



Storytelling in teaching speaking to secondary school students

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Abstract

The development of speaking competence remains one of the major objectives of English language teaching. However, many secondary school students experience difficulties in expressing ideas fluently and confidently in English. This study investigates the effectiveness of storytelling as a communicative technique for improving students’ speaking skills. The research was conducted among secondary school learners through a series of storytelling-based speaking activities, including picture narration, story retelling, chain storytelling, role-play, and personal storytelling. The findings revealed significant improvement in students’ fluency, vocabulary usage, pronunciation, coherence, and confidence. The results suggest that storytelling creates a supportive learning environment that encourages meaningful communication and active learner participation. Therefore, storytelling can be considered an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing speaking competence in English language classrooms.

Keywords

storytelling, speaking skills, communicative competence, English language teaching, fluency, vocabulary development, secondary school learners.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the teaching of English as a foreign language has undergone significant changes. Modern educational approaches emphasize communicative competence rather than the mere memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary items.

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most essential language skills because it enables learners to participate in real-life communication and express their thoughts



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VOLUME-1, ISSUE-3, 2026**

effectively. Despite studying English for several years, many students face difficulties when required to speak. They often hesitate, produce short answers, and lack confidence. These challenges indicate the need for innovative and learner-centered teaching methods that can increase students’ motivation and speaking opportunities. Storytelling is one such method. Stories naturally attract learners’ attention and create meaningful contexts for language use. Through storytelling, learners are encouraged to narrate events, express opinions, describe characters, and interact with others. This process promotes both linguistic and communicative development. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of storytelling activities in developing speaking competence among secondary school students.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars have highlighted the significance of storytelling in language education. According to Wright (1995), storytelling combines imagination, language, and communication, making it an effective classroom activity. Ellis and Brewster (2014) argue that stories provide meaningful contexts in which vocabulary and grammatical structures can be learned naturally.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of interaction in learning. Storytelling activities create opportunities for collaborative learning, allowing students to construct knowledge through communication. Similarly, Bruner (1986) suggests that narrative structures help learners organize ideas logically and understand the world through meaningful sequences of events. Research findings indicate that storytelling positively affects speaking fluency, vocabulary retention, confidence, and pronunciation. It also reduces speaking anxiety because learners focus on sharing stories rather than worrying about linguistic accuracy alone.

3. Research Questions

The study aimed to answer the following questions:



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1. Does storytelling improve students’ speaking competence?
2. Which aspects of speaking improve most through storytelling?
3. How do students perceive storytelling activities?
4. Can storytelling increase learners’ confidence in oral communication?

4. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the effectiveness of storytelling in developing students’ speaking skills. The research was conducted with 52 secondary school students, including 22 senior learners and 30 junior learners. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, classroom observations, and questionnaires. During a six-week experimental period, students participated in various storytelling-based activities such as picture storytelling, story retelling, chain storytelling, role-play, and personal storytelling. Their speaking performance was assessed according to fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and coherence. The collected data were analyzed by comparing pre-test and post-test results and examining students’ attitudes toward storytelling. The findings provided valuable evidence regarding the role of storytelling in improving speaking competence and increasing learners’ confidence and motivation in English language learning.

4. 1. Participants

The research involved 52 students divided into two groups:

GROUP	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Senior Group	22
Junior Group	30
Total	52

4.2. Research Tools

This study used a **quantitative approach** with a **close-ended questionnaire** and



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classroom observation. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections.

Pre-test: Used to determine students' initial speaking level before the experiment.

Post-test: Used to measure students' speaking improvement after the storytelling activities.

Classroom Observation: Used to observe learners' participation, confidence, and interaction during lessons.

Questionnaire: Used to collect students' opinions and attitudes toward storytelling.

Speaking Assessment Rubric: Used to evaluate fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and coherence

4.3 Procedure

Table 1. The research was conducted over six weeks.

