

## Enhancing Pronunciation Through Storytelling: A Case Study of Two EFL Learners

Nuraini \*<sup>1</sup>, Putri Syuhada<sup>2</sup>, Ermyna Seri<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Accounting Department Politeknik Negeri Medan, Medan, 20155, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [nuraini@polmed.ac.id](mailto:nuraini@polmed.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effect of storytelling on pronunciation development among SMP and SMA students. The research focuses on how meaningful repetition, emotional engagement, and confidence-building in stories support articulation, intonation, stress, and rhythm. Using a qualitative approach, students' storytelling performances were recorded, analyzed, and observed to identify patterns of pronunciation improvement. The results show that repeated phrases in narratives helped students master challenging sounds naturally, emotional content improved prosody and expression, and engaging stories enhanced speaking confidence. Storytelling created authentic, motivating contexts that encouraged students to practice language purposefully, combining cognitive, emotional, and social engagement. These results suggest that storytelling is a dynamic, student-centered strategy for pronunciation teaching, offering repeated practice, emotional engagement, and confidence support simultaneously. Incorporating storytelling into language instruction can improve students' oral proficiency, prosody, and communicative effectiveness, making pronunciation learning more natural, effective, and enjoyable.

**Keywords:** Case Study; EFL Learners; Pronunciation; Storytelling; Articulation



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## 1. Introduction

English proficiency has become increasingly important in the era of globalization, especially in countries like Indonesia where English is primarily learned as a foreign language. Among the four language skills, speaking plays a central role in academic, professional, and intercultural communication. Speaking, or oral proficiency, is not only about using correct grammar and vocabulary but also about fluency and pronunciation (Luoma, 2004). While fluency refers to producing speech smoothly at a natural pace, pronunciation relates to the accurate production of sounds (segmentals) and prosodic features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. Pronunciation is particularly crucial because it directly affects intelligibility—the extent to which speech can be understood (Levis, 2018).

Despite its importance, many EFL learners continue to struggle with pronunciation. First language influence, lack of authentic exposure, and limited instructional focus often make pronunciation a persistent challenge (Derwing, 2015). In Indonesia, this problem is especially evident among junior and senior high school students. At this stage, learners are expected to transition from basic communicative skills toward more advanced oral proficiency. Yet, many

can use vocabulary and grammar appropriately, but their speech often remains difficult to understand due to inaccurate articulation, misplaced stress, or unnatural intonation. The issue is compounded by the national curriculum, which gives little attention to explicit pronunciation instruction. Teachers also tend to prioritize grammar and vocabulary over prosodic features, creating a mismatch between what students learn in school and what they need to communicate effectively. This gap becomes particularly critical as learners prepare for higher education and global interaction.

Storytelling has emerged as a promising approach to address these challenges. Grounded in socio cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1998), storytelling provides meaningful, interactive contexts where learners practice language by focusing on both meaning and form. This makes storytelling particularly effective for pronunciation development, while also supporting fluency and motivation (Isbell, et. al, 2004).

These advantages are supported by research from diverse international contexts. (Mourão, 2016) found that storytelling improved intonation and expressiveness in Portuguese learners. (Yang & Wu, 2012) showed that digital storytelling raised Taiwanese students' awareness of prosody, while (Akdamar, 2023) demonstrated that Turki learners developed digital storytelling on listening skills of foreign language learners of English and their Attitudes towards digital storytelling. In Indonesia, (Wulandari, 2025) observed that storytelling effectively enriches vocabulary, sharpens focus, fosters creativity, and strengthens speaking skills among secondary-level learner,, and (Inaya & Amalia, 2024) confirmed that digital storytelling improved both accuracy and expressive intonation.

