

The Effectiveness of Storytelling in Improving Speaking Skills of Junior High School Students

Femi Pakpahan¹, Lulu Sadira², Naurah Syifah³, Setiawan Jodi⁴, Erdo Panjaitan⁵, Wiwiek Meisuri⁶

Faculty of Language and Art, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: femipakpahan198@gmail.com

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ABSTRAK

Berbicara adalah salah satu keterampilan yang paling menantang bagi siswa sekolah menengah pertama karena memerlukan kelancaran, ketepatan pengucapan, kepercayaan diri, dan komunikasi ekspresif. Banyak siswa mengalami kesulitan berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris karena kurangnya paparan, takut melakukan kesalahan, dan metode pembelajaran yang kurang menarik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas storytelling dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa kelas VIII, khususnya dalam hal pengucapan, kelancaran, kepercayaan diri, dan ekspresi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan 20 siswa kelas VIII dengan pengalaman berbicara bahasa Inggris yang terbatas, yang mengikuti program storytelling selama lima hari dalam kelompok kecil dengan bimbingan tutor. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi sebelum dan sesudah program, rekaman video, serta refleksi siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa storytelling secara signifikan meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa, membuat mereka lebih lancar, percaya diri, dan ekspresif. Awalnya, siswa menunjukkan keraguan dan kesulitan dalam pengucapan, tetapi pada sesi terakhir, mereka berbicara lebih jelas, alami, dan menggunakan bahasa tubuh yang ekspresif. Interaksi dengan teman sebaya dan dukungan tutor berperan penting dalam meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa serta mengurangi kecemasan mereka. Storytelling perlu diintegrasikan

dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai metode yang interaktif dan efektif, dengan penelitian lebih lanjut untuk mengeksplorasi dampak jangka panjangnya serta efektivitasnya dibandingkan metode lainnya.

ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills for junior high school students, requiring fluency, pronunciation accuracy, confidence, and expressive communication. Many students struggle with speaking English due to limited exposure, fear of making mistakes, and lack of engaging learning methods. This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of storytelling in improving the speaking skills of eighth-grade students, particularly in terms of pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and expressive delivery. Using a qualitative research approach, this study involved 20 eighth-grade students with limited English-speaking experience who participated in a five-day storytelling program, where they practised speaking in small groups guided by tutors. Data were collected through pre- and post-observations, video recordings, and student reflections. The results indicate that storytelling significantly improved students' speaking abilities, as they became more fluent, confident, and expressive in their storytelling performances. Initially, students exhibited hesitation and struggled with pronunciation, but by the final session, they demonstrated greater clarity, natural fluency, and expressive body language. Peer collaboration and tutor support were crucial in fostering students' engagement and reducing anxiety. Despite some early challenges, students found storytelling enjoyable and beneficial for their speaking development. These findings suggest that storytelling should be integrated into English learning as an interactive and effective method to improve students' oral communication skills, with further research needed to explore its long-term impact and effectiveness compared to other speaking-based teaching methods.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) has become a significant focus on education, particularly at the junior high school level. In this era of globalization, the ability to communicate in English is an essential skill that supports academic and professional success. However, many junior high school students struggle to develop their speaking skills due to limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and a lack of confidence in communication. Additionally, language learning methods that still focus on grammar and written exercises often fail to provide students with sufficient opportunities to practice speaking actively. Therefore, an innovative approach to teaching English is needed to help students overcome these barriers and improve their speaking skills. One method that has been proven effective in enhancing communication skills is storytelling, where students learn to speak more naturally, enjoyably, and interactively.

Speaking is one of the primary language skills that allows individuals to convey ideas, emotions, and information verbally. This skill is not merely about pronouncing words; it also involves linguistic aspects such as accurate pronunciation, proper grammar structures, a broad vocabulary, and fluency in constructing spontaneous sentences. According to Goh and Burns (2012), speaking is a complex cognitive and social process in which language learners must simultaneously integrate various components to communicate effectively. Speaking proficiency also highly depends on confidence and fluency in real-life communication situations. In a globalized world, the ability to speak English is becoming increasingly important, particularly as it serves as a lingua franca in academic, professional, and social contexts. Therefore, language education should prioritize speaking skills to ensure students can communicate fluently and confidently.

