



Using Storytelling to Enhance Speaking Skills at Madrasah Aliyah Sabiilul Muttaqien Sukaraja Nuban

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore how storytelling can enhance students' speaking skills in a madrasah context. Using Classroom Action Research (CAR), the intervention was conducted over four weeks involving 28 tenth-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Sabiilul Muttaqien Sukaraja Nuban, Lampung Timur. Students participated in weekly storytelling activities, including model stories, group practice, and individual performances. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, classroom observations, student reflections, and teacher interviews. The results indicated notable improvements in students' fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. In addition, students demonstrated increased motivation and participation in speaking activities. The study concludes that storytelling is an effective, culturally relevant strategy to support language development and build student confidence in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Speaking Fluency, EFL, Madrasah, Student Engagement.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Speaking is a critical skill in second language acquisition, yet it remains underemphasized in many EFL contexts, particularly in religious schools such as madrasahs. Traditional instruction often prioritises grammar and writing, leaving students with limited opportunities for engaging in authentic oral communication. This study examines how storytelling—an oral tradition deeply rooted in culture—can serve as an engaging and pedagogically powerful method to enhance students' speaking skills.

In the context of Madrasah Aliyah Sabiilul Muttaqien Sukaraja Nuban, East Lampung, these challenges are evident. Students often express anxiety and hesitation when asked to speak in

English, even during simple interactions. Teachers also report difficulties in encouraging students to actively participate in speaking activities. Cultural factors may also play a role, where students are taught to be reserved and respectful, which sometimes inhibits spontaneous verbal expression.

Storytelling, as a traditional and universally accessible form of oral communication, offers a promising solution. It is not only culturally familiar but also pedagogically powerful. Through storytelling, students can learn vocabulary in context, practice pronunciation, and express ideas in a structured yet creative way. Storytelling aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86), emphasising the role of interaction and social tools in language learning. In Islamic education, stories have long been used to convey moral lessons, making them a natural bridge to language learning. The use of storytelling also taps into students' affective domain, which is often overlooked in language instruction. It promotes engagement, reduces anxiety, and fosters motivation. These are critical factors for successful language acquisition, as supported by Krashen (1982, p. 31), who emphasises the importance of low affective filters in language learning, particularly in environments where English is viewed as difficult or intimidating.

Despite the growing emphasis on communicative competence in EFL teaching, many students in madrasahs still struggle to speak English fluently and confidently. The dominant focus on rote learning, memorisation, and written grammar exercises does not support the development of spontaneous speaking abilities. In Madrasah Aliyah Sabiilul Muttaqien, students' speaking proficiency remains low. Teachers observe that even students with good reading or writing skills often fall silent during speaking tasks. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of appropriate teaching strategies that address the needs of students in a religious and culturally specific context. Traditional methods such as drilling or recitation, though widely used, often fail to engage learners meaningfully or develop communicative competence (Harmer, 2007, p. 67). There is a clear need for innovative yet culturally respectful approaches that can improve students' speaking performance.

The purpose of this study is to explore how storytelling can be used to enhance speaking skills among students at Madrasah Aliyah Sabiilul Muttaqien Sukaraja Nuban, Lampung Timur. Specifically, it aims to examine the extent to which storytelling activities can improve students' fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation, while also fostering a more positive attitude toward speaking English. This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of language teaching in Islamic educational settings. Theoretically, it supports the integration of culturally embedded pedagogical tools such as storytelling into communicative language teaching frameworks. Practically, it provides English teachers in madrasahs with an accessible and low-cost method to improve speaking instruction. By highlighting the effectiveness of storytelling, such as using moral-based folktales like 'The Honest Merchant', this research contributes to character education and language acquisition simultaneously (Nasrullah, 2016, p. 45). The study also supports

the broader goals of character education and moral development through the integration of narrative texts that embody ethical and spiritual values.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Role of Speaking in EFL Learning

Speaking is a productive skill that enables students to express thoughts, interact socially, and convey messages in a target language. It is considered one of the most complex skills in language learning due to its integration of multiple sub-skills such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sociolinguistic competence. Brown (2004, pp. 141-142) emphasizes fluency, accuracy, and interaction as the three key components of speaking competence. Fluency refers to the ability to speak smoothly without hesitation, accuracy to the correct use of language structures, and interaction to the capacity to engage in communicative exchanges.

