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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enhancing First-Year English Education Students' Speaking Skills through Storytelling Training at State University of Makassar

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Abstract: This study investigates the effectiveness of storytelling training in enhancing the speaking skills of first-year students in the English Education Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. The research was motivated by a survey of senior students, which revealed that 15.8% were still at the A1 level and 35.3% at the A2 level of the CEFR, indicating persistent challenges in speaking confidence and performance, particularly in formal academic contexts. The study involved 14 participants selected randomly to represent each first-year class. Data were collected through a post-training perception survey using closed-ended questionnaires covering aspects of fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, clarity, and speaking confidence. The results showed that all participants perceived improvements in their speaking abilities, with the highest agreement (100%) observed in vocabulary, comprehension, and confidence, followed by pronunciation (92.9%), clarity (92.9%), and fluency (85.7%). These findings suggest that storytelling can serve as an effective strategy for improving both the linguistic and affective aspects of speaking in EFL contexts. The study concludes that storytelling is a valuable pedagogical tool that should be integrated into early stages of English language teacher education.

Keywords: Storytelling, Speaking Skills, EFL Learners.

1. Introduction

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most essential yet challenging skills in the process of learning a foreign language. Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is often considered the most immediate reflection of one's communicative competence. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, especially in Indonesia, the development of speaking skills has frequently been overshadowed by a greater focus on grammar, vocabulary, and written assessments. This has led to a persistent gap between students' theoretical language knowledge and their practical communicative ability.

For students in English Education programs, speaking skills are not only a core aspect of language proficiency but also a fundamental component of their professional identity. As future educators, these students are expected to model effective English communication in the classroom and beyond. However, various reports and observations suggest that many students, even at the end of their academic journey, still struggle to express themselves clearly and confidently in English, particularly in formal academic settings such as presentations, seminars, or classroom discussions.



A recent internal survey conducted among final-year students of the English Education Department at Universitas Negeri Makassar provides a concerning insight into this issue. The results revealed that approximately 15.8% of the students were still at CEFR level A1, while 35.3% remained at level A2. These levels indicate limited ability to speak English beyond simple and familiar contexts, far below the expectations for prospective English teachers. Furthermore, many of these students reported feeling anxious and unconfident when speaking English, particularly in formal situations. The majority admitted that they rarely used English outside the classroom, which resulted in poor development of their speaking fluency and confidence.

These findings point to the urgent need for pedagogical interventions that are engaging, student-centered, and communicative in nature. One approach that has gained growing attention in recent years is storytelling. Storytelling is not only a traditional mode of communication but also an effective instructional strategy that allows learners to express themselves through structured narratives. It encourages the use of descriptive language, logical sequencing, emotional engagement, and vocal expression. In EFL classrooms, storytelling has been shown to significantly enhance learners' fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and overall speaking confidence (Wright, 2008; Atta-Alla, 2012). Moreover, it aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) by promoting meaningful interaction and language use in context.

Introducing storytelling training early in the students' academic journey, particularly during their first year, may serve as a foundational effort to strengthen their speaking ability and reduce anxiety related to oral communication. Engaging first-year students in storytelling activities may help them build fluency and confidence while also fostering a positive attitude toward language use in real-life contexts.

And considering this gap, the present study aims to examine the implementation of storytelling training as a strategy to enhance the speaking skills of first-year students in the English Education Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Through this study, the researchers seek to explore not only the impact of storytelling on students' speaking performance—including aspects such as fluency, coherence, and pronunciation—but also students' perceptions of storytelling as a pedagogical tool. The findings are expected to provide insights into innovative speaking instruction strategies for early-stage university learners and contribute to the growing body of literature on narrative-based approaches in English language teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The Importance of Speaking Skills in EFL Contexts*

Speaking is a fundamental skill in second or foreign language learning, serving as both a medium of communication and a measure of linguistic competence. In the EFL context, speaking is often perceived as the most demanding skill due to its spontaneous nature, which requires learners to process language in real time while maintaining fluency, accuracy, and coherence (Brown, 2004; Harmer, 2007). According to Richards (2008), effective speaking entails not only linguistic knowledge but also sociocultural competence and strategic interaction.

In teacher education programs, the ability to speak English fluently and confidently is crucial, as prospective teachers are expected to model language use and manage classroom communication. Despite this importance, many students in English Education programs continue to experience difficulties in speaking, particularly in formal or academic contexts (Setiyadi, 2006). These difficulties often stem from a lack of real communicative practice and limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom environment.

