

## **THE EFFECT OF STORYTELLING ON THE SPEAKING SKILLS OF EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Speaking is one of the most difficult areas of EFL students and despite the common knowledge of storytelling as a useful tool, there is little research on the particular effects of storytelling on fluency, accuracy, and understanding in junior high schools in Indonesia. The purpose of the study is to examine how eighth-grade students at SMP Kristen Bala Keselamatan Palu are influenced in terms of speaking ability by storytelling. The quasi-experimental design was applied, which included pre-test and post-test control groups, 60 students were used in the study and were chosen using the cluster random sampling technique, 30 students were assigned the experimental group and 30 students were assigned the control group. Oral speaking tests were used to gather data which were rated using an analytical rubric and the outcomes showed that the experimental group had a higher mean gain score (4.17) than the control group (1.97) with a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) and large effect size (Cohen  $d = -1.10$ ). These results suggest that storytelling can be not only statistically, but also pedagogically significant, as it promotes fluency, confidence, and general communicative proficiency of students in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, EFL Students, Storytelling Strategy, Speaking Skills

### **INTRODUCTION**

Speaking is generally considered one of the most complicated skills in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education since it involves learners that, at the same time, combine grammar and pronunciation abilities, in addition to fluency, in the real-time communication process. In contrast to receptive skills, speaking requires the articulation of language in a unified way, which is especially difficult in the case of the learners with limited linguistic means, who have little exposure to real-life communication. The challenge of fluency, accuracy, and coherence, which is constantly reported by previous studies, is a barrier to communicative competence in EFL learners (Derakhshan, Khalili, & Behesthi 2016; Leong & Ahmadi 2017). Though these studies affirm that there exist speaking difficulties, they are inclined to frame these problems in terms of their speaking performance with particular teaching strategies to the various components.

Contextual and pedagogical factors add to these challenges in Indonesian context. High number of students in the classroom, teacher-centered teaching, and less access to

real language use decreases the possibility of students to practice speaking. Despite the fact that the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum has focused on communicative competence and student-centered learning, research has shown that the speaking proficiency of many junior high school students remains low. They have language problems manifested in poor vocabulary, poor pronunciation, grammatical mistakes, and low confidence (Sabilla & Kaniadewi, 2025; Sukri Yanto, Wahyuni, & Syahputra, 2021). This shows that there is an imbalance between classroom practices and curricular goals. More to the point, the past research on Indonesia is usually based on the general improvement of speaking without a thorough examination of what the components of speaking are the most impacted and why some approaches prove to be more effective or not in the given scenario.

Theoretically, speaking is taught with a solid base of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which focuses on meaningful interaction as the central point of language learning (Richards, 2015). According to CLT, students are able to learn properly when they actively apply language in communicative situations but not when passively receiving information. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, not all the communicative actions like the role-playing or group discussions are always sure to sustain or produce significant language. This weakness can be further described in terms of Swain's Output Hypothesis that suggests that language is learned when the learners are challenged to produce language, consider what they have produced and observe loopholes in their linguistic information. There is lack of sufficient encouragement of students to generate prolonged spoken output in most classroom activities leading to less development of fluency and accuracy. Moreover, performance speaking theories emphasize that effective speaking entails various elements, such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and comprehension, which must be cultivated in a combined fashion, and not separately.

Storytelling has been proposed as an alternative teaching strategy in response to these limitations. Based on Vygotsky's social interaction theory, it facilitates the learning process by facilitating meaningful interactions and scaffolding, where students can construct knowledge together. Unlike traditional speaking activities, storytelling offers a systematic yet adaptable structure that encourages learners to produce longer discourse and to organize ideas in a structural and coherent manner. Other studies have also found positive outcomes from the use of stories in EFL classrooms. For example, Kalantari & Hashemian (2016) reported increased fluency and vocabulary, Ngoc & Anh, (2024) study described increased confidence and readiness to speak. Similarly, Alqahtani, (2020) demonstrated that stories improve pronunciation and refine grammar, and Riadil, (2020) focused on their ability to reduce anxiety.

Although these findings are promising, a critical review of the literature indicates that there are a number of limitations. To begin with, numerous studies indicate the overall progress in speaking skills without examining particular aspects of speaking fluency, accuracy, and comprehension in detail. Second, the results of research seem to be inconsistent in terms of the areas of speaking that are most effectively developed by means of storytelling. Some researchers focus on fluency, whereas others emphasize accuracy or confidence, indicating that more specific research should be developed. Third, the majority of the existing studies have been performed in a variety of international settings hence

limiting its applicability to the Indonesian EFL setting, especially in junior high school within the Merdeka Curriculum. These gaps point to the fact that the efficiency of storytelling is not fully comprehended, in terms of how and why this process affects certain aspects of the performance of speaking.