In second language acquisition, speaking is often regarded as the most challenging skill for students to master. This difficulty arises from the need for real-time language processing, appropriate vocabulary selection, and the correct application of grammatical structures. Additionally, speaking involves non-verbal aspects such as facial expressions, gestures, and intonation, which enhance the conveyed meaning. Richards (2015) emphasizes that speaking fluency is one of the key indicators of language learning success, as it reflects the extent to which learners can engage in spontaneous and effective interactions. Furthermore, in the educational domain, speaking skills play a crucial role in academic presentations, group discussions, and interpersonal communication. However, many students struggle with speaking English due to psychological factors such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Therefore, effective and innovative teaching methods are needed to help students build confidence and acquire the necessary skills to communicate successfully.

Storytelling has become one of the most widely recognized teaching methods in language education over the past decade. In the context of English learning, storytelling provides students with a meaningful experience, as they are not only required to listen and understand the story but also to retell it with appropriate expressions. According to Cameron (2016), storytelling in language teaching enhances speaking skills because it encourages students to use language naturally in an engaging and enjoyable way. Additionally,

storytelling helps students develop fluency, intonation, and expressive skills, which are essential for effective communication. Compared to traditional methods that focus more on grammar and vocabulary memorization, storytelling allows students to think critically, use their imagination, and apply language in a more authentic setting. Thus, storytelling not only improves speaking skills but also helps students gain a deeper and more contextualized understanding of language structures.

Various studies indicate that junior high school students face numerous challenges in developing their speaking skills in English. Data from different sources show that approximately 72% of students experience anxiety when speaking English due to fear of making mistakes or receiving negative judgments from peers (Wijaya & Hartono, 2021). Additionally, research by Ahmad and Suryani (2020) found that 65% of students struggle with pronunciation, particularly with phonemes that do not exist in their native language, making them less confident in speaking. Limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge also pose significant obstacles, with a report from the Indonesian Ministry of Education (2019) indicating that 58% of junior high school students have a restricted vocabulary, preventing them from constructing meaningful and communicative sentences. A classroom observation study conducted by Setiawan (2022) further revealed that 80% of students do not receive sufficient opportunities to practice speaking in their English lessons, as most activities focus more on reading and writing rather than oral communication. Given these challenges, innovative teaching methods such as storytelling have been proposed as an effective strategy to enhance students' speaking skills. Storytelling provides a natural and engaging context for students to practice pronunciation, intonation, and fluency while simultaneously building their confidence in verbal communication.

The Elements of Speaking

Speaking is a complex skill that involves several key components (Brown, 2019):

- a) Pronunciation - Ensures intelligibility and reduces misunderstandings (Derwing & Munro, 2015).
- b) Fluency - Enables smooth, natural speech without hesitation (Harmer, 2020).
- c) Grammar and Vocabulary - Help structure clear and meaningful communication (Nation & Newton, 2021).
- d) Intonation and Stress - Aid in expressing meaning effectively (Celce-Murcia et al., 2018).
- e) Confidence and Interaction - Overcome anxiety and improve communication (Dörnyei, 2016).

The Elements of Storytelling

Storytelling enhances speaking skills through various elements (Wright, 2020):

- a) Narrative Structure - Helps students organize thoughts logically (Thornbury, 2017).
- b) Character and Emotion - Improve fluency and pronunciation through expressive delivery (Lazar, 2019).
- c) Engagement and Imagination - Encourage creativity and active participation (Ghosn, 2018).
- d) Repetition and Reinforcement - Strengthen language retention and confidence (Ellis, 2021).

- e) Multimodal Aspects – Incorporate gestures, facial expressions, and voice modulation for effective storytelling (Mayer, 2022).

Storytelling integrates linguistic, cognitive, and social elements, making it an effective method for improving students' speaking skills in language learning.

