

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING COMPETITION IN ENHANCING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: *This study explores senior high school students' perspectives on the role of storytelling competitions in enhancing their English-speaking skills. It focuses on students' experiences in participating in storytelling competitions, the benefits they gained, and the challenges they faced during preparation and performance. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach involving two senior high school students who were active members of an English Club at an Islamic boarding school. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that storytelling competitions helped the participants improve their pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, intonation, and expressive speaking. They also became more confident in using English in competitions and daily communication. In addition, the competitions increased their motivation to continue learning English. However, the participants also faced challenges, including nervousness, memorizing scripts, pronunciation difficulties, and time management. Overall, this study concludes that storytelling competitions provide meaningful learning experiences and play an important role in improving students' English-speaking skills.*

Keywords: *storytelling competition, English speaking skills, students' perspectives, phenomenological study*

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in education, employment, and international communication. As global interactions become increasingly common, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become an essential skill for students. Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered the most challenging because it requires learners to organize ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, and produce accurate pronunciation while communicating in real time (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013; Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017). Strong speaking proficiency enables students to participate actively in discussions, presentations, and other communicative activities (Sarnilawati et al., 2024). In Indonesia, where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL), opportunities to use English in authentic communication remain limited (Riadil, 2020).

Consequently, many students experience difficulties related to fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. They often feel anxious about making mistakes or being negatively evaluated by others, which may hinder their participation in speaking activities (Mistar & Umamah, 2014). Therefore, students need meaningful opportunities to practice English in supportive learning environments that encourage active communication (Jihad & Damayanti, 2024).

One activity that has been widely recognized for supporting speaking development is storytelling. Through storytelling, students practice speaking in front of audiences while improving pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and the ability to convey ideas effectively. Storytelling also encourages learners to communicate in a more natural and expressive manner. Anggarini et al. (2023) found that storytelling activities contributed positively to students' speaking performance, particularly when students engaged in regular practice. In addition, storytelling competitions provide authentic opportunities for learners to demonstrate their speaking abilities while developing confidence, creativity, and public speaking skills.

Previous studies have reported positive outcomes of storytelling for English language learning. Pakpahan et al. (2025), for example, found that storytelling activities improved students' fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking English. Similarly, Nair and Yunus (2021) reported that storytelling supports speaking development while also enhancing learners' motivation and engagement. Other studies have highlighted that storytelling encourages active participation and creates enjoyable learning experiences for students. However, these studies also indicate that learners may still face challenges such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and performance anxiety during speaking activities.

Despite the growing body of research on storytelling, most studies focus on classroom-based storytelling activities and frequently employ quantitative approaches. Limited attention has been given to students' lived experiences in storytelling competitions, particularly regarding how they perceive the benefits and challenges of participation. Furthermore, research involving English Club members in Islamic boarding schools remains scarce, despite these settings providing unique learning environments that may shape students' experiences differently. To address this gap, the present study explores senior high school students' perspectives on the role of storytelling competitions in enhancing English-speaking skills. Specifically, it investigates students' experiences in participating in storytelling competitions, the benefits they perceive for their speaking development, and the challenges they encounter during preparation and performance.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do students experience participating in storytelling competitions?
2. How do storytelling competitions benefit students in improving their English-speaking skills?
3. What challenges do students face during the preparation and participation in storytelling competitions?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Speaking

Speaking is one of the basic human skills that allows people to express what they think and feel. According to Nunan (2015), speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves both producing and receiving information. This indicates that speaking is not only about producing words but also about exchanging meaning with others. Harris (1974) identifies five components of speaking: grammar, comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence, which work together to support effective communication.

According to Brown (2001), speaking performance can take various forms, ranging from simple language practice to extended oral production. One form of speaking is a long monologue, such as speeches and storytelling, which is particularly relevant to storytelling competitions. Therefore, storytelling can be considered an effective activity for developing students' speaking skills through meaningful language use.