Students participated in various storytelling activities:

Activity	Speaking focus	Level	Classroom format
Picture Sequence Story	Sequencing and narration	A2–B1	Pair work
Story Retelling with Keywords	Fluency and coherence	A2–B2	Group work
Finish the Story	Creativity and prediction	B1–B2	Group work
Role Play from a Story	Interaction and intonation	A2–B2	Pair/group work
Personal Story Circle	Personal expression	B1–B2	Small groups
Chain Story	Spontaneous speaking	A2–B1	Whole class/group
Digital Storytelling	Prepared oral presentation	B1–B2	Individual/group

Students completed a speaking pre-test before the intervention and a post-test after the completion of storytelling activities. The research was conducted over a six-week



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period and consisted of several stages. First, a pre-test and questionnaire were administered to identify students' initial speaking abilities and attitudes toward speaking English. During the experimental phase, students participated in various storytelling-based activities, including picture storytelling, story retelling, chain storytelling, role-play, story completion, and personal storytelling. The activities were organized according to three stages: pre-storytelling, while-storytelling, and post-storytelling. In the pre-storytelling stage, students were introduced to the topic and provided with key vocabulary and visual prompts. During the while-storytelling stage, learners worked individually, in pairs, and in groups to create and present stories. In the post-storytelling stage, feedback, discussion, and reflection activities were conducted. Throughout the experiment, classroom observations were carried out to monitor students' participation, confidence, and speaking performance. At the end of the study, a post-test and questionnaire were administered to evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling activities and compare the results with the initial data.

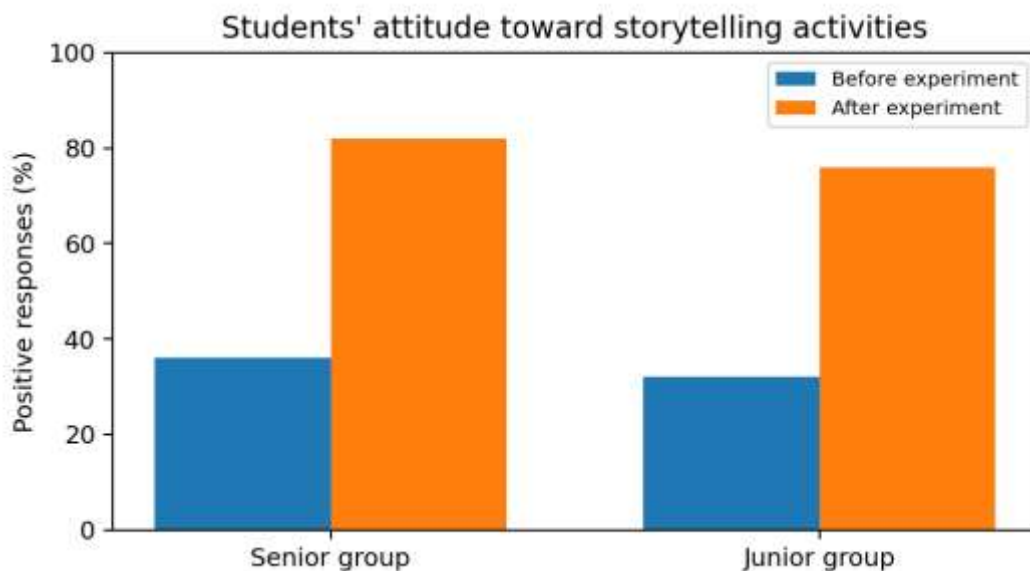
Table 2. Post-questionnaire results after storytelling-based lessons

No	Statement	Senior group Agree %	Junior group Agree %
1	Storytelling helped me speak more confidently.	81.8	76.7
2	Storytelling helped me remember new vocabulary.	86.4	80.0
3	I could organize my ideas better while telling stories.	77.3	70.0



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4	Group storytelling made speaking easier for me.	90.9	83.3
5	I liked picture-based storytelling activities.	86.4	90.0
6	I would like to use storytelling in future English lessons.	81.8	76.7



B. Data collected from the subjects with the help of Pre-test and Post-test

The results indicate that storytelling contributed positively to all assessed components of speaking competence. The greatest improvement was observed in coherence and fluency. Students became more capable of organizing ideas logically and speaking for longer periods without hesitation. Questionnaire responses also revealed positive attitudes toward storytelling. Most participants reported that storytelling made speaking lessons more enjoyable and reduced their fear of making mistakes.

5. Limitations and Future Scope

The study was conducted with a relatively small number of participants and within a limited period. Future research may involve larger samples, different age groups, and



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longer experimental periods. Researchers may also investigate the impact of digital storytelling and artificial intelligence tools on speaking development.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that storytelling is an effective method for developing speaking competence in English language classrooms. It improves fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, coherence, and learner confidence. Storytelling provides meaningful communicative contexts and encourages active participation, making English learning more engaging and productive.

Therefore, English language teachers are encouraged to integrate storytelling activities into regular classroom practice as a strategy for promoting communicative competence and improving students’ oral communication skills.

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