Based on the background and the role of storytelling in language learning, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of storytelling in improving the speaking skills of junior high school students. The primary objectives of this research are as follows: (1) To evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing students' pronunciation and intonation. (2) To analyze the impact of storytelling on students' confidence in speaking English. (3) To determine the extent to which storytelling can improve students' fluency and expressive speaking skills. (4) To explore students' perceptions of storytelling as a language learning strategy. Through this research, it is hoped that storytelling can be more widely implemented in English language learning to help students develop better speaking skills.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with an observational approach to examine the effectiveness of storytelling in improving junior high school students' speaking skills. The research was conducted over a five-day storytelling program, where students' progress was monitored through pre- and postobservations, video recordings, and student feedback. The participants consisted of 20 eighth-grade students with limited English-speaking experience, who were divided into small groups, each guided by a tutor to ensure personalized feedback and targeted support. Their language proficiency ranged from beginner to lowerintermediate, and their progress was assessed based on pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and expressive skills. Data collection methods included pre- and poststorytelling observations to evaluate improvements in speaking ability, video recordings to analyze intonation, body language, and clarity, as well as tutor and peer feedback to encourage collaborative learning. Additionally, student reflections were gathered through questionnaires and discussions to provide qualitative insights into their learning experiences. Thematic analysis was used to compare pre- and postprogram data, identifying patterns of improvement and highlighting increased confidence, fluency, and enjoyment of storytelling as an effective learning method. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, including obtaining school permission, securing parental consent, maintaining student confidentiality, and ensuring voluntary participation, where students could withdraw at any time without consequences.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study indicate that the implementation of storytelling as a language-learning strategy had a significant impact on students' speaking skills. The observations, video recordings, and feedback from both students and tutors demonstrated notable improvements in pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and expressive delivery. While challenges were encountered in the early stages, continuous practice and engagement in storytelling sessions contributed to the students' ability to overcome these obstacles and develop stronger speaking proficiency.

At the beginning of the program, many students exhibited hesitation and anxiety when speaking English. They were reluctant to stand in front of their peers, and their speech was characterized by frequent pauses, unclear pronunciation, and a lack of expressive intonation. Most students relied heavily on reading their scripts rather than delivering their stories naturally. These initial difficulties were anticipated, as previous studies have shown that speaking anxiety is a common issue among ESL learners, particularly those with limited exposure to spoken English (Wijaya & Hartono, 2021). However, as the storytelling sessions progressed, students gradually became more confident and engaged.

One of the most evident improvements was seen in pronunciation and fluency. During the early sessions, students struggled with correctly pronouncing certain English words, particularly those containing unfamiliar phonemes. Their speech was often interrupted by pauses as they attempted to recall words or correct their pronunciation. However, by Day 3, after intensive pronunciation and intonation training, students exhibited greater clarity in speech. Video recordings showed that by the final session on Day 5, most students spoke with significantly improved pronunciation and fewer hesitations. These findings align with previous research suggesting that continuous exposure to spoken language, particularly through engaging methods like storytelling, enhances pronunciation and fluency (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

In addition to pronunciation and fluency, confidence played a crucial role in students' progress. At the start of the program, several students displayed signs of nervousness, such as avoiding eye contact, speaking softly, or relying on their scripts. However, as they participated in group storytelling exercises and received encouragement from tutors and peers, they gradually became more comfortable speaking in front of others. By Day 5, students were delivering their stories with greater vocal projection and expressive gestures, indicating increased self-assurance. This aligns with findings by Dörnyei (2016), who emphasized that confidencebuilding activities, such as storytelling, help reduce language anxiety and encourage spontaneous speech production.

Furthermore, body language and expression were essential elements that contributed to the effectiveness of students' storytelling. Initially, most students spoke in a monotone voice with minimal gestures, making their storytelling less engaging. However, as they observed their tutors and practiced expressive delivery, their performances improved dramatically. By the final session, students were incorporating appropriate facial expressions, hand movements, and voice modulation, making their storytelling more engaging and natural. These results confirm that multimodal aspects of communication—such as gestures and facial expressions—enhance language learning by reinforcing meaning and making speech more dynamic (Mayer, 2022).

Another key finding from this study was the role of peer interaction and tutor support in facilitating students' speaking development. Working in small groups with dedicated tutors allowed students to receive personalized feedback and guided practice, which proved beneficial in addressing individual weaknesses. Peer evaluations also played a significant role, as students learned not only from tutors but also from their classmates. Many students reported that watching and listening to their peers' storytelling performances motivated them to improve their own skills. These findings support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in language development (Vygotsky, 1978).

