

Voices Through Stories: Exploring the Implementation of Storytelling Method in EFL Speaking Classroom in Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose: Speaking skill is an integral part of language learning, yet many students face speaking difficulties, including language anxiety, negative expectations, and lack of motivation. These issues hinder vocabulary retention, slow speaking progress, and lead to insecurity. This study aims to examine students' perceptions of storytelling as a method to improve speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms.

Methodology: This research employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews and direct observation during storytelling activities as primary data collection methods. The data were analyzed using two theoretical frameworks: the cognitive theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, which integrates cognition with perceptual and motor experiences; and Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis theory to construct the conceptual framework. Secondary data were also obtained from journals and articles.

Results: The findings revealed that students showed noticeable improvement in their speaking skills after participating in storytelling activities. They engaged enthusiastically and demonstrated increased confidence and vocabulary use. Storytelling was also found to be an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing speaking skills.

Applications/Originality/Value: This research provides valuable insights for future studies in EFL teaching strategies, particularly in the use of storytelling. It also offers practical implications for teachers to adopt storytelling as a method to evaluate and improve students' English-speaking abilities.

Introduction

Speaking skill belongs to one of the essential skills in the integrated view of English, besides listening, reading, and writing skills (Simbolon et.al, 2018). Having knowledges in tenses, vocabularies, grammars, or adjectives are quite significant for enhancing speaking skill. Students who learn English need to practice and study more as the effort for obtaining knowledges, skills, abilities, or new perspectives which are necessary for daily life (Festiawan, 2020). Those values will be useful for enriching the capacity of speaking, while speaking is the second skill that an individual must perform after listening skill (Apriliyana, 2020), in this case, english speaking skill.

However, recently the skill of speaking becomes lagging behind, due to several causes. The most two major causes are language anxiety and negative expectation (Fauzi et al., 2022). The language anxiety leads a speaker into nervousness which can cause decreasing overall language proficiency, reducing the speaker motivations, and encouraging a lack of participation in activities which promote a focus on speaking (Lastiri, 2023). Meanwhile, the negative expectation actually a fear of having negative evaluation from the audiences (Azzahra, 2022). The speakers sometimes expect themselves to be perfect foreign speakers, on the other hand, they are afraid of receiving negative evaluation from others such as mockery. This negative expectation usually occurs in any circumstances, whether it is formal or informal presentation. Another cause is the lack of motivation which can lead the students into insecurities (Meutia et al., 2020). The lack of motivation rises when students are conscious of the lack of vocabularies and material understanding.

Nevertheless, the motivation of learning somehow wanes when it comes to speaking skill – in this context, English speaking skill. The waning of the motivation is caused by those three causes mentioned before: the language anxiety, the negative expectation, and the lack of motivation. To overcome this problem, Researcher conduct a storytelling activity as a method of learning for untangling the decreasing of the students' speaking skill in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Putri Aisyiyah. Since storytelling has several components such as emotion, expression, social influences, communication, and audience attraction (McDowell, 2021), from my point of view, it will overcome the existing problems in students' speaking skill. Storytelling is considered as the suitable method to improve the speaking skill of students in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Putri Aisyiyah, since stories have regarding memorability and deriving emotions (Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, 2019).

Storytelling is engaging, creative, and inspiring, therefore it can be worthwhile as a pedagogical approach when it is used properly. In short, storytelling can be used in many different ways to support teaching and learning as long as it is proper.

It can intensify the communication, imagination, and cooperation (Kisyanto, 2022). Storytelling can be an important form of pedagogy, regarding to the systematic structure, the preparation of the material, and the message delivered while communicating (USMA, 2018). Storytelling has a place in professional education; it fills the gap between the codified professional knowledge and rapidly-changing current circumstances.

Several previous researches have analyzed the storytelling activity as a method to enhance students' speaking skill. The activity varies from several different methods. Handrayani in her research has stated that storytelling is used as a method to improve students speaking skills; to practice intonation, to arrange sentences, to build courage, and to develop motivation (Handrayani, 2022). Together with Handrayani's research, Faruq and Fariyatul say that in improving speaking skill of students, storytelling can be use as the method, eventhough it is in the pandemic era, the technology can be useful as the helpful device (Faruq & Fahyuni, 2022). The technology is also used for enhancing students speaking skill by developing e-books based on multimodal digital storytelling (Amelia, Handayani, & Pratama, 2024). The effectiveness of storytelling as a method to improve students speaking skill then is proved quantitatively by Rizky and Suharmoko by observing the practice of students speaking and evaluate it. It resultes in numbers and percentages so researchers in the future will acknowledge the capacity of storytelling in improving speaking skill easily, that storytelling is effective to enhance students speaking skill: proved by numbers (Rizky & Suharmoko, 2019).

