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## Storytelling in English Language Learning: Boosting Confidence and Discourse in EFL Contexts

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### Abstract

This study investigates storytelling as pedagogical strategy for enhancing English language skills among vocational students at SMKN 1 Samarinda. While storytelling has been recognized as a powerful tool for improving speaking confidence and engagement, challenges such as public speaking anxiety and fear of peer judgment persist. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research explores the experiences of three students, supported by teacher insight for triangulation. The findings demonstrate that storytelling significantly boosts confidence, fluency, and motivation, but also reveals areas for improvement in addressing emotional challenges. Practical recommendations focus on implementing culturally relevant and supportive storytelling practices tailored to vocational education. This study addresses a gap in the literature by contextualizing storytelling within vocational EFL settings, highlighting its potential to transform language learning.

**Keywords:** storytelling; EFL; vocational education; speaking confidence; language learning.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In the increasingly interconnected global environment, English has become the lingua franca, pivotal for international communication, commerce, and education (Jenkins, 2017). Proficiency in English offers individuals greater access to global resources, knowledge, and career opportunities (Graddol, 2020). Recognizing the importance, the Indonesia Ministry of Education has mandated English instruction in all levels of formal education (Lie, 2007). Despite this emphasis, the implementation of effective English teaching methods remains a challenge, particularly in non-metropolitan areas often hinder meaningful language acquisition



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(Kurniawan & Putri, 2023). Furthermore, large class sizes and a wide variety of competency levels in the classroom impede efforts to provide targeted education. Teachers frequently struggle to meet the demands of both high-and low-proficiency learners, which can lead to disengagement and hinder language development (Muluk et al., 2021).

## 1.2 Defining Storytelling

Storytelling is a pedagogical approach that integrates narrative techniques to create engaging, context-rich learning experiences. Unlike traditional methods centered on rote memorization, storytelling involves the practical use of language, encouraging learners to express themselves through structured yet creative scenarios (Chen & Lee, 2020). By enabling students to engage with language in real-life contexts, storytelling enhances discourse acquisition, fluency, pronunciation, and overall discourse skills (Mason, 2005). Theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Bandura's Social Learning Theory support storytelling's potential to facilitate scaffolded, interactive learning environments (Vygotsky, 1978; Bandura, 2023).

## 1.3 Storytelling in Vocational Education

Vocational students face unique linguistic demands due to the practical nature of their education. Fields such as marketing, tourism, and hospitality require industry-specific language skills, which are often neglected in traditional classroom settings (Almeida & Costa, 2022). Storytelling bridges this gap by contextualizing English instruction, allowing students to practice language in scenarios that reflect their career aspirations. At SMKN 1 Samarinda, storytelling aligns language learning with vocational training, making it a valuable pedagogical tool for preparing students for real-life world communication.



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## 1.4 Research Gap and Objectives

While existing studies highlight storytelling's general benefits in EFL context, its application in vocational education remains underexplored (Putri & Santoso, 2022). Furthermore, little attention has been paid to addressing emotional challenges, such as speaking anxiety, which significantly impact language learning outcomes. This study aims to:

1. Investigate the impact of storytelling on speaking confidence among vocational students.
2. Identify the challenges faced during storytelling activities.
3. Propose practical strategies for during storytelling into vocational EFL instruction.

perhaps overcoming the limits of previous ways (Widiyanto, 2020);(Rahman & Widodo, 2023). Storytelling, along with other active learning practices like roleplaying and multimedia integration, shows promise for improving language acquisition in Indonesian schools.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of students and teachers involved in storytelling activities. Phenomenology is well-suited for exploring subjective perceptions and uncovering the nuanced ways in which storytelling influences language learning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### 2.2 Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMKN 1 Samarinda, a vocational high school in East Kalimantan. Three 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students from the marketing program participated in the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that they had prior experience with storytelling activities and were willing to provide detailed reflections. The selection criteria included: active engagement in classroom storytelling sessions, willingness to participate in interviews, availability during the data collection period. And The English



teacher overseeing these activities was also interviewed to provide additional insights and triangulate findings.

### **2.3 Data Collection Instruments**

The primary data collection tool used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. The questions within this guide were designed to explore several key themes. Firstly, the interviews aimed to understand students' experiences and perceptions of storytelling activities. Additionally, the research sought to identify the challenges students encountered during storytelling sessions, as well as the observed impacts on their speaking confidence and language skills. Sample questions included: "What do you enjoy most about storytelling activities in class?" and "Can you describe a moment when storytelling helped you feel more confident?" Furthermore, questions such as "What challenges do you face while participating in storytelling activities?" were also posed to delve deeper into the students' experiences. Through this approach, it is hoped that valuable insights can be gained regarding the influence of storytelling activities on students.