However, most of these studies were carried out in large classroom settings and tended to emphasize fluency or overall oral proficiency. Far less attention has been devoted to pronunciation in depth, particularly prosodic features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. In many cases, prosody has been treated as a secondary outcome rather than a central focus, which limits our understanding of how learners actually develop intelligible speech. For instance, (Mourão, 2016) study emphasized learners' expressiveness but did not provide detailed analysis of stress or rhythm, while (Siti Inaya, Ila Amalia, 2024) research focused mainly on digital tools and motivation, leaving prosodic development underexplored. Moreover, few studies have considered the specific challenges faced by Indonesian junior and senior high school learners, who are at a transitional stage of oral development but still lack sufficient exposure and targeted instruction. Small-scale or individualized investigations are also scarce, even though such contexts could provide deeper insights into how storytelling supports learners with different backgrounds and needs.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining “Enhancing Pronunciation through Storytelling: A Case Study of Two EFL Learners.” It focuses on one junior high school student and one senior high school student in Indonesia. This study is distinctive in three respects: it adopts a small-scale, in-depth case study design, emphasizes fundamental pronunciation features including articulation, stress, rhythm, and intonation rather than fluency alone, and offers practical pedagogical implications for integrating storytelling into small-group or individualized EFL instruction. for integrating storytelling into small-group or individualized EFL instruction.

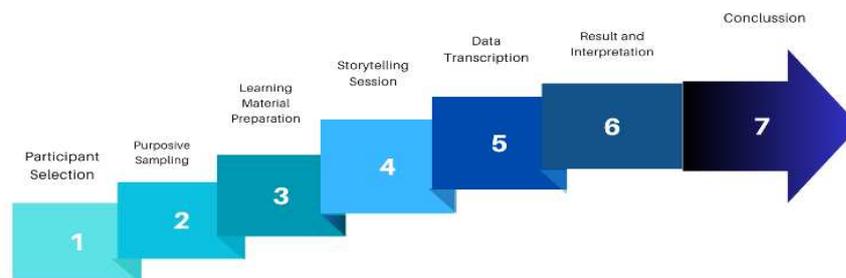
## **2. Method**

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) to examine how storytelling influences pronunciation development in two EFL learners. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of different educational levels and existing pronunciation challenges.

Learning materials consisted of short narrative texts with varied vocabulary, stress patterns, and intonation features (Rebecca Isbell, Joseph Sobol, 2004). Storytelling sessions were video-

recorded, transcribed, and supplemented with field notes capturing confidence, gestures, and natural speech flow (Derwing, 2015).

The data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), focusing on patterns of pronunciation improvement, articulation, rhythm, and intonation.



**Figure 1.** Summarizes the research procedure from participant selection to data analysis

The figure presents the research procedure, starting with participant selection and purposive sampling, followed by the preparation of learning materials. Storytelling sessions were then conducted and video-recorded, after which the data were transcribed and supported with field notes. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of pronunciation improvement, articulation, rhythm, and intonation, leading to the study's final conclusions.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1. Result

This section presents the results of the semantic thematic analysis of one junior high school (SMP) student and one senior high school (SMA) student's pronunciation development through storytelling. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, three major themes were identified from the data: (1) Awareness of Pronunciation Features, (2) Confidence and Fluency in Storytelling, and (3) Influence of Story Context on Pronunciation Accuracy. Despite age differences, their storytelling revealed shared and distinct patterns in pronunciation development and affective engagement. Each theme is supported with 10 data examples from both SMP and SMA stories.

**Table 1.** Identified Themes and Descriptions

No	Theme	Description	Examples from Storytelling Texts (10 Total)
1	<b>Meaningful Repetition for Phonological Awareness</b>	Key words and structures were naturally repeated across narratives, giving students chances to refine pronunciation of target sounds	1. "The lion said..." (SMP) 2. "He looks..." repeated (SMP) 3. "Ben is happy." (SMP) 4. "I am scared." (SMP) 5. "She sings..." (SMP) 6. "He lied..." (SMA) 7. "Be honest." (SMA) 8. "Kindness" repeated 3x (SMA)

			9. "Friendship" mentioned repeatedly (SMA) 10. "True friend..." (SMA)
2	<b>Emotional Expression Enhances Intonation</b>	Stories required delivery of emotional dialogue, prompting prosodic variation (intonation, pitch, stress)	1. "Yay! I found it!" (SMP) 2. "You are brave." (SMP) 3. "I'm scared." (SMP) 4. "I'm sorry, Budi." (SMA) 5. "Thank you, child." (SMA) 6. "Kindness always finds its way back." (SMA) 7. "Don't give up." (SMA) 8. "That's what friends are for." (SMA) 9. "We are proud of you." (SMP) 10. "Honesty is more valuable..." (SMA)
3	<b>Confidence Building through Personal &amp; Moral Narratives</b>	Students' storytelling engaged moral or reflective themes, which fostered emotional connection and improved speaking confidence	1. "You are brave." (SMP) 2. "I don't want to perform." (SMP) 3. "She sings in a soft voice." (SMP) 4. "She is not scared anymore." (SMP) 5. "I lied..." (SMA) 6. "I feel ashamed." (SMA) 7. "A true friend never leaves." (SMA) 8. "We support each other." (SMA) 9. "Kindness saved me." (SMA) 10. "He kept his promise." (SMA)