Speaking Skills in the EFL Context

Speaking is a crucial skill in language learning, particularly in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, as it enables learners to communicate effectively in real-world situations. According to Swain (1995), speaking allows students to apply what they have learned and recognize their mistakes. However, speaking is often considered the most difficult skill to master because learners must organize ideas, choose appropriate vocabulary, and apply grammar while producing language (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021). In EFL contexts, limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom often affect students' fluency, confidence, and speaking performance (Sayuri, 2016; Normawati et al., 2023).

One activity that can support speaking development is storytelling. Through storytelling, students practice expressing ideas, improve fluency and confidence, and engage in authentic communication. In EFL settings where opportunities to use English are limited, storytelling competitions provide valuable experiences that allow students to practice speaking in meaningful contexts. According to Nair and Md Yunus (2022), storytelling helps students improve fluency and expression, particularly when accompanied by guidance and feedback.

Storytelling Competition in English Learning

Storytelling competitions are recognized as an effective activity for improving English-speaking skills because they encourage students to use language actively in meaningful situations. Through storytelling, students learn to organize ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, and communicate messages clearly. This aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes the use of language in authentic communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In addition, storytelling

requires learners to produce language actively, which supports speaking development through practice (Swain, 1985).

Storytelling competitions also contribute to students' confidence and motivation. Meaningful and enjoyable speaking activities can reduce anxiety and encourage learners to communicate more actively (Krashen, 1982). Previous studies have shown that storytelling helps improve fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence while providing opportunities for authentic speaking practice (Usmani et al., 2025; Alaiksander et al., 2026). Furthermore, storytelling often involves interaction with teachers and peers through practice and feedback, which supports speaking development and confidence building (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, storytelling competitions can serve as valuable opportunities for enhancing students' English-speaking skills.

Students' Learning Experiences Through Storytelling Activities

Students' learning experiences through storytelling activities involve not only practicing English but also developing confidence, communication skills, and emotional awareness. Brown (2001) explains that learning experiences are shaped by learners' active participation in meaningful learning situations. Through storytelling, students use English to share ideas, convey messages, and interact with audiences, making storytelling a valuable learning experience. Storytelling also supports speaking development because it requires students to produce language actively. According to Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis, language learning develops when learners communicate their ideas through language production. During storytelling activities, students practice pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and intonation while learning how to deliver messages effectively.

In addition, storytelling involves emotional and communicative development. Students may experience excitement, nervousness, and satisfaction during preparation and performance, which can influence their confidence and willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Storytelling also encourages the use of verbal and non-verbal communication, such as intonation, facial expressions, and gestures (Harmer, 2007). Although students may experience anxiety when performing in front of audiences (Horwitz et al., 1986), storytelling provides meaningful opportunities for developing speaking skills, confidence, and motivation in English learning.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore students' experiences in participating in storytelling competitions and their perceived contributions to English-speaking development. Phenomenology was selected because it focuses on understanding and interpreting individuals' lived experiences from their own perspectives (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). The study was conducted at an Islamic boarding school in Sumenep, East Java, where English is actively used in both

classroom and extracurricular activities. The participants were two senior high school students, Fani and Tiya (pseudonyms), who were selected through purposive sampling. Both participants were active members of the English Club of Lubri and had experience participating in storytelling competitions, although they differed in the duration of club membership and competition experience.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and supporting documentation. The interview guide consisted of 20 questions adapted from Brown's (2001) theory of language learning experiences, Harris's (1974) framework on speaking difficulties, and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis, and was validated by an experienced lecturer. The interviews explored participants' experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges in storytelling competitions. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed. Supporting documents, including certificates, photographs, and storytelling materials, were collected to enrich and verify the interview data.

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed, coded, and organized into categories before being developed into broader themes. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by returning the interpretations to participants for verification, while triangulation was employed through the use of supporting documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents research findings based on thematic analysis of interview data from two senior high school students who had participated in storytelling competitions. The analysis produced several themes that answered two research questions.