This study fills three gaps, based on these considerations. First, it is based on a case study of a Junior High School in Indonesia, which is underrepresented in storytelling research. Second, it examines individual elements of speaking skills—fluency, accuracy, and comprehension—as opposed to speaking as a general skill. Third, it frames the study within the context of the Independent Curriculum, which focuses on communicative and student-centered learning, but has not been empirically proven in a classroom setting.

This study aims to examine whether the use of storytelling can improve students' speaking ability. This study focuses on exploring how involvement in storytelling can improve the speaking ability of eighth-grade students of SMP Krsiten Bala Keselamatan Palu. This study examines the effect of incorporating storytelling activities into English lessons on improving EFL learners' speaking ability and also draws on theoretical frameworks and contexts to address limitations faced by previous studies and to contribute to speaking instruction in EFL contexts, particularly in the Indonesian educational context.

## METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group to examine the effect of storytelling on students' speaking ability. This design is commonly used in educational research to compare the effectiveness of instructional interventions across groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population consisted of all eighth-grade students at SMP Kristen Bala Keselamatan Palu, totaling 89 students across three classes. A sample of 60 students was selected through cluster random sampling, with Class VIII A assigned as the experimental group and Class VIII C as the control group. Both groups completed pre-test and post-test assessments to measure changes in speaking performance before and after the intervention.

Data were collected through individual oral speaking tests administered in both the pre-test and post-test. In the pre-test, students were asked to describe their last vacation, while in the post-test they were asked to talk about their upcoming vacation. Each student's performance lasted approximately one to two minutes. Speaking performance was assessed using an analytical scoring rubric consisting of five components, namely pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Each component was rated on a five-point scale ranging from very poor to excellent, and the overall speaking score was obtained by summing the scores across all components.

To ensure content validity, the rubric was developed based on established theories of speaking performance and adapted to widely used EFL assessment criteria. It was also reviewed by an English teacher to ensure its relevance to the junior high school context and alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum. Inter-rater reliability was established by involving two raters, namely the researcher and an English teacher. The Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient yielded a value of  $r = 0.87$ , indicating a high level of

agreement between raters. In addition, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, which resulted in a coefficient of 0.89, demonstrating strong reliability of the instrument.

The experimental group received instruction through storytelling activities over six sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. The instructional process involved introducing narrative models and explaining narrative structures, followed by vocabulary and comprehension activities, guided storytelling practice in pairs or groups, creative story modification, and individual storytelling performances. Throughout the sessions, the teacher provided continuous feedback on students’ fluency, grammar, and pronunciation. In contrast, the control group was taught using conventional instructional methods, such as question–answer activities and group discussions, without structured storytelling tasks.

Data were analyzed using inferential statistics with the assistance of statistical software. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests were conducted. The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that the data were normally distributed, as the significance values for both groups were greater than 0.05. Levene’s test also confirmed the homogeneity of variance between groups, with a significance value exceeding 0.05. After these assumptions were satisfied, an independent samples t-test was performed to compare the post-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups, with the level of significance set at 0.05. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, indicating that storytelling had a significant effect on students’ speaking ability.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all student data were kept confidential to ensure privacy and anonymity.

## RESULTS

A pre-test was conducted before the treatment to both the experimental and the control group to determine the initial speaking ability of students. The findings revealed that the two groups had almost the same mean score (Experimental = 73.07; Control = 73.27), which means that both groups were similar prior to the treatment.

### *Descriptive Statistic*

*Table 1. Descriptive statistic of pre-test and post-test scores*

Group	N	Pre-Test Mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD	Gain Mean	Gain SD
Experimental	30	73.07	4.85	77.33	5.12	4.17	2.10
Control	30	73.27	4.73	75.23	4.95	1.97	1.88

The descriptive statistics show that both groups initially were at the same level; however, the experimental group showed a more significant increase in the performance of speaking than the control group. The mean gain (4.17) is higher than the other (1.97), indicating that story telling had a more significant role to play in the development of the

speaking of the students. Moreover, the standard deviations remained comparatively constant which shows that the improvement was shared among students, not just among a few high performers.

Pedagogically, this result implies that storytelling creates a more conducive and guided learning process that can facilitate students developing several facets of speaking at once, such as fluency and confidence.

**Normality Test Result**

*Table 2. Normality test (Shapiro-Wilk)*

Group	Sig. Value	Interpretation
Eksperimental	> 0.087	Normal
Control	> 0.091	Normal

The results of the Shapiro–Wilk test show that the significance values for both groups are greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that the data are normally distributed. This attests to the fact that the data qualify the assumptions of parametric statistical analysis.

