressing both linguistic and emotional aspects. In the classroom, students were able to speak for longer periods, hesitate less, and maintain smoother speech flow during storytelling. They also mentioned that repeated practice, both at school and at home, helped them feel more natural when narrating stories. This aligns with the idea that fluency improves through continuous and meaningful speaking practice (Harmer, 2007). Similar findings showed that storytelling allowed students to create and present narratives in their own style, which increased their engagement in speaking activities (Pratama et al., 2024).

The process of preparing and performing stories encouraged students to pay more attention to vocabulary and grammar. Learners reported searching for new words to enrich their stories and reviewing their sentences for accuracy before presenting. Observations indicated that students increasingly used narrative markers and past tense forms, sometimes even self-correcting while speaking. This highlights how storytelling raised awareness of word choice and sentence structure. It supports the notion that narrative frameworks help learners organize meaning and language more coherently (Bruner J, 1990). Comparable results were also reported where storytelling was perceived positively by students as it enriched vocabulary, improved pronunciation, and encouraged them to speak more confidently in class (Ramadani, 2025). Pronunciation and clarity were also developed through the storytelling process. Initially, many students spoke softly or mispronounced certain words, but feedback from teachers and peers encouraged them to improve their articulation. Several students practiced with classmates before presenting, which helped refine their pronunciation. By the final sessions, students spoke with stronger voices, clearer articulation, and more varied intonation. These findings demonstrate that storytelling encouraged learners to focus on delivery and audience engagement. This reflects the view that authentic speaking tasks motivate learners to pay attention to pronunciation and clarity (Brown, 2000). Similar studies also showed that storytelling supported improvements in pronunciation and fluency, which gradually increased with practice (Sitanggang et al., 2023). From an emotional perspective, students described storytelling as enjoyable and motivating. They felt it was different from routine lessons and encouraged them to practice more seriously, even outside the classroom. Some rehearsed in front of mirrors or with family members, indicating that the activity fostered independent

learning. This illustrates how storytelling supported not only classroom participation but also personal effort. This observation aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key motivational factors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Other studies also found that storytelling helped reduce speaking anxiety and created a supportive environment where learners were more willing to participate in oral activities (Purwasari & Nugraha, 2023). At the same time, the findings revealed that students faced challenges such as nervousness, forgetting parts of the text, or speaking too quickly. They developed coping strategies like taking deep breaths, avoiding direct eye contact with the audience, or focusing on key story words. These strategies show that difficulties became opportunities for resilience rather than obstacles. This process reflects the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners advance with guidance in challenging tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). Similar findings were also reported in classroom action research, which showed that storytelling helps students manage their nervousness and speak with clearer pronunciation and greater fluency (Kaet et al., 2023). Confidence was one of the most significant outcomes in this study. Students who had previously avoided speaking in front of others gradually became braver after repeated practice. Observations confirmed that more students volunteered to perform and spoke with clearer gestures and stronger voices. This underscores the importance of confidence as a central element of oral communication (Brown, 2001). Other research has also shown that storytelling and retelling activities encouraged learners to approach speaking tasks with greater assurance (Ramadhani & Syahputra, 2022). The findings align with more recent studies. It was reported that storytelling increased active participation in class and encouraged vocabulary practice (Putri et al., 2023). Another study found that students perceived storytelling as motivating, confidence-building, and effective for practicing pronunciation and vocabulary (Yulianawati et al., 2025). Digital storytelling was also shown to support fluency, articulation, and motivation among high school students (Nuriyah et al., 2024). The use of PowerPoint-based storytelling attracted students' interest and encouraged more confident oral performance (Karimah et al., 2024). Other findings highlighted that cooperative storytelling strategies enhanced participation and built learners' confidence (Siregar et al., 2025). A literature review further confirmed that storytelling consistently fostered fluency and expressive skills in students (Utami et al., 2023). Another study emphasized that storytelling not only supported speaking practice but also created a more positive classroom experience for students (Ramadhani & Syahputra, 2022). Overall, the findings emphasize the dual role of storytelling in the EFL classroom. On one hand, it provided meaningful practice in fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. On the other hand, it shaped students' attitudes by fostering motivation, confidence, and resilience. Unlike much previous research that focused mainly on performance outcomes, this study highlighted students' perceptions, showing how they valued storytelling as both enjoyable and supportive. These insights suggest that storytelling is not just a speaking activity but also a pedagogical approach that transforms speaking from a source of anxiety into a motivating and meaningful classroom experience ((Dörnyei, 2001; Pakpahan et al., 2025).

## CONCLUSION

This study explores the use of storytelling as a student-taught technique in the classroom to support speaking practice among junior high school students. The findings show that storytelling contributes to students' speaking performance in several ways. Students are able to speak more fluently, apply vocabulary and grammar more carefully, and use clearer pronunciation and articulation. These results were achieved through repeated practice, feedback from teachers, and collaboration among classmates. Beyond linguistic aspects, storytelling also shaped students' attitudes toward speaking. They described this activity as enjoyable and motivating, which encouraged them to practice both inside and outside the classroom. Although

challenges such as nervousness, hesitation, and mispronunciation still arose, students developed strategies to overcome them. Over time, they report feeling more confident and comfortable when speaking in front of others. Overall, these findings suggest that storytelling not only serves as a way to practice language forms, but also as a supportive learning environment where students can build confidence and motivation. For teachers, storytelling can be a useful classroom strategy to make speaking activities more interactive, less stressful, and more meaningful for students. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be considered for future teaching and research practices. For teachers, storytelling can be integrated as a routine activity in the classroom to create more interactive and supportive speaking lessons. The use of storytelling allows students to practice language in meaningful contexts, while building their confidence and motivation. Teachers can also combine storytelling with visual aids, digital media, or collaboration between classmates to maintain student interest and engagement. In addition, providing constructive feedback and encouraging practice both in class and at home can help students overcome nervousness and improve their speaking skills. For future research, storytelling can be further explored at different educational levels or in different contexts to observe how students from diverse backgrounds respond to this technique. Studies could also investigate the long-term effects of storytelling on students' attitudes and speaking performance, as well as compare traditional storytelling with digital or multimodal storytelling. Such exploration would provide a broader understanding of how storytelling can contribute to language education and support students in developing their speaking skills more effectively.

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