However, those researchers state nothing about the specific theory or concept used where theory is an important thing: a theory or concept will be useful as a knife to dissect the data. Theory provides both a framework for critically understanding a phenomena and a basis for considering how what is unknown can be organized (Benetti, 2009). This research fills the gap: Researchers use a theory of cognitive by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson which it is said that cognitive science is the scientific discipline that studies conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). This theory will be helpful to analyze the response of the students, and the enthusiasm they show when storytelling activity is in doing. The gap Researcher fill will be helpful for the students to find several moral story about characters and good deeds (Dewi & Nani, 2020) while they imitate the main character's good deeds simultaneously.

This research's objective is to examine the students' perception of storytelling in English for Foreign Language (EFL) speaking classroom activity in MTS Putri Aisyiyah Palu: how does it work? Is it effective in improving speaking skill? How is the students' response? Researchers hope this research is able to make a significant contribution to understanding the effectiveness of storytelling as the learning material in EFL speaking classroom activity.

Method

This research took place in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Putri Aisyiyah in Palu – the capital city of Central Sulawesi Province which was built in 2006 as a school that only receives female students. This research examines a program called storytelling as a new program in MTS Putri Aisyiyah Palu – the teachers never used this method before – and understand the reasons for this implementation success and make a recommendation. The story used in the storytelling activity in this research is *Aesop's Fable: The Crow and The Pitcher*. This story originated from Greece. This story has several moral values, such as teaching thoughtfulness and self-determination. In other parts of the world, this story is known as The Thirsty Crow. This research is qualitative research which analyzes data using descriptive text. Six students were involved in a semi structured interview. The duration of the interview was 30 minutes for each student. The interviews go with three questions: Do they enjoy the storytelling? Do they experience the benefits of storytelling in enhancing their speaking skill? Do they find any obstacles? Meanwhile, researcher also observed their discipline in the process of storytelling, including their material readiness.

Using various data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and speaking ability tests. In addition to observing the learning process, researchers can also conduct interviews with students to gain a more in-depth perspective. Using multiple data sources such as students, teachers, and class notes. By collecting data from multiple sources, researchers can compare and confirm their findings. Member check is the process of confirming findings with research participants. Researchers can share interim results with students and teachers to ensure that the researcher's interpretation matches their experience. After analyzing the interview data, researchers can return to the participants to confirm whether their interpretation of the data is accurate. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in data.

In collecting the data, researcher tried to build a conceptual framework finding the key factors, constructions, and variables and finding the relationship among them. As the data collection proceeds, further data condensation is done: writing summaries, coding, developing themes, generating categories, and writing analytical text. This process continues until the final report is completed (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Data analysis process then was conducted in three stages:

- Data condensation, which is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, summarizing, and transforming data, simplifying, summarizing, and transforming raw data. Some also use the word data reduction to refer to this stage.
- Displaying data that has been summarized into a form to help draw conclusions.

- Drawing and verifying conclusions, which is the process of summarizing the results of the research while verifying the conclusions that have been drawn. Research results and verifying that the conclusions are supported by the data that has been collected and analyzed.

The theory used to analyze the students' response is cognitive science by Lakoff and Johnson who state that cognitive science is the scientific discipline that studies conceptual systems. This theory is found in the 70s and used to understand people through which they are mostly unconscious under cognitive awareness. For example when people are in a conversation, unawaresly, they assigning a structure to the sentence in accord with the vast number of grammatical construction in their native language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). This concept will be useful to analyzing the unconsciousness of the students where they try to speak and retell a story, simultaneously they try to build better grammar and enrich their vocabularies.