RQ1. How do senior and junior members experience participating in storytelling competitions?

This research examines the experiences of both senior and junior members in participating in storytelling competitions within the English Club. It focuses on participants' initial involvement in storytelling activities, their emotional experiences before and during performances, and the ways repeated participation shaped their adaptation and personal growth throughout the competition process. Through their experiences, this study examines how storytelling competitions became meaningful learning experiences for participants with different levels of competition experience.

Experiencing Emotional Challenges and Adaptation in Storytelling Competitions

Both participants described storytelling competitions as meaningful yet emotionally challenging experiences. Although they entered competitions with different backgrounds, they shared similar feelings of nervousness and anxiety when performing in front of judges and audiences. The junior member participant reported

stronger nervousness due to limited experience, whereas the senior member participant felt more prepared because of previous involvement in performance-based activities.

Quotation 1

"My first performance was quite nerve-wracking. Even though I had practiced many times, I still felt nervous because I had to perform in front of judges and a large audience. At that time, my voice trembled, but I tried to stay calm and continue the story." (Interview, March 2026, P1).

Quotation 2

"Before performing, I usually feel enthusiastic but also slightly nervous because I want to give a good performance. During the performance, I try to stay focused on the story even though sometimes I still feel afraid and nervous when seeing the judges and audience." (Interview, March 2026, P2).

These findings suggest that storytelling competitions involve emotional challenges that extend beyond language performance. Participants experienced anxiety because they were being observed and evaluated publicly. This finding supports Horwitz et al. (1986), who argue that language anxiety frequently emerges in evaluative situations. Similarly, Kashinathan and Abdul Aziz (2021) found that public-speaking activities often trigger nervousness among EFL learners. Despite these challenges, storytelling competitions provided opportunities for participants to confront their fears and gradually become more comfortable speaking in public.

Developing Confidence Through Repeated Participation

Repeated participation in storytelling competitions helped participants become more confident and adaptable. Both participants reported that continuous practice and competition experience reduced nervousness and allowed them to perform more comfortably.

Quotation 3

"The difference is quite noticeable. When I first joined the competition, I was very nervous because I had no performance experience. But after several practices and competitions, now I am more accustomed to speaking in front of many people and more confident." (Interview, March 2026, P1).

Quotation 4

"After participating in several storytelling competitions, I became more accustomed, calmer, and able to enjoy the performance without becoming too panicked." (Interview, March 2026, P2).

These findings indicate that confidence develops gradually through repeated exposure to speaking situations. As participants gained more experience, storytelling competitions became opportunities for growth rather than sources of fear. This finding is consistent with Ruxiue et al. (2024), who emphasize that confidence develops

through repeated speaking experiences. Likewise, Olindo et al. (2024) found that participation in English competitions contributes to emotional resilience and self-confidence among language learners.

RQ2. To what extent do storytelling competitions benefit students in improving their English-speaking skills?

This research examines how storytelling competitions contributed to the development of participants' English-speaking skills. It focuses on how repeated storytelling practices and competition experiences helped participants improve pronunciation, fluency, expressive communication, and confidence in speaking English. Through their experiences, this study also explores how storytelling competitions encouraged participants to communicate more effectively and increased their motivation to continue learning English.

Improving Speaking Skills Through Repeated Storytelling Practice

Both participants perceived storytelling competitions as beneficial for improving various aspects of speaking ability, including pronunciation, fluency, intonation, and expressive delivery. Repeated practice during competition preparation encouraged them to use English actively and refine their speaking performance.

Quotation 5

"Yes, storytelling really helped me improve my speaking ability because during preparation, I practiced pronunciation, intonation, and expression repeatedly. At first, I often felt nervous and unsure when speaking English in front of many people, but after joining several competitions, I became more confident and more fluent when delivering stories." (Interview, March 2026, P1).