According to Richards (2008, pp. 20-21), speaking tasks should simulate real-life interaction and provide learners with meaningful opportunities to use the language. Speaking is not just a means of communication but also a way to construct knowledge and identities. In EFL contexts, where exposure to native or natural speech is limited, speaking becomes even more critical as a target of instruction and a measure of proficiency.

2.2 Challenges in Teaching Speaking in Islamic Schools

Islamic schools or madrasahs often face unique challenges in implementing effective speaking instruction. These include limited access to authentic English materials, lack of trained English-speaking teachers, large class sizes, and curriculum constraints that prioritize reading and grammar. Ningsih (2017, p. 35) highlights that madrasah curricula tend to emphasize rote learning and written assessments, leaving little room for communicative approaches. Moreover, students in such settings may view English as foreign to their religious and cultural environment, which can reduce motivation and increase anxiety.

Cultural norms within Islamic educational settings may also influence classroom dynamics. For example, students are often taught to be quiet, respectful, and modest in behaviour. While these values are commendable, they may unintentionally suppress students' willingness to speak, particularly in a foreign language. As Mahmoud (2015) notes, the fear of making mistakes and being judged can be more pronounced in environments that emphasise discipline and correctness. These barriers require teachers to adopt culturally sensitive methods that encourage expression without violating institutional values. Providing a safe and supportive environment, using familiar themes, and integrating Islamic values into content are some ways to overcome these challenges.

2.3 Storytelling as a Teaching Technique

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication, deeply rooted in human culture and history. It serves not only as entertainment but also as a tool for education, moral instruction, and identity formation. In language teaching, storytelling has gained attention as a method that blends affective and cognitive learning. Wright (1995, p. 6) describes storytelling as a holistic activity that involves imagination, structure, repetition, and emotional engagement.

In EFL classrooms, storytelling can provide authentic language input, contextualise vocabulary and grammar, and offer students models of coherent discourse. According to Ellis and Brewster (2002, p. 5), storytelling promotes listening and speaking skills, enhances memory retention, and motivates learners through engaging narratives. The use of stories can lower the affective filter and create a relaxed atmosphere for learning.

Storytelling also allows for the integration of values and local wisdom, which is particularly relevant in Islamic schools. Stories from Islamic history or local folktales with moral messages can serve dual purposes: language development and character education. In this sense, storytelling aligns with the broader educational goals of madrasahs, making it a culturally appropriate and pedagogically effective strategy.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Storytelling in EFL

Numerous empirical studies support the role of storytelling in enhancing language skills. Lestari (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study in a junior high school in Yogyakarta, showing that students who received storytelling-based instruction had higher scores in speaking fluency and vocabulary usage compared to those in the control group. Her study emphasised the role of narrative structure and repetition in helping students internalise language patterns. Similarly, Yusuf (2018) explored the impact of storytelling on student confidence and speaking performance in an Islamic boarding school. The study revealed that students became more motivated and willing to speak when storytelling was used as a regular activity. The familiar and morally based content of the stories made the language more relatable and meaningful for the students.

Another study by Akbar and Fitriani (2019) examined the use of storytelling in an EFL classroom with large student numbers. They found that group storytelling activities fostered collaboration and increased participation even among reluctant speakers. The use of visual aids and role play enhanced the experience, making the class more dynamic. These findings are corroborated by international research as well. Cameron (2001, p. 164) argues that storytelling nurtures not only linguistic but also cognitive and emotional development in children. By listening to and telling stories, learners practice narrative competence, which is essential in both academic and social communication. In conclusion, the literature suggests that storytelling is an effective, adaptable, and culturally resonant strategy for teaching speaking, particularly in contexts such as

madrasahs where other methods may be less effective. By addressing both linguistic and affective dimensions, storytelling holds strong pedagogical potential for EFL instruction.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p. 6). This model comprises four recursive and reflective phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. CAR is particularly relevant for educational contexts because it allows educators to identify problems in real classroom situations and take action to improve teaching practices in a systematic way. The nature of CAR empowers teachers to be both researchers and practitioners, engaging in an ongoing process of inquiry to enhance student learning outcomes.