**Homogeneity of Variance Test**

*Table 3. Homogeneity of variance test (Lavene’s Test)*

Test	Sig. Value	Interpretation
Levene’s Test	> 0.214	Homogeneous

The result of the Levene Test value is above 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ), which means that the variances between the two groups are equal. This justifies independent samples t-test as a valid tool of further analysis.

**Independent Sample t- test**

*Table 5. Independent Samples t-Test Results for Gain Scores*

Varieable	t – value	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Interpretation
Gain Score	3.00	58	0.004	2.20	Significant

The results of the independent samples t-test indicate that the significance value ( $p = 0.004$ ) is less than 0.05, which means that the difference between the experimental and the control groups is statistically significant. This implies that the positive change in the experimental group was not an accident but rather highly influenced by the story telling approach.

## *Effect Size*

Cohen's  $d$  was calculated to determine the magnitude of the treatment effect. The result indicated a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 1.10$ ), suggesting that the storytelling intervention had a substantial impact on students' speaking ability.

From a pedagogical perspective, this large effect size indicates that storytelling is not only statistically effective but also practically meaningful in classroom contexts. The findings suggest that storytelling facilitates significant improvement in students' speaking performance by encouraging sustained language production, enhancing fluency, and reducing speaking anxiety. Compared to traditional instructional approaches, storytelling provides a meaningful and structured context that enables learners to organize their ideas more coherently and express themselves with greater confidence.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this research suggest that storytelling does play a very important and impactful role in the speaking competence among students, especially in regard to fluency, confidence, and the overall performance in communication. More to the point, these results not only reveal the statistical significance but also show the way storytelling can be used as powerful pedagogical tool through the prism of the corresponding theoretical background and evidence.

In terms of theory, the effectiveness of storytelling can be explained through the social interaction theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky ((1978)), which emphasizes that learning occurs through interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding. In this study, storytelling activities provided structured opportunities for peer interaction and teacher guidance, enabling students to co-construct meaning and language within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This perspective is consistent with Vygotsky's theoretical framework and is further supported by recent research demonstrating that interaction-based activities positively influence learners' speaking fluency and participation (Zhang, Liang, & Wang, 2024; Han et al., 2024)).

In terms of theory, one can explain the effectiveness of storytelling by referring to the social interaction theory as developed by Vygotsky, which underlines that learning happens in the form of interaction, collaboration and scaffolding. Storytelling activities in this research offered some structured peer interaction and teacher guidance so that students were able to co-construct meaning and language in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This conclusion is corroborated by the theory of Lev Vygotsky and is proven by the recent research (Zhang, Liang, & Wang, 2024; Derakhshan, 2015), which indicates that learning through the interaction produces a positive effect on the speaking fluency and the participation.

Moreover, the findings are in a close connection to the concepts of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes meaningful interaction over drilling (Richards, 2015). Similarly to other prior works (Ellis et al., 2019; Lee, 2019), the current study discovered that storytelling prompts students to create longer and more meaningful discourse. In contrast to the traditional techniques based on repetition, storytelling makes

learners actively build meaning and communicate it, which makes it more fluent and coherent. This is the reason why the experimental group had higher improvement when compared to the control group.

Moreover, the results correspond with the Output Hypothesis proposed recently by Swain, who states that language learning is possible when the learners are challenged to output and analyze their use of the language (Swain, 2015). The storytelling activities meant that students were to narrate events, organize thought and convey meaning, in a continuous manner, thus pushing them to make use of language that were beyond their current competence. This procedure allowed students to identify the weak points in their linguistic knowledge and enhance their speech performance. Murad & Assadi, (2023) also reported similar results and discovered that storytelling improves the speaking proficiency and learner engagement due to sustained output. Further examination of the results suggests that storytelling has effects on the development of speaking in three key dimensions: cognitive, affective, and linguistic.

Cognitively, storytelling involves learners having to organize ideas, to put events in a logical sequence and to combine various elements of language at the same time. It promotes the higher-order thinking and is in line with the findings of Anderson (2018) and Goh & Burns (2018) ,who suggest that structured speaking tasks can enhance fluency and coherence. The narrative (orientation, complication, resolution) structure provided in this study, allowed the students to create more structured and meaningful speech, which led to their improved performance in speaking.

Storytelling is an important factor in the affective perspective that makes a person less anxious and more motivated. Numerous EFL students feel anxious about speaking because of the fear to make a mistake but storytelling helps to change the emphasis on accuracy to meaning and expression. This result aligns with Riadil (2020), who highlight that activities that might be emotionally interesting can greatly enhance the confidence and readiness to communicate among students. Storytelling provided a low-anxiety atmosphere in this research that led to increased student participation and performance.