### **2.4 Data Collection Procedures**

1. Student Interviews: Each participant engaged in a 60-minute, one-on-one interview conducted in familiar and comfortable school environment.
2. Teacher Interview: The English teacher was interviewed separately to provide additional context regarding classroom dynamics and the effectiveness of storytelling.
3. Recording and Transcription: All interview were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and reliability of data.

### **2.5 Data Analysis Techniques**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which included the following steps:

1. Data Familiarization: The researcher reviewed each interview transcript several times to understand the content and identify initial patterns or codes.



2. Coding: Key phrases and sentences in the transcripts were coded line-by-line, focusing on themes like “speaking confidence,” “skill improvement,” and “engagement with storytelling.”
3. Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader themes aligned with the research objectives, such as “skill development” and “confidence building.”
4. Reviewing and Refining Themes: The themes were reviewed and defined to ensure they accurately represented the data and addressed the research questions.
5. Triangulation and Validation: To confirm the validity of the findings, data from student interviews were cross-referenced with the English teacher’s responses. This triangulation process ensured that the themes aligned with classroom observations, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

This study investigates the perspectives of students at SMKN 1 Samarinda on the use of storytelling as a pedagogical strategy in English language learning. Through interviews with three active participants in storytelling activities, the findings show that storytelling has a considerable impact on students’ speaking confidence, language abilities, engagement, and overall enjoyment of learning. We will thoroughly address each theme from the data, incorporating illustrative statements from participants to enhance our understanding of their experiences.

#### **3.1 Confidence in Speaking**

One of the most noteworthy results of the storytelling exercise was an increase in students’ confidence when speaking English. All participants said that storytelling provided a secure and structured setting in which to hone their speaking skills.



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P1 stated:

*“Telling my story in class made me feel proud and showed my classmates that I can speak English well.”*

*This statement highlights how storytelling allowed P1 to demonstrate his English skills, countering any negative perceptions he felt from peers.*

P2 added:

*“I was nervous at first, but storytelling gave me the chance to practice, and now I feel much more confident.”*

The teacher also observed this change, noting that students who participated in storytelling showed noticeable improvement in their willingness to speak publicly.

The teacher remarked:

*“I have seen students who are once shy start to speak up more in class after participating in storytelling. It’s great to see their growth.”*

This is consistent with McCormick, (2021) research on how structured storytelling exercises can help minimize speaking anxiety by giving a platform for students to express themselves without fear of being judged. The new study expands on this by demonstrating that storytelling not only boosts language classroom environment by motivating students to share their experiences and help others.

### **3.2 Improvement in Language Skills**

In addition to increasing confidence, storytelling has been shown to improve a variety of language abilities, particularly discourse development, fluency, and pronunciation. Participants reported that storytelling helped them acquire new terms and improve their language abilities in context.



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P3 noted:

*“I learned many new words and how to use them in sentences, which helped me remember them better”*

The teacher corroborated these observations, noting that students exhibited increased discourse use and improved fluency during storytelling exercises:

*“I can see a clear difference in their discourse and how they express themselves after they engage in storytelling. It’s been very beneficial.”*

The finding is consistent with Mason, (2005) discovery that participatory storytelling led to large discourse growth in EFL environments. However, this study focuses on the contextual application of discourse, proving that storytelling allows children to engage with language in a more natural and successful manner than typical rote learning approaches do.

### **3.3 Engagement and Enjoyment**

Participants regularly rated storytelling as an engaging and pleasurable element of their English education. This engagement was evident in their active participation in storytelling sessions and their eagerness to share their experiences.

P3 expressed:

*“I really enjoy storytelling. It’s fun to create my own stories and share them with my classmates.”*

P2 added:

*“It’s much better than just reading from textbook. Storytelling makes English come alive for me.”*

The teacher observed that storytelling increased student engagement, noting:



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*“Students are more involved and excited during storytelling activities than in traditional lessons. They seem to connect more with the content.”*

These findings are consistent with García & Li, (2022) research, which revealed that interactive methods such as storytelling increase motivation and involvement in language acquisition. The current study builds on this knowledge by emphasizing the link between storytelling and real-world language uses, particularly in a vocational setting. Storytelling builds a stronger emotional connection to the language by allowing students to relate it to their personal experiences and potential occupations.

### **3.4 Challenges in Storytelling**

While the benefits of storytelling are obvious, participants acknowledged some difficulties, including anxiousness and fear of peer judgement. These difficulties are frequent in language learning and can prevent involvement.