2.2. *Challenges in Developing Speaking Proficiency*

Several studies have documented the common challenges faced by EFL learners in developing speaking proficiency. These include limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracy, poor pronunciation, and lack of fluency (Nation & Newton, 2009). In addition to linguistic barriers, psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence significantly hinder oral performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; Tuan & Mai, 2015). In the Indonesian context, formal language learning environments often rely heavily on teacher-centered instruction and textbook-based activities, offering little space for spontaneous or meaningful oral interaction (Astuti, 2013).

As indicated in a recent internal survey at Universitas Negeri Makassar, many final-year students still perform at A1 or A2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), showing limited ability to engage in extended or formal speech. This suggests the need for more dynamic and communicative methods to improve speaking skills from the early stages of their academic journey.

2.3. *Storytelling as a Pedagogical Strategy in EFL Learning*

Storytelling is increasingly recognized as an effective instructional strategy in language education. Defined as the act of narrating a sequence of events—whether personal, fictional, or cultural—storytelling engages learners in purposeful, structured, and expressive language use (Wright, 2008). It allows learners to use a wide range of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse markers in a natural and meaningful context. Furthermore, storytelling promotes active engagement, creativity, and personal involvement, which are essential for language development (Isbell et al., 2004).

In speaking classes, storytelling has been found to enhance fluency, improve pronunciation, and develop students' confidence (Atta-Alla, 2012). It also aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, as it fosters authentic language use and interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Importantly, storytelling reduces learner anxiety by shifting focus from correctness to meaningful expression.

2.4. *Storytelling for Pre-Service English Teachers*

For students in English Education programs, storytelling offers both linguistic and pedagogical benefits. Linguistically, it helps learners rehearse and produce extended discourse. Pedagogically, it serves as training in communication techniques such as voice projection, intonation, gesture, and audience interaction—skills that are essential for future teaching practice (Malkina, 2005). According to Yuliani (2019), storytelling can function as both a speaking activity and a form of micro-teaching for pre-service teachers.

Despite these advantages, there is limited empirical research on the implementation of storytelling training for first-year university students in Indonesia, particularly in English Education programs. This study aims to address that gap by examining how storytelling can be used as a tool to enhance speaking skills in the early stages of teacher education.

3. Method

3.1. *Research Design*

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design to explore students' perceptions of storytelling training in enhancing their English-speaking skills. This design was selected to obtain measurable data regarding how students evaluated the effectiveness of the training, particularly in key speaking components such as pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and intonation. A structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used to ensure consistency in responses and ease of analysis.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were 14 first-year students enrolled in the English Education program at Universitas Negeri Makassar during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants were selected randomly, with representation from each class to ensure diversity across the student cohort. All participants were beginner-level learners based on initial placement tests and were assumed to have limited formal speaking experience in English at the tertiary level.

3.3. Intervention: Storytelling Training

The storytelling training was designed as a short-term program conducted over four sessions (approximately once a week). The sessions emphasized critical storytelling components including structure, vocal variety, body language, and audience engagement. Students were guided to create and deliver their own stories in English while receiving feedback on their performance. The training aimed not only to improve technical speaking skills but also to build students' confidence in speaking English in front of an audience.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through a post-training perception survey, which included a series of closed-ended questions. These questions were designed to capture students' self-reported perceptions of improvement in various aspects of their speaking skills. Each item asked students to reflect on specific components of speaking, such as:

- (1). Fluency and flow of speech
- (2). Pronunciation (e.g., clarity, word stress, intonation)
- (3). Vocabulary
- (4). Clarity
- (5). Confidence in speaking in front of others
- (6). Usefulness and enjoyability of the storytelling method

The survey utilized a Likert-type format and was administered in paper or digital form immediately following the final storytelling session.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data gathered from the closed-ended responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentages, to identify general trends and patterns in student perceptions. Each item was interpreted to understand how the participants perceived the impact of storytelling training on specific aspects of their speaking skills. These results were then used to assess the perceived effectiveness of the training and to inform future improvements to similar instructional programs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The results of the perception survey and CEFR-based self-assessment before and after the storytelling training indicate a significant shift in the participants' perceived speaking skill levels.



Figure 1. CEFR-based self-assessment

Prior to the training, the majority of participants reported themselves at the A1 level, with 42.9% (6 out of 14 students) identifying their speaking ability at this beginner stage. After the storytelling sessions, this figure dropped significantly to 7.1% (1 student), suggesting that most participants experienced an improvement in their speaking confidence and performance.