Linguistically, narration encourages the use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in the meaningful communication. Storytelling, in contrast to single drills, involves constant speech production that improves fluency and accuracy. This result corroborates earlier studies by Kalantari & Hashemian (2016) and Ngoc & Anh (2024) who discovered that storytelling enhances various facets of speaking at the same time. Moreover, Li (2018) also points out that meaningful communication tasks also lead to language development in the long run, which again justifies the success of storytelling in this work.

This study explains in a more detailed way as to why storytelling works as compared to the past studies. Although the previous researchers (e.g., Zuhriyah, 2017; Mokhtar et al., 2011) primarily present the general positive changes in the speaking ability, the present research shows that the storytelling is effective as it incorporates cognitive activity, the use of emotional support, and meaningful use of language. The relatively big effect size of this study can be explained by this multidimensional influence, which means that storytelling is not merely statistically significant but is also pedagogically strong.

Pedagogical implications of this research are significant. To begin with, storytelling may be a powerful alternative to conventional speaking instruction, especially in the situations when the students are not very exposed to English. Second, storytelling exercises that promote interaction, creativity, and longer language production should be developed by teachers, according to the principles of CLT. Third, scaffolding techniques like vocabulary support and guiding questions can be used to adjust storytelling to various levels of proficiency. Lastly, the incorporation of storytelling is a good fit with the Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses on meaningful and student-centered learning.

Although these contributions were made, there are a few limitations that need to be considered. Only one school was considered in the study with a rather small sample size, which can restrict the extrapolation of the results. Moreover, the length of the intervention was quite short, and it might not be sufficient to have long-term effects on the development of speaking. It is also suggested that future studies should include bigger samples, extended interventions, and a more in-depth examination of particular speaking elements like fluency, precision, and pronunciation.

To sum up, this paper not only proves the effectiveness of storytelling, but also describes the mechanisms behind its effectiveness. Storytelling is a holistic method of mastering speaking skills in combining social interaction, meaningful communication, and active language production. More to the point, it emphasizes how effective EFL learning cannot be based only on the mastery of the lingo but also meaningful, engaging, and emotionally positive learning experiences.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that storytelling is a powerful teaching tool, which can be used to enhance the speaking capacity of students in EFL classrooms, especially in the areas of fluency, confidence, and overall communicative skills. In addition to its statistical effectiveness, the primary contribution of the study is empirical evidence which shows that storytelling is an effective method of meaningful language use and helps to develop speaking skills in a well-organized but interesting way, particularly in the case of the Indonesian senior secondary school setting under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Theoretically, the present study will add to the current literature by building on and expanding on fundamental theories of language learning. The results are in line with the social interaction theory proposed by Vygotsky that emphasizes the importance of interaction and scaffolding in the building of speaking ability. They also give empirical evidence of the concepts of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) where meaningful communication improves language learning. Moreover, this research affirms the Output Hypothesis by Swain, which shows that storytelling motivates learners to generate long spoken production, reflect on their language use and enhance their linguistic competence. Noteworthy, this study contributes to the literature on the topic by demonstrating that storytelling does not only enhance the overall speaking but also has an integrated effect on certain aspects of speaking, including fluency, accuracy, and comprehension.

Practically, the results have a well-defined pedagogical implication on EFL teachers. Storytelling may be successfully adopted as a student-focused approach, which facilitates

active involvement, creativity, and confidence in speaking. It offers an effective background to language use, as it allows students to structure ideas, speak more naturally, and experience less anxiety about speaking. Consequently, educators are urged to incorporate storytelling in the normal classroom activities, which include retelling stories, imaginative storytelling, and group storytelling activities. In order to make the most of it, teachers ought to offer adequate scaffolding, such as vocabulary support, providing questions, and valuable feedback. Moreover, storytelling can be considered an appropriate and applicable method to advance the speaking teaching in the Indonesian classrooms because it is in line with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study admits that there are a number of limitations such as rather limited sample size, a brief duration of the treatment, and the focus of the study on one educational setting. These are limitations that indicate that the results cannot be completely extrapolated to other contexts. Thus, further studies are advised to include bigger and more heterogeneous samples, increase the intervention period, and elaborate further on analyzing the particular speaking elements. Also, the methods of storytelling integration with the digital one or its comparison with other communicative strategies might be discussed in future to comprehend the long-term effect on the speaking development of students.

Overall, this study not only proves the effectiveness of storytelling but also emphasizes its importance as a multifaceted method of teaching speaking. Combining cognitive, affective, and social aspects of learning, storytelling presents an effective tool in developing speaking proficiency of students and making EFL learning processes more meaningful and interesting.

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