Quotation 6

"For me, storytelling competitions trained me to speak more naturally and expressively. I learned how to adjust my tone, maintain eye contact with the audience, and deliver emotions through the story so the audience could understand the message better." (Interview, March 2026, P2).

These findings demonstrate that storytelling competitions function as meaningful speaking practice that promotes active language use. Through repeated rehearsal and performance, participants improved both technical and communicative aspects of speaking. This finding aligns with Gultom and Trisnanti (2025), who argue that speaking competence develops through continuous practice involving pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and accuracy. Similarly, Islamiyah et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of repeated and meaningful speaking opportunities for language development.

Enhancing Confidence and Motivation to Use English

Beyond speaking performance, storytelling competitions also contributed to participants' confidence and motivation to use English in everyday situations. Participants reported becoming less afraid of making mistakes and more willing to communicate in English during discussions, presentations, and daily interactions.

Quotation 7

"After joining storytelling competitions, I became braver to speak English during daily activities in the English Club. Previously, I was afraid of making mistakes, but now I try to speak more actively with my friends even if my English is not perfect yet." (Interview, March 2026, P1).

Quotation 8

"Yes, my experience in participating in storytelling competitions made me more motivated to learn English. I feel happy when I see that my abilities gradually improve through consistent practice, which leads to better performance." (Interview, March 2026, P1).

These findings suggest that storytelling competitions provide benefits that extend beyond competition settings. Participants developed greater confidence, willingness to communicate, and motivation to continue learning English. This finding supports Deci and Ryan (2000), who argue that feelings of competence and achievement strengthen learners' motivation. It also aligns with Mawaddah et al. (2025), who found that storytelling activities contribute to increased confidence and willingness to communicate in English.

RQ3. What challenges do students face during the preparation and participation in storytelling competitions?

This research explores the challenges experienced by students during the preparation and participation process in storytelling competitions. It focuses on the emotional pressure faced during performances, technical speaking difficulties such as pronunciation and memorization, as well as challenges in managing preparation time and maintaining performance consistency. Through their experiences, this study examines how participants dealt with various obstacles throughout the storytelling competition process.

Facing Performance Anxiety During Storytelling Competitions

One of the major challenges experienced by the participants was performance anxiety. Both participants reported feeling nervous when performing in front of judges and large audiences. The competition setting created psychological pressure because participants were concerned about making mistakes and being evaluated by others.

Quotation 9

"When I saw the judges and many audience members, it really affected my performance, especially during my first competition. But on the other hand, it also made me try to perform as best as possible. During the performance, I tried to stay focused on the story so I would not overthink my nervousness." (Interview, March 2026, P1).

Quotation 10

"Being observed by evaluators and a large audience still affected my performance, but not as much as before. I felt more stable and able to control my nervousness, although there were still moments when I felt a bit nervous during the performance." (Interview, March 2026, P2).

These findings indicate that storytelling competitions can generate speaking anxiety, particularly when participants perform under evaluation. Fear of making mistakes and being observed by judges contributed to nervousness during performances. This finding supports Horwitz et al. (1986), who explain that foreign language anxiety often emerges in situations involving evaluation and public performance. Similarly, Kashinathan and Abdul Aziz (2021) found that speaking in front of audiences remains a significant challenge for EFL learners. Nevertheless, repeated participation helped participants gradually manage their anxiety and perform more confidently.

Managing Technical Difficulties and Preparation Demands

In addition to emotional challenges, participants also experienced technical and preparation-related difficulties. These included memorizing stories, maintaining accurate pronunciation, delivering appropriate expressions and intonation, and balancing competition preparation with academic responsibilities.

Quotation 11

"The most difficult thing is memorizing the story while maintaining pronunciation and expression. Sometimes I have already memorized the story, but there are still some words that are difficult to pronounce. Usually, I write down how the words are pronounced under the storytelling text, then I practice saying them repeatedly so I can become more fluent. If I still have difficulties, I usually ask my tutor or friends who understand better to make sure my pronunciation is correct." (Interview, March 2026, P1).