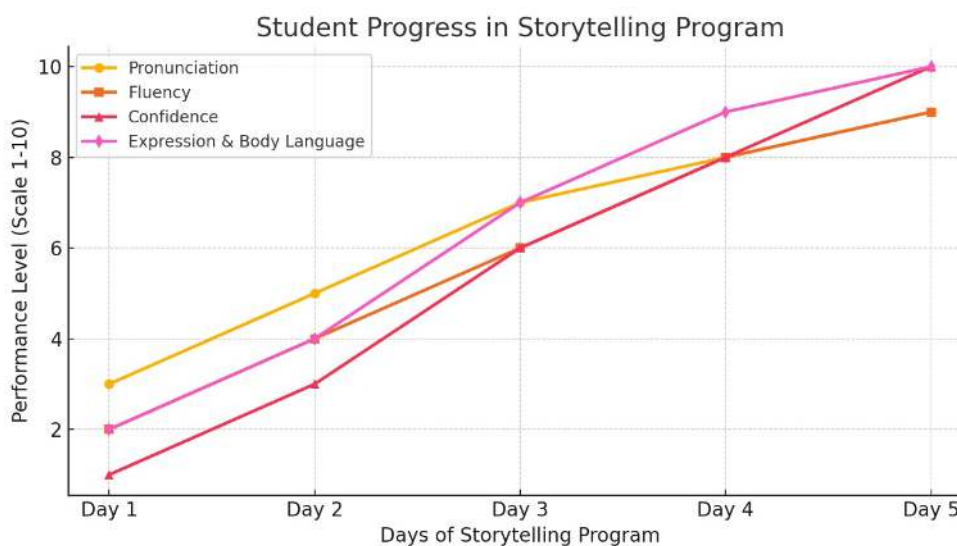
While the overall impact of storytelling on speaking skills was highly positive, certain challenges were observed throughout the program. One of the primary challenges was students' initial reluctance to speak in English. Some students lacked the vocabulary needed to fully express themselves, leading to moments of hesitation. This challenge was gradually overcome by incorporating interactive vocabulary-building activities into the storytelling sessions. Another difficulty was time constraints; although students showed significant progress within five days, a longer duration might have resulted in even greater improvements in spontaneous speech and storytelling creativity.

Despite these challenges, the majority of students responded positively to the storytelling approach, expressing that it made learning English more enjoyable and engaging. Several students mentioned that traditional speaking exercises felt repetitive and intimidating, whereas storytelling provided a natural, fun, and meaningful context for language use. Their positive experiences are consistent with previous studies that highlight the motivational benefits of storytelling in ESL learning (Ghosn, 2018).

Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that storytelling is an effective method for improving students' speaking skills. The combination of structured storytelling training, tutor guidance, and peer interaction contributed to increased pronunciation accuracy, fluency, confidence, and expressive communication. These findings suggest that integrating storytelling into ESL curricula could be highly beneficial for language learners, particularly those who struggle with speaking anxiety or lack exposure to spoken English. Future research could explore the longterm effects of storytelling on speaking proficiency and investigate how digital storytelling tools can further enhance learning experiences.

Student Progress Diagram

The following diagram visually represents student progress from Day 1 to Day 5 based on four key aspects: Pronunciation, Fluency, Confidence, and Body Language & Expression.



The diagram illustrates the steady improvement of students' speaking skills throughout the five-day storytelling program. On Day 1, students exhibited low confidence (1/10) and

fluency (2/10), with noticeable hesitation and difficulty pronouncing words correctly (pronunciation: 3/10). Their body language and expressions were minimal (2/10), showing a lack of engagement in storytelling. By Day 2 and Day 3, there was significant progress as students gained more confidence (6/10) and began speaking with better pronunciation (7/10) and fluency (6/10). Their ability to express emotions through facial expressions and gestures also improved (7/10 on Day 3). By Day 4, most students spoke more smoothly (fluency: 8/10) and projected their voices with confidence (confidence: 8/10). Finally, on Day 5, all students demonstrated strong fluency (9/10), confidence (10/10), and expressive storytelling (10/10), showing significant growth in their speaking abilities. The consistent upward trend in the graph indicates that storytelling is an effective method for enhancing students' speaking skills, particularly in terms of fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and expressive delivery.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that storytelling is an effective method for improving the speaking skills of eighth-grade students. Over five sessions, students showed significant improvements in pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and expressive communication. Initially, many students were hesitant to speak, but with continued practice, they became more fluent and expressive. Pronunciation improved through guided practice, and confidence increased as students engaged in group storytelling activities.

The role of peer interaction and tutor support was crucial in fostering students' progress. Learning in small groups allowed students to gain personalized feedback and build confidence through collaborative storytelling exercises. Additionally, body language and expression became more natural as students practiced storytelling techniques. While the overall impact was positive, some challenges were observed, such as initial nervousness and vocabulary limitations. However, by the end of the program, students overcame these difficulties through structured practice and feedback. Although the five-day program was effective, a longer duration might have allowed for even greater development of spontaneous speaking skills.

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