P1 expressed:

*“Sometimes, I worry about making mistakes when telling my story. It’s scary to speak in front of everyone.”*

P3 admitted that she often compared herself to more fluent peers, which made her anxious:

*“I feel less confident when I see others speaking so easily. It makes me doubt my own abilities.”*

The teacher acknowledged these challenges, noting that nervousness can be a significant barrier for some students:

*“It’s important to recognize that not every student feels comfortable speaking up. We need to create an environment where they can feel safe to make mistakes.”*

These findings are consistent with (Sari & Handayani, 2019) research on speaking fear in storytelling, underscoring the importance of teachers creating a supportive classroom





environment. Teachers can assist students in overcoming their worries and fully participating in storytelling activities by addressing these issues and providing positive feedback.

### **3.5 Significance of Findings and Practical Implications**

The study's findings highlight storytelling's distinctive importance as a pedagogical technique that goes beyond typical language education in EFL classes. Storytelling creates a multimodal learning experience that not only improves language abilities (such as discourse acquisition, sentence structure, and pronunciation) but also boosts students' confidence and encourages a deeper degree of participation and enjoyment in learning (Ahmadi, 2023). Students at SMKN 1 Samarinda noted that storytelling allowed them to practice English in a calm and inclined to participate. This highlights storytelling as an effective way for fostering an engaged and supportive classroom environment, which can be especially good in lowering language anxiety and encouraging active involvement.

From a practical standpoint, the agreement between students' good experiences and teacher's observations in this study suggests that storytelling has the ability to change the dynamics of language learning. Educators are encouraged to incorporate storytelling into their teaching practices on a regular basis in order to foster an environment in which students feel comfortable expressing themselves in English. To maximize the effectiveness of storytelling, teachers must choose themes and stories that are relevant to their students' personal interests, cultural backgrounds, or future career goals (San, 2006). This relevance to setting for them to see the actual applications of language abilities, which is especially beneficial in vocational institutions like SMKN 1 Samarinda, where English is often used in industry specific settings.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the value of inclusivity and peer participation in the language learning process. Teachers should try to create an inclusive classroom atmosphere in which all students, regardless of language capability, can participate. Teachers can develop a feeling of community in the classroom by encouraging peer support through collaborative storytelling exercises. This reduces performance anxiety and promotes reciprocal learning



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(Rahman & Widodo, 2023). Encourage students to share their own experiences or collaborate in groups to create stories, which can provide valuable chances for self-expression and active listening, both of which are essential components of language learning.

Additionally, in order to optimize the impact of storytelling, teachers should provide planned storytelling exercises that balance individual expression with group participation. A storytelling workshop, for example, could begin with individual brainstorming or writing exercises and then progress to group presentations or debates. This approach allows students to first develop their thoughts independently, which helps boost confidence, before practicing speaking in a supportive group context (Lim & Yoon, 2022). Teachers can also offer constructive criticism that focuses on content and delivery rather than just linguistic accuracy. This method not only enables students to express themselves more freely, but it also promotes the development of communication skills, which are important in real-world situations (Xie & Kuo, 2023).

Another practical implication of this study is the significance of storytelling in developing empathy and cultural knowledge. Students can develop a better awareness of different cultures and opinions by exchanging stories that reflect many acquisition (Stevenson, 2018). Educators can use storytelling to each cultural subject and facilitate debates that go beyond linguistic competency, emphasizing the values and social skills required for global citizenship (Hofmann, 2023). In a platform for children to build empathy and a more nuanced awareness of their surroundings.

In closing, the study's practical implications indicate that storytelling should be seen as a basic component of language instruction rather than an ancillary activity. Integrating narrative into regular class can benefit EFL teachers in variety of ways, ranging from linguistic development to confidence building and emotional engagement. By creating an environment that encourages expression, collaboration, and empathy, educators may use storytelling to create a more holistic and effective language learning experience that prepares students not



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only for academic success but also for personal and professional growth (Jackson & Singh, 2023).

### **2.3 Practical Strategies**

To address challenges and maximize storytelling's benefits, the following strategies are proposed:

1. Culturally Relevant Narratives: Use stories that reflect students' background and career aspirations.
2. Peer Collaboration: Encourage group storytelling activities to build confidence and reduce anxiety.
3. Constructive Feedback: Provide positive reinforcement focused on content and delivery rather than linguistic accuracy.

### **4. Conclusion**

Storytelling is a transformative teaching strategy that enhances speaking confidence, language skills, and engagement among vocational EFL students. By addressing emotional and practical challenges, storytelling creates a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This study underscores storytelling's potential as a core pedagogical tool in vocational education preparing students for both academic and professional success.

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop storytelling modules tailored to vocational contexts.
2. Incorporate peer support mechanisms to create a collaborative classroom culture.
3. Conduct longitudinal studies to assess storytelling's long-term impact on language acquisition.



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## Limitations and Future Research

This study's small sample size limits generalizability. Future research should explore storytelling's application across diverse educational settings and examine its effects on other language skills, such as listening and writing.

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