Quotation 12

"The challenge I often faced was maintaining performance consistency and preparing the story well within limited practice time. Besides that, I also had to divide my time between storytelling practice and other learning activities." (Interview, March 2026, P2).

The findings suggest that storytelling competitions require participants to manage multiple demands simultaneously. Besides mastering language aspects such as

pronunciation and memorization, students must also maintain expressive delivery and allocate sufficient preparation time. These findings support Harmer (2007), who argues that effective oral communication requires both linguistic competence and expressive communication skills. Furthermore, Brown (2001) emphasizes that successful language learning often involves overcoming challenges through continuous practice and active engagement. Therefore, although storytelling competitions present various difficulties, these challenges also contribute to students' speaking development and learning experiences.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of the interviews show that storytelling competitions gave positive experiences to both participants in learning to speak. Even though they had different experiences in joining competitions, both participants felt that storytelling helped them become more confident when speaking English in front of other people. At first, they still felt nervous and afraid of making mistakes during performances. However, after joining several competitions and practicing regularly, they slowly became more comfortable and calmer when speaking in public. The competitions also helped them become braver in using English in their daily activities.

The study also shows that students perceived that storytelling helped to improve their speaking skills. During the preparation process, they practiced pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, intonation, and expression many times. Because of this repeated practice, they became more fluent and more natural when speaking English. They also learned how to deliver stories using gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact so the audience could understand the story better. Besides improving speaking skills, storytelling competitions also made the participants more motivated to continue learning English because they could see their own progress little by little.

Besides the benefits, the participants also faced some difficulties during the preparation and competition process. Nervousness was one of the biggest challenges, especially when they had to perform in front of judges and large audiences. They also sometimes had difficulty memorizing the story, pronouncing some English words, and adjusting their expression and intonation while performing. In addition, they needed to divide their time between storytelling practice and school activities. Even so, with regular practice, support from tutors and friends, and repeated competition experiences, the participants gradually became more prepared, more disciplined, and more confident in speaking English. the researcher would like to give several suggestions related to speaking activities and storytelling competitions. For students, especially students who still feel shy or afraid when speaking English, it is important to practice more and not be too afraid of making mistakes. Speaking ability cannot improve in a short time because it needs process, confidence, and repeated practice. Joining storytelling competitions or other speaking activities can help students become more confident and more accustomed to speaking English publicly. Students should also try to use English

more often in daily conversations so they can become more comfortable using the language naturally.

For English Club members and tutors, support from people around them is very important in helping students improve their speaking skills. Students usually feel more confident when they practice English in a comfortable environment where they are not afraid of making mistakes. Tutors and friends can help by giving encouragement, simple corrections, and regular speaking practice. This kind of environment can make students feel more relaxed and motivated to speak English more often. Besides that, schools and universities can also support students by providing more speaking activities outside the classroom, such as storytelling competitions, speech contests, debates, or other speaking programs. Through these activities, students can get more opportunities to practice speaking directly, increase their confidence, and gain valuable experiences in using English publicly.

For future researchers, this study still has limitations because it only focused on storytelling competitions and involved a small number of participants. Future studies can discuss other speaking activities or involve more participants from different educational backgrounds to get broader information about students' speaking experiences and speaking development in English learning contexts. The researcher hopes that this study can encourage students to practice speaking English more actively and help people understand that speaking ability develops through courage, practice, and learning experiences, not simply from theory inside the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Mr. Ali Ashari and Mr. Imam Wahyudi for their guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the completion of this study

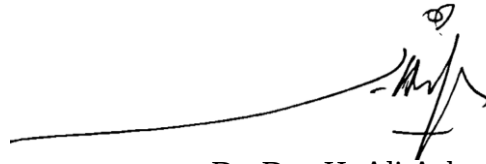
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Malang, June 15, 2026
Advisor I

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a long horizontal stroke followed by a stylized, cursive-like flourish.

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NPP.1910200021