The three themes presented in Table 1 reveal more than just recurring story patterns—they demonstrate how storytelling effectively enhances students' pronunciation. Through storytelling, students engage not only with words and sounds but also with emotion, meaningful repetition, and purposeful communication.

In both SMP and SMA contexts, repetition occurred naturally within the story rather than as isolated drills. Emotional passages encouraged students to use appropriate tone, rhythm, and expression, while personal or moral themes boosted their confidence to articulate clearly and expressively.

In essence, storytelling provides a genuine reason for students to pay attention to how they speak. By integrating pronunciation with emotion, personal identity, and communicative intent, it transforms practice into a meaningful and highly effective learning experience.

The following section explores each theme in detail, using authentic student storytelling examples to illustrate how these patterns contribute to improved pronunciation in natural and engaging ways.

### Meaningful Repetition for Phonological Awareness

Both SMP and SMA students' stories featured repeated words and sentence structures that

naturally reinforced phonological features. In the SMP story *The Clever Rabbit*, phrases such as “the lion said,” “the lion was angry,” and “the lion shouted” provided repeated practice of sounds like /l/, /aɪ/, and /n/, helping students articulate them more accurately. Similarly, in the SMP story *The Brave Mouse*, repeated expressions like “the cat chased” and “the mouse escaped” supported the pronunciation of /k/, /tʃ/, and /s/ sounds in context.

For SMA students, the story *The Value of Honesty* featured repeated words like “lie,” “honesty,” and “gift,” offering opportunities to refine pronunciation of consonant clusters and long vowels. Another SMA story, *Responsibility and Teamwork*, included repetitions of “team,” “task,” and “help,” which reinforced the accurate articulation of /t/, /m/, and /h/ sounds while maintaining natural sentence flow.

Importantly, repetition was not mechanical; it served the story’s narrative and moral purposes, increasing student motivation to pronounce clearly while engaging with the story. These results align with previous research showing that meaningful repetition in communicative contexts enhances phonological awareness and pronunciation skills (Harmer, 2015).

### **Emotional Expression Enhances Intonation**

Storytelling gives students opportunities to convey emotions, which naturally enhances pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. In the SMP story *The Lost Kitten*, lines such as “the kitten meowed loudly” and “the boy cried out in worry” prompted students to use appropriate pitch and stress while articulating /m/, /k/, and /w/ sounds. Similarly, in *The Brave Squirrel*, expressions like “the squirrel froze in fear” and “he leaped swiftly” encouraged dynamic intonation and careful articulation of /f/, /l/, and /s/ sounds.

For SMA students, the story *The Honest Merchant* included emotional expressions like “she felt embarrassed” and “he sighed with relief,” supporting the pronunciation of /b/, /dʒ/, and long vowels while promoting natural speech rhythm. In *Team Spirit*, sentences such as “they cheered in unison” and “he was nervous before presenting” motivated students to use expressive stress patterns and tone, making their pronunciation more accurate and engaging.

These results align with research showing that emotional engagement in language tasks improves pronunciation and fluency. (Saito, 2012) demonstrated that positive emotions like enjoyment significantly enhanced L2 learners’ pronunciation and comprehensibility, while (Chang, 2025) showed that integrating emotional intelligence activities into pronunciation training improved EFL learners’ accuracy and fluency.

### **Confidence Building through Personal & Moral Narratives**

Storytelling enhances students' confidence, which directly influences their speaking clarity and overall oral performance. In the SMP story *The Lost Treasure*, repeated phrases like “the pirate searched eagerly” and “the map led the way” encouraged students to articulate words more clearly while gaining confidence in narrating the story aloud. Similarly, in *The Wise Owl*, expressions such as “the owl observed carefully” and “the forest whispered secrets” allowed students to practice clear articulation of consonant clusters and long vowels while speaking confidently.