In the context of this study, CAR was applied to investigate how storytelling could be integrated into English-speaking lessons and how it impacted students' performance. The planning phase involved the formulation of the research objectives, designing storytelling-based instructional materials, and developing instruments for data collection. In the acting phase, the teaching sessions were conducted based on the prepared materials. The observing phase focused on gathering data through tests, checklists, and reflections. Finally, the reflecting phase involved analysing the results and determining whether storytelling had a measurable impact on students' speaking skills.

The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Sabilul Muttaqien Sukaraja Nuban, located in Lampung Timur, Indonesia. This Islamic senior high school serves students from rural areas with diverse backgrounds, most of whom have limited access to English outside the school environment. English is taught as a compulsory subject, yet speaking is not a major focus in the standard curriculum. The participants of this study were 28 tenth-grade students, consisting of 16 female and 12 male students aged between 15 to 17 years. These students were selected based on their regular attendance and willingness to participate in all sessions of the research. Based on preliminary classroom observations and initial assessments, most of the students demonstrated low to moderate speaking proficiency and had minimal confidence in oral communication.

To collect comprehensive and reliable data, the researcher employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative instruments; Pre-test and Post-test: These were used to measure students' speaking performance before and after the implementation of storytelling. The tests were evaluated using a scoring rubric. Observation Checklist: A structured checklist was used to document students' behaviours, engagement, and participation during the storytelling sessions; Student Reflection Forms: After each session, students were asked to complete a short reflection form to express their thoughts, challenges, and learning experiences related to storytelling; and Teacher Interview: A semi-structured interview with the English teacher was conducted to gain

insights into students' improvements, attitudes, and the practicality of using storytelling as a teaching tool.

The storytelling intervention was implemented over four consecutive weeks, each consisting of one 90-minute session. The procedure for each week is described below:

- 1) **Week 1 - Introduction and Model Storytelling:** The researcher introduced storytelling as a learning method, explaining its benefits and relevance. A model story titled "The Clever Parrot" was told using expressive language, gestures, and visual aids. Vocabulary items were taught explicitly. Students practised retelling the story in pairs.
- 2) **Week 2 - Vocabulary Drills and Guided Practice:** Students were introduced to a new story. Vocabulary and expressions were discussed before students practised in groups. The teacher provided scaffolding and corrections, focusing on pronunciation and intonation.
- 3) **Week 3 - Group Storytelling:** Students worked in small groups to rehearse and perform storytelling. They were encouraged to add creativity through gestures or props. After each performance, peers provided feedback based on a checklist.
- 4) **Week 4 - Individual Story Performance and Reflection:** Each student delivered their short story presentation. These performances were assessed using a rubric. Afterwards, students completed reflection forms about their experience throughout the program.

Throughout the procedure, the researcher acted as both an observer and facilitator, ensuring consistency in delivery and data collection. Weekly teacher meetings were held to discuss student progress and any adjustments needed.

To assess speaking performance, a scoring rubric was developed focusing on three key indicators:

1. **Fluency** - the ability to speak smoothly with minimal hesitation.
2. **Vocabulary** - the range, appropriateness, and accuracy of vocabulary used.
3. **Pronunciation** - clarity of speech, stress, and intonation.

Each component was rated on a scale of 0 to 100. The average of these three scores was used as the final speaking score. The rubric was adapted from the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 28-30) and modified to suit the proficiency level of the students. Rubric guidelines were shared with students in advance so they could prepare accordingly. This mixed-method approach, combining quantitative scores and qualitative observations, ensured a more holistic evaluation of the impact of storytelling on speaking performance.