Students' Behaviour in Storytelling Implementation

Students' enthusiasm

Observations made in grades 7, 8, and 9 at MTs Putri Aisyiyah Palu revealed various dynamics in the storytelling program. In grade 7, it was observed that students showed high interest and strong enthusiasm for the program. They were actively involved in the storytelling sessions, with many students showing a deep interest in the stories told. This student engagement was reflected in their participation in discussions, questions and positive responses to the material presented. The students in grade 7 also demonstrated the ability to use their imaginations creatively in responding to the stories, thus creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Meanwhile, in grade 8, although there was a slight decrease in students' level of interest and enthusiasm compared to grade 7, they still showed a relatively good level of participation. Students showed sufficient interest in the storytelling sessions, although not as intense as grade 7. They still actively participated in discussions and showed interest in the content of the stories. Although there was a slight decrease in enthusiasm, there was still positive engagement from most students. On the other hand, in Grade 9, observations showed a significant decline in students' interest and enthusiasm for the storytelling program. Some students showed a lack of interest and enthusiasm during the session, which was reflected in low participation and lack of response to the material presented. While not all students showed low levels of interest, there were some students who showed a lack of engagement in the storytelling activities. This may be due to factors such as boredom, mismatch of the material with students' interests, or lack of variety in the learning approach.

Students' discipline

The discipline shown by the students are various: grade 7 students present good discipline by presenting active participation in the class. The students in grade 8 present consistent participations by giving not-too-active responses, but still participate rather orderly. Meanwhile, the students of grade 9 present less discipline by misunderstanding the rules in the process of storytelling worse than students in grade 7 or 8. They seem uninterested with the story and they fail to keep their focus in the class and make more noise than students in grade 7 or 8. Observations of discipline in the implementation of the storytelling program at MTs Putri Aisyiyah Palu showed variations between grades 7, 8, and 9. Grade 7 showed an adequate level of discipline, with most students showing fairly good participation although there were some who were less focused. In grade 8, the level of discipline was fairly consistent, although there were some students who were somewhat less orderly, but it did not significantly disrupt the program. Meanwhile, in Grade 9, discipline was very good, with most students showing high participation and maintaining their concentration well, without any significant disruptions. They seem to really understand the importance of following the rules that have been set during the storytelling program.

Students' preparation

The preparation from grade 7 students shows that they are well-prepared. They prepare themselves the material that they want to bring into the discussion. The students of grade 8 show quite good preparation before the storytelling starts, although there are several students who are not fully ready. The students in grade 9 present the less satisfied preparation: some students are not ready yet with the material and in my opinion, they still need more guidance in finishing their preparation. The results of the observation of the readiness of the storytelling program material at MTs Putri Aisyiyah Palu showed differences between grades 7, 8, and 9. Grade 7 showed a fairly good level of material readiness, with most students having prepared the material well before the implementation of the program. Grade 8 showed a moderate level of readiness, where most students had prepared the material, but there were still some students who were not fully prepared. While grade 9 showed an unsatisfactory level of readiness, with most students not preparing the materials well and still requiring additional guidance to complete their preparation.

Students' participation

In short, students of grade 7 present themselves in a good way by actively speaking and trying to overcome their problems with language. The students of grade 8 show their less participation by unwillingly to be involved in the discussion. Several of them do not try to overcome the problem in language such as their anxiety. Furthermore, the students in grade 9 shows quite the same: they look bored with this activity and uninterested and in my point of view, their unwillingness must be caused by some reasons. Observations from grades 7, 8 and 9 at MTs Putri Aisyiyah Palu during the storytelling program showed significant variations in the classroom atmosphere. Grade 7 showed a high level of participation, with students enthusiastically following the story and interacting with the story, but still seemed less willing to be asked to speak or tell stories in front of the class. In Grade 8, the atmosphere was quieter with students focusing more on listening to the story without much verbal interaction. Whereas in grade 9, there were some students who were less interested and more passive in participating in the storytelling program, perhaps due to a lack of interest in the story chosen, and some students still seemed to have low literacy in reading.

Students' perception in storytelling implementation

The data students' perception of storytelling are analyzed by the theory of qualitative data analysis, which it says that I need to build a framework conceptually to find the relationship among the factors, constructions, and variables (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The data gained will be analyzed further to find the conclusion. This qualitative data analysis allows me to specify the data that I need to collect. The categories which need to be analyzed using Miles and Huberman theory due to the students' perception are followed. We interviewed six students, two from each class. With questions: Do you as a student enjoy the continuity of storytelling activities? Do you feel the benefits of storytelling in improving your English speaking skills? Did you experience any difficulties during the storytelling?

Storytelling brings fun and excitement

According to the interview results, the learners give a positive response to this program. According to them, the storytelling method provided is something new in their English speaking learning session, so they get a new experience too. In the learning process, students also revealed that storytelling provides an interesting and entertaining atmosphere, so their interaction with their friends to support each other is also involved here. This is something that builds enthusiasm and confidence in some students so that they appear brave and reduce their fear of speaking and telling stories in front of the class. When they share their stories, it can also strengthen the bond between researchers as teachers and students, as well as between students with each other, thus creating a harmonious learning atmosphere. It also shows that the narrative approach in storytelling not only shows students' interest, because during the program, it is seen that their increased comfort when learning to speak English is accompanied by an element of entertainment in it. The researcher also noticed that learners were more motivated to learn when they were entertained and interested, which had the effect of making them participate actively and enthusiastically in learning to speak English. Through the interviews done to two representative students for each grade, students proclaim that storytelling is fun and exciting. They give a positive response to this activity because in their opinion, storytelling is a new thing in their process of learning.

"eah, I enjoy it because this storytelling activity makes me more interested in getting involved in a conversation" (Student 1)

"I feel delighted with this storytelling activity because it helps me understand materials in a pleasant way" (Student 2)

"This storytelling activity is enjoyed by me because I can study in a good time and enjoy interesting stories" (Student 3)

"Of course I have a favor in storytelling because the stories delivered are interesting and fun" (Student 4)

"Yes I enjoy it because this activity makes me interested and involved more in the english lesson" (Student 5)

"I am really happy with storytelling because it helps me understand the lesson in a fun way" (Student 6)

Storytelling enhances the speaking skill of the student

According to the interview results, students responded that they gained many benefits when the activity took place. From the answers of some students, it shows an increased interest in learning from English. Through storytelling activities, their way of thinking also increased during the material. Some children who feel that they like to tell stories, but still don't like it when they are given orders to speak in front of others due to anxiety or fear. Through this storytelling activity, it actually eliminates this negative thing, because students learn to be confident by enriching vocabulary that they don't know, understanding the sentence structure, so that they are more prepared when speaking.

A sense of skill is encouraged in students in this program. They feel involved because their minds are stimulated to imagine, allowing them to think creatively and create new ideas. Storytelling also impacts students on how to be good listeners. By listening to their friends who are speaking in front, it will also hone their listening skills, thus students will gradually feel they understand what is being discussed. Likewise, the ability to concentrate and focus is also needed here.

Words through the interviews done to two representatives of students for each grade; students proclaim that storytelling is fun and exciting. They give a positive response to this activity because according to their opinion, storytelling is a new thing in their process of learning. They get new experiences when learning how to speak English and they can interact with other friends by speaking English. Students motivate and support each other and it enhances their self confidence, which means they can encounter their language anxiety, the negative expectation, and lack of motivation.

From the interviews, researchers know that they start to enjoy the conversation in English, because the conversation runs in fun and attractive ways. They admit that they have high motivation and self-determination after practicing storytelling. The good impact is that they are willing to learn to speak English actively.

"Yes, storytelling has helped me increase my confidence in speaking English because I am used to expressing my ideas and feelings through stories" (Student 1)

"Of course, through storytelling, I can enhance my English speaking skills in a more natural and fun way." (Student 2)

"Yes, I feel the benefits of storytelling in helping me expand my English vocabulary and expressions" (Student 3)

"It's true, storytelling has made me more skilled at practicing English grammar and sentence structure contextually" (Student 4)

"Very clearly, with storytelling, I can feel an increase in my ability to convey ideas and stories in English more fluently" (Student 5)

"Definitely, storytelling helped me in understanding the nuances of the English language and better ways to convey messages clearly and effectively" (Student 6)

Furthermore, they say that they benefit from storytelling for their speaking skill enhancement. They can increase their critical thinking when the storytelling is in progress. Some students admit that they are uncomfortable when they have to speak in front of the class, then after doing storytelling practice, they enjoy speaking in front of the class. They enrich their vocabularies, understand sentence structures, and enhance their readiness to speak.

Storytelling challenges the students

The students get new experiences when learning how to speak English and they can interact with other friends by speaking English. Students motivate and support each other and it enhances their self confidence, which means they can encounter their language anxiety, the negative expectation, and lack of motivation. From the interviews, I know that they start to enjoy the conversation in English, because the conversation runs in fun and attractive ways. They admit that they have high motivation and self-determination after practicing *The Crow and The Pitcher* storytelling. The good impact is that they are willing to learn to speak English actively.

Even Though storytelling brings some advantages for the students in their speaking skill, storytelling is considered very challenging for the students whenever it is implemented. There are some obstacles which the students need to overcome whenever they do storytelling. From the interview, I acknowledge that the students feel difficult to start storytelling at the beginning because it is totally new experiences for them. They need to think the grammar or vocabularies longer when they want to speak. Some of them are shy and doubt to speak in the front of the class. When I explore more, surprisingly, they never have this experience because they only read, write, and listen in the class. It explains why they are shy and doubt to speak.

Second obstacle is their inability to arrange sentences which makes them difficult to speak, though they have a thousand words to say in their head. It usually happens when someone never practices public speaking. However, the students have to do it for their future, so I encourage them to be brave. They speak stammeringly and nervously and I often help them. Sometimes they speak in a mixed language with Indonesia, then their friends and I help them and encourage them.

Thirdly, they also in expressively speaking because they have limited vocabularies. In the beginning, their participation is rather obstructed because of being shy and afraid. The next obstacle is their pronunciation that is still need to be evaluated more. It is because all this time they only become listeners when English class, so they are lack of practice.

"Of course, sometimes I found it difficult to keep all the students' attention." (Student 1)

"There were moments where I struggled to find the right words to explain certain parts of the story." (Student 2)

"Sometimes, I have difficulty organizing the story time so that it fits the schedule that has been set." (Student 3)

"I also find it difficult when I have to adapt to different levels of understanding among students." (Student 4)

"Especially when there is interference from outside the classroom, such as noise from outside that disturbs students' concentration." (Student 5)

"Sometimes, the lack of response or interaction from friends made it difficult for me to keep the spirit of the story alive." (Student 6)

Discussion

As the students of MTS Putri Aisyiyah Palu are still counted as children, it is better to teach them some moral values to form their habits and sentiments, on the other hand, they need to be taught about kindness and rationality (Lambert, 2011). Therefore, the story used in the storytelling activity in this research is a folklore which a folklore contains moral values that benefit children (Widyahening, 2020). To the response of the students, finding reveals the dynamic variations among grade 7, 8, and 9 in storytelling activity. Grade 7 shows high interest and enthusiasm, grade 8 shows less interest but enough participation, and grade 9 shows significantly less interest and enthusiasm.

The high enthusiasm of the 7th grade students is because their perspectives of life are still simple. After graduating from elementary schools, they have not thought about many assignments and examinations. They are still in an orientation period where they still try to acknowledge more about their school and new friends. The spirit of new students remains there and it makes them interested in storytelling activities as a new experience for them. However, the less interest and enthusiasm is shown by the students of grade 8 and 9 because they are preoccupied with dozens of assignments from their teacher and preparation for the graduation exams for the 9th grade students. Lessons material in grade 8 and 9 are more difficult than grade 7 and it occupies their minds. It causes them to have lower interest in storytelling activity.

The interview from six students reveals that they enjoy the activity of storytelling and feel the beneficials in enhancing the skill of speaking English. However, some students still lack vocabularies which make it difficult to express their words (Maji, Samanhudi, & Mokoagouw, 2022). It becomes the cause of why grade 8 and 9 are less interested with storytelling, besides their business of assignment and other school stuff. It is suitable with the finding from the previous research, that limited vocabularies can cause students to feel that storytelling is ineffective for them, after all this time most students only become listeners in their class.

Research by (Burns, 2009) shows that storytelling can increase student engagement in the learning process. Burns found that students who engaged in storytelling activities more actively participated in class discussions and showed improvements in their speaking ability². This supports the findings of this study that storytelling can create a more interactive and supportive learning environment.

Another study by (Harmer, 2001) also emphasizes the importance of storytelling in language teaching. Harmer states that storytelling can help students develop critical and creative thinking skills, which are very important in language learning. This research shows that storytelling not only improves speaking ability but also helps students in developing other skills relevant to language learning.

Conclusion

The storytelling activity gives fun and excitement through students who participate in the activity. They also get the benefits such as increasing their attractiveness of speaking in front of people and reducing their language anxiety. They consider that storytelling activity is challenging for them since previously they only learn about answering questions from teachers.

After having storytelling activity as the new material for them, they feel challenged to try and be involved in the activity. Besides giving benefits for the students, this research is also useful for teachers evaluation material at MTS Putri Aisyiyah Palu, to further improve students' ability to speak English. This research enables schools to monitor student progress, evaluate teachers effectiveness and measure overall school success. This research helps identify best practices, develop new curricula, and evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs

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