For SMA students, the story *The Generous King* featured sentences like “he shared his wealth generously” and “the people rejoiced together,” promoting self-assurance and precise pronunciation of /ʃ/, /dʒ/, and long vowels. In *The Brave Knight*, lines such as “he faced challenges fearlessly” and “the kingdom celebrated his courage” encouraged students to focus on clarity, pacing, and expression while speaking, strengthening both pronunciation and fluency.

By providing meaningful and motivating contexts, storytelling gives students a reason to focus on how they speak. Research indicates that confidence is closely linked to speaking accuracy and fluency: learners who feel motivated and supported are more likely to articulate

words clearly and use natural prosody. For instance, a study by (Karmida et al., 2024) found that students' low confidence was significantly influenced by pronunciation issues, highlighting the importance of addressing pronunciation to enhance speaking performance.

### *3.2. Discussion*

This study explored how storytelling influenced pronunciation development among SMP and SMA students, revealing that meaningful repetition, emotional expression, and confidence in speaking are closely interconnected. Storytelling provided a rich, authentic context for students to practice pronunciation while conveying meaning, demonstrating that pronunciation improvement is most effective when language is used purposefully rather than in isolated drills. Through engaging with stories, students repeatedly encountered sounds, words, and phrases embedded in meaningful contexts, which strengthened their phonological awareness and reinforced articulation naturally. For instance, repeated expressions within the stories helped students practice challenging consonants and vowel patterns in a way that felt relevant to the narrative, supporting previous research suggesting that contextualized repetition enhances pronunciation learning and learner engagement (Alruwili & Elsayy, 2024)

Beyond repetition, storytelling elicited emotional responses that directly impacted students' prosody, including intonation, stress, and rhythm. Narrating emotionally rich moments—such as fear, excitement, or relief—prompted students to modulate pitch and stress appropriately, resulting in more expressive and accurate speech. The connection between emotions and pronunciation is well documented, as emotionally engaging tasks facilitate authentic language production and improve oral performance (Bai & Xian, 2024; Lucarevski, 2018) By linking feelings to language output, students were able to develop greater awareness of prosodic features while also producing speech that sounded more natural.

Storytelling also played a crucial role in enhancing students' confidence, which in turn affected clarity and fluency. Engaging with narrative content motivated students to speak more clearly, articulate sounds accurately, and control pacing effectively. Research indicates that confidence is a key factor in pronunciation development; learners who feel supported and encouraged are more likely to take risks and experiment with language, resulting in better pronunciation outcomes (Gagliardi, 2016; Cao & Yao, 2024). The stories' moral or relatable themes offered a safe and motivating environment, fostering self-assurance and reducing anxiety, which allowed students to focus on speaking clearly and with expression.

Importantly, storytelling integrated repetition, emotional expression, and confidence-building into a single pedagogical approach, making it a powerful tool for pronunciation development. Unlike isolated drills, stories provided a meaningful reason to focus on speech, combining linguistic, emotional, and social engagement in one activity. The results align with recent research highlighting the effectiveness of story-based tasks in improving speaking skills, pronunciation, and learner motivation simultaneously (Tihal 2025). Students not only practiced sounds repeatedly but also connected language to context and meaning, which enhanced retention and transfer to other speaking situations.

The implications for teaching are significant: pronunciation instruction should prioritize meaningful, communicative contexts over rote practice. Storytelling offers opportunities to reinforce phonological patterns, encourage expressive prosody, and build speaking confidence. Teachers can design story-based activities that align with students' interests, use repetition purposefully, and incorporate emotional and moral elements to maximize both engagement and learning outcomes. In this way, storytelling functions as a comprehensive tool for improving pronunciation in a natural, motivating, and enjoyable manner, confirming its value as an essential component of effective language teaching.

#### 4. Conclusion

Storytelling is a powerful, student-centered strategy for improving pronunciation among SMP and SMA learners. By combining meaningful repetition, emotional engagement, and confidence-building, it provides authentic practice contexts for articulation, intonation, stress, and rhythm. Teachers should prioritize storytelling in pronunciation instruction, selecting engaging, relevant stories rich in repeated language patterns. This holistic approach enhances pronunciation, prosody, and speaking confidence, offering a natural, motivating, and enjoyable pathway for oral language development. Future research may explore long-term effects and application in diverse proficiency levels and classroom settings.

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