In the A2 level, 35.7% (5 students) initially assessed themselves at this level before training. Following the training, this group slightly increased to 42.9% (6 students), which indicates that some participants progressed from A1 to A2. Similarly, the number of participants who identified at the B1 level increased from 21.4% (3 students) to 28.6% (4 students) after the training. Most notably, 21.4% (3 students) reported a speaking level of B2 after the training, whereas none had previously placed themselves in this category.

These findings suggest that the storytelling training had a positive impact on students' self-perceived speaking skills, with notable movement from lower to higher CEFR proficiency levels. Figure 1 would visualize this shift across CEFR bands from pre- to post-training.

4.1.1. *Speaking Post-Training Survey*

The results of the post-training perception survey revealed that the storytelling training had a substantial positive impact on various components of the students' speaking skills. That can be seen from the diagram below:

Apakah setelah mengikuti pelatihan storytelling, kalian merasakan adanya peningkatan dalam speaking skill kalian?
14 jawaban



Figure 2. The Participant's Improvement After The Training

All 14 participants responded that they experienced overall improvement in their speaking abilities after participating in the training.

A breakdown of specific speaking components showed varying degrees of perceived improvement:

4.1.2. *Fluency and Flow of Speech*

Apakah kalian merasakan peningkatan kelancaran berbicara tanpa banyak jeda atau keraguan setelah mengikuti pelatihan? (Fluency)
14 jawaban

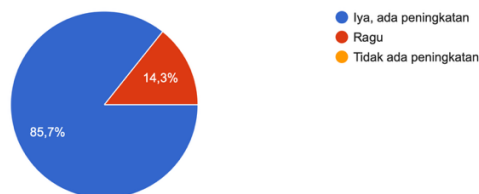


Figure 3. Fluency

A total of 85.7% (12 participants) reported an improvement in their ability to speak more fluently with fewer pauses and hesitations, while 14.3% (2 participants) responded with uncertainty.

4.1.3. Pronunciation

Apakah kalian merasakan peningkatan kejelasan pengucapan, tekanan kata, dan intonasi yang tepat setelah mengikuti pelatihan? (Pronunciation)
14 jawaban

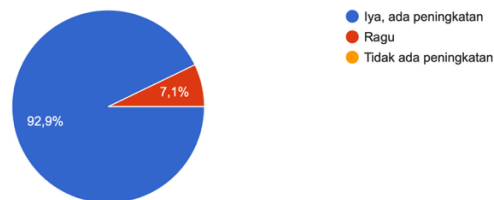


Figure 4 Pronunciation

Based on the diagram above, 92.9% (13 participants) indicated improvement in this area, while 7.1% (1 participant) remained unsure.

4.1.4. Vocabulary

Apakah kalian merasakan peningkatan variasi dan ketepatan kosakata yang digunakan sesuai konteks setelah mengikuti pelatihan? (Vocabulary)
14 jawaban



Figure 5.Vocabulary

All participants acknowledged an increase in the variety and accuracy of vocabulary usage appropriate to context.

4.1.5. Comprehension

Apakah kalian merasakan peningkatan kemampuan memahami pertanyaan dan memberikan jawaban yang sesuai setelah mengikuti pelatihan? (Comprehension)
14 jawaban

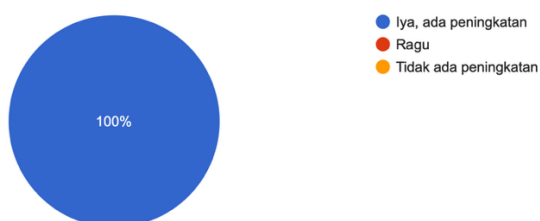


Figure 6. Comprehension

Based on the diagram above, all participants also reported an improvement in their ability to understand questions and provide appropriate responses during communication.

4.1.6. Clarity

Apakah kalian merasakan peningkatan kejelasan pengucapan dan struktur pembicaraan yang mudah dipahami setelah mengikuti pelatihan? (Clarity)

14 jawaban

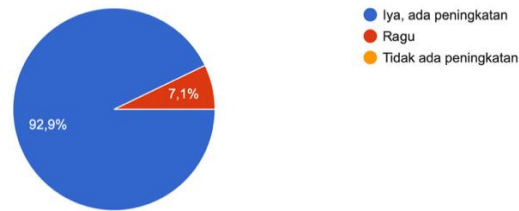


Figure 7. Clarity

92.9% (13 participants) felt their speech had become clearer and easier to understand in terms of pronunciation and structure, while 7.1% (1 participant) responded with hesitation.