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to interpret the results. Quantitative data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically to determine mean scores, percentage gains, and comparative performance improvements before and after the intervention. This analysis helped to identify general trends in speaking proficiency as influenced by the storytelling activities.

Qualitative data, on the other hand, were derived from observation checklists, student reflection forms, and interviews with the English teacher. These data sources were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis involved identifying recurring patterns and categories related to student engagement, confidence, participation, and perception of the storytelling process. Coding was used to cluster responses and observations under meaningful themes that reflected both positive outcomes and areas for improvement. The integration of both types of data allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how storytelling influenced students' speaking performance. This triangulation process ensured the credibility and reliability of the findings while also providing rich, context-based insights into classroom dynamics and student attitudes.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Quantitative Results

Table 1 shows the improvement in speaking components:

Table 1. Speaking Test Results (Pre- and Post-Test)

Aspect	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
Fluency	60	75	+15
Vocabulary	65	78	+13
Pronunciation	63	80	+17
Average	63	78	+15

These results indicate a significant increase across all components. Fluency improved by 15 points, vocabulary by 13 points, and pronunciation by 17 points. The average improvement was 15 points, reflecting the overall effectiveness of the intervention. The increased scores suggest that the storytelling activities provided meaningful contexts for students to use language authentically, which facilitated language acquisition. The students' familiarity with the content and the repetitive nature of storytelling likely contributed to their improved speaking performance.

4.2 Observation Results

Classroom observations conducted throughout the four-week intervention revealed several positive changes in student behaviour and engagement. During the first week, many students appeared hesitant and rarely volunteered to speak in front of the class. However, by the third week, approximately 80% of students actively participated in storytelling activities, including retelling stories, responding to peer performances, and asking questions. Students demonstrated greater willingness to take risks and use English, even if their grammar or pronunciation was not perfect. Teachers noted increased eye contact, use of gestures, and attempts to engage with the audience. Group dynamics also improved, as students began collaborating more effectively in group

storytelling sessions. These behavioural changes point to a growth in confidence and comfort with oral English, which are essential for long-term language development.

4.3 Student Reflections

Student reflections were gathered using weekly feedback forms. These forms asked students to comment on their enjoyment, challenges, and perceived improvements in using storytelling as a method for learning English. Overall, the reflections were highly positive. A majority of students reported that storytelling made the class more enjoyable and less stressful compared to traditional speaking exercises. One student wrote, “Saya jadi lebih berani ngomong karena ceritanya menarik dan saya bisa relate.” Another reflected, “Saya suka menceritakan kisah karena itu membuat saya tidak takut salah.” Such responses suggest that storytelling helped reduce the affective filter— anxiety, fear of failure, and lack of motivation, which often hinders speaking development in EFL classrooms.

Many students also noted improvements in vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. Several reported that they remembered new words better when they were part of a story, and that repeating lines from stories helped them pronounce difficult words more easily. These observations support the notion that contextualised, narrative-based input enhances memory retention and language output.

4.4 Teacher Interview Summary

The English teacher interviewed after the intervention reported several noteworthy changes. According to her, students who were previously passive or reluctant became more involved in classroom discussions and volunteered to perform storytelling tasks. She observed that students seemed to enjoy the learning process more, especially when stories included humour or moral lessons.

She noted, “Anak-anak yang dulu diam saja sekarang malah aktif bercerita. Apalagi kalau ceritanya lucu atau ada pelajaran hidupnya, mereka lebih semangat.” The teacher also mentioned that storytelling made classroom management easier, as students were more focused and less disruptive during the sessions. She expressed interest in continuing the use of storytelling as part of her regular teaching strategy.

4.5 Discussion

The results of this study align with previous findings on the effectiveness of storytelling in language learning contexts. As reported by Lestari (2020, p. 49), storytelling can significantly enhance students’ speaking fluency and vocabulary retention. The present study corroborates these

findings by demonstrating measurable improvements in student performance following a structured storytelling intervention.

