



Enhancing speaking capabilities in secondary schools via storytelling: An analysis of GS Gikumba in Kigali's Gasabo District, Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This study looked at how well storytelling helped secondary school students at GS Gikumba in Kigali's Gasabo District improve their speaking abilities. The study's objectives were to assess the storytelling techniques employed by educators, pinpoint the difficulties encountered by students, and determine the connection between storytelling and the development of speaking abilities. The study was based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and collaborative learning in cognitive development, and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which highlights the significance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. In order to obtain a 100% response rate, a census sampling technique was used in conjunction with a descriptive research design to gather data from all 40 students. Information on students' experiences with storytelling and how it affected their speaking performance was gathered using structured questionnaires. While correlation analysis evaluated the connection between speaking skill development and storytelling techniques, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data in order to find trends and patterns. The results showed that storytelling has a positive impact on vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and classroom engagement. Language anxiety, a small vocabulary, a lack of practice outside of the classroom, and a fear of speaking in front of peers were among the difficulties that students encountered. Additionally, the study found a strong positive correlation between speaking skill improvement and storytelling engagement, suggesting that students who actively engage in storytelling exhibit greater oral communication competence. Based on these findings, the study suggests incorporating storytelling into English language training, encouraging both group and individual storytelling exercises, and giving students regular chances to practice speaking in encouraging and engaging environments. These interventions can improve learner confidence, improve oral communication abilities, and improve academic performance in general. The study shows that storytelling helps students improve their speaking skills, including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and participation in class. Despite these benefits, students often struggle with language anxiety, limited vocabulary, fear of speaking in front of others, and not enough practice outside the classroom. To support them, schools can include storytelling in the curriculum, encourage both group and individual storytelling activities, and set up speaking clubs. Teachers can foster active participation to build confidence, while students benefit from practicing regularly to strengthen their oral skills. These approaches can boost learners' confidence, communication abilities, and overall academic performance.

Keywords: Oral Communication, Language Learning, Storytelling, Speaking Abilities

I. INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are an important part of doing well in school and getting along with others, because they let students clearly express their ideas, join in on conversations, and take part in meaningful activities in and out of the classroom. English is the language of instruction in Rwanda from upper primary to secondary school, which means that students have to work hard to improve their speaking skills. To speak well, you need to know how to pronounce words correctly, speak quickly, use a wide range of words, understand grammar, and be confident. These are all important for doing well in school and getting along with others (Barungi et al., 2024). However, research indicates that numerous Rwandan students encounter difficulties with spoken English, including anxiety, fear of errors, and

limited classroom participation (Mpumuje et al., 2024). These problems show how important it is to have good teaching methods that help students improve their speaking skills.

Storytelling has been widely acknowledged as an interactive and learner-centered pedagogical approach that fosters significant language utilization. Storytelling puts learners in real-life situations where they have to communicate, which helps them organize their thoughts, learn new words, improve their pronunciation, and become more fluent (Nuriyah et al., 2024). Moreover, storytelling promotes critical thinking and creativity, as learners are required to formulate coherent narratives and adjust language usage based on context. This approach is especially advantageous in second-language acquisition settings, where chances for unplanned and significant speaking practice are scarce (Utilizing storytelling to enhance students' speaking abilities).

Even though storytelling has its benefits, many Rwandan secondary schools don't use it yet. Conventional teacher-centered approaches prevail in classrooms, emphasizing rote memorization, grammar drills, and written evaluations, thereby constraining students' chances to engage in authentic speaking practice (Barungi et al., 2024). Because of this, students often don't take an active role in oral communication activities, which makes it harder for them to become fluent, confident, and active participants. Because of this, using interactive methods like storytelling can be very helpful for improving speaking skills and making