4.1.7. Confidence in Speaking

Apakah kalian merasakan peningkatan kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara, ekspresi, dan bahasa tubuh setelah mengikuti pelatihan? (Confidence)

14 jawaban



Figure 8. Confidence

All of the participants agreed that their confidence in speaking English—particularly in terms of expression and body language—had improved following the training.

These findings reflect a consistent pattern of perceived improvement across multiple essential speaking sub-skills, with particularly high gains in vocabulary, comprehension, and confidence.

4.2. Discussions

The observed improvement in students' speaking proficiency levels, particularly in the shift from A1 to A2, B1, and even B2 levels, highlights the effectiveness of storytelling as a communicative pedagogical approach. Storytelling provides a low-anxiety, student-centered learning environment that encourages spontaneous language use, which may explain the rapid development in speaking confidence and fluency observed in the participants. As asserted by Ellis (2003), increased speaking opportunities in meaningful contexts foster language acquisition, and storytelling serves as such a meaningful context.

The rise in B1 and B2 level assessments, although not extreme, indicates that some students were not only improving but also beginning to develop intermediate-level competencies, such as organizing longer utterances, expressing personal opinions, and maintaining interaction—all of which are embedded in storytelling practice. The emergence of B2-level responses may also reflect improved mastery in aspects such as pronunciation, lexical variety, and use of discourse markers, which are typically developed through repeated storytelling performance and feedback.

Additionally, the significant decrease in the number of students identifying with the A1 level is critical. It implies that storytelling training can serve as a boosting mechanism, especially for students with initially low proficiency and confidence in speaking English. This aligns

with Nation and Newton's (2009) claim that fluency activities, including storytelling, can promote automaticity and increase learners' readiness for speaking in academic and real-world contexts.

The data suggest that storytelling training had a significant and positive impact on students' self-perceived speaking performance. The 100% agreement on overall speaking skill improvement highlights the effectiveness of storytelling as an engaging, communicative learning strategy, especially for first-year students who are still developing foundational speaking skills in English.

One of the most notable findings is the improvement in confidence, which all participants acknowledged. This supports previous research suggesting that storytelling, by encouraging self-expression in a low-pressure environment, can reduce anxiety and promote learner willingness to speak (Gregerson & MacIntyre, 2021). Students also felt more capable in comprehending input and responding effectively, suggesting an increase in interactive competence, likely because storytelling encourages active listening and turn-taking in communicative settings.

In terms of fluency, a majority (85.7%) reported improvement, though two students remained uncertain. This may indicate that fluency development takes more time and exposure than other areas such as vocabulary or comprehension. Similarly, the results on pronunciation and clarity (each with one student unsure) suggest that while most learners noticed a change, pronunciation may still be a challenge for some and may require more targeted feedback or extended practice time.

The perfect scores in vocabulary and comprehension may also reflect the structured and thematic nature of storytelling, where learners are exposed to repeated vocabulary in meaningful contexts and practice both receptive and productive skills simultaneously.

In summary, these findings provide strong evidence that storytelling training can be a powerful pedagogical tool to enhance multiple facets of speaking performance among EFL learners. It fosters not only linguistic development but also confidence, creativity, and interpersonal communication skills—all essential for academic and professional success in English.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the impact of storytelling training on improving the speaking skills of first-year English Education students at Universitas Negeri Makassar. The findings indicate that storytelling is an effective pedagogical approach to enhance various aspects of students' speaking abilities, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, clarity, and confidence.

The results of the post-training perception survey showed a strong positive response from participants, with 100% reporting overall improvement in their speaking skills. Notably, all students indicated increased confidence and improved vocabulary and comprehension, while most participants also perceived significant gains in fluency, pronunciation, and clarity. These findings highlight the potential of storytelling to not only support linguistic development but also foster self-expression and reduce anxiety in speaking English, especially in academic contexts.

Given the encouraging outcomes of this study, storytelling can be considered a valuable strategy in EFL instruction, particularly at the early stages of university-level language education. Future research may consider implementing longer training durations or incorporating storytelling into regular classroom practice to examine its long-term effects on speaking proficiency and performance in formal settings.

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