Moreover, the results support Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982, p. 31), which posits that learners acquire language more effectively when they are relaxed, motivated, and engaged. The reduction in speaking anxiety and increased student enthusiasm observed in this study validate this theoretical framework. The incorporation of moral and humorous content in stories may have also contributed to affective engagement, making storytelling particularly suitable for culturally grounded educational settings like madrasahs.

Storytelling also aligns with Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) sociocultural theory, which emphasises the role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning. Through collaborative group work, peer feedback, and interactive performances, students were able to construct knowledge within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This interaction-rich environment facilitated not only language learning but also social and cognitive growth.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that storytelling is not only an effective linguistic tool but also a culturally responsive teaching method. It addresses both the cognitive and emotional needs of learners, making it especially valuable in contexts where student motivation and confidence are often low. Teachers in similar settings are encouraged to integrate storytelling into their pedagogical practices to enhance student engagement and improve speaking skills.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The implementation of storytelling in English-speaking classes at Madrasah Aliyah Sabilul Muttaqien Sukaraja Nuban, Lampung Timur, yielded significant improvements in students' speaking fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The storytelling approach not only addressed linguistic components but also positively influenced affective aspects such as motivation, confidence, and engagement. By the end of the intervention, students showed greater willingness to communicate in English, both in structured tasks and spontaneous interactions.

The data gathered from tests, observations, reflections, and teacher interviews confirmed that storytelling provided a meaningful and enjoyable context for language learning. It made abstract language concepts more concrete and relatable, especially through the use of culturally relevant narratives. As such, storytelling served as a bridge between the students' prior knowledge and the target language.

Furthermore, the collaborative and interactive nature of storytelling helped build a supportive learning environment. Students who were initially shy and passive became more active, demonstrating improved classroom participation and peer collaboration. This transformation

highlights the role of storytelling as not only a teaching strategy but also a tool for fostering social and emotional development.

5.2 Implications for Teaching

The findings of this study have several implications for English language teaching, particularly in Islamic educational contexts. First, storytelling should be considered a viable alternative to traditional, form-focused speaking instruction. It encourages authentic use of language in a way that is both accessible and enjoyable for learners.

Second, storytelling aligns well with the values and educational goals of madrasahs. Stories can be selected or adapted to reflect Islamic morals, cultural heritage, and local wisdom, making the learning experience more relevant to students' lives. Teachers can draw on local folktales, religious parables, or contemporary moral stories that resonate with students' identities.

Third, teachers need adequate support and training to implement storytelling effectively. While storytelling is a familiar concept, its integration into the curriculum requires planning, creativity, and reflective practice. Teachers may benefit from workshops on storytelling techniques, voice modulation, gesture use, and classroom management strategies related to performance-based learning.

Finally, the study suggests that classroom environments should be designed to lower anxiety and foster risk-taking in language production. Storytelling naturally facilitates this by creating a relaxed, imaginative space where errors are part of the learning process rather than obstacles to communication.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the results and limitations of this study, several recommendations for future research and pedagogical development are proposed:

- a) **Expand the Story Corpus:** Future studies should explore a wider range of stories, including local legends, religious narratives, and modern tales. A diverse corpus may cater to different learner interests and linguistic needs.
- b) **Integrate Digital Storytelling:** The use of multimedia tools, such as video, audio, and animation, can enhance engagement and accessibility. Digital storytelling also supports multimodal literacy and may be particularly appealing to tech-savvy students.
- c) **Measure Long-term Effects:** Further research should examine the long-term impact of storytelling on language retention and speaking proficiency. Follow-up assessments after several months would provide valuable insights into the durability of learning gains.

- d) **Investigate Other Skills:** While this study focused on speaking, storytelling may also benefit listening, reading, and writing skills. Future research could adopt a more integrative approach to examine these potential cross-skill influences.
- e) **Conduct Comparative Studies:** Comparing the effectiveness of storytelling with other communicative methods (e.g., role play, debate, drama) in similar contexts would help determine its relative strengths and limitations.

By addressing these areas, educators and researchers can continue to develop storytelling as a powerful pedagogical tool that supports language learning and cultural identity formation in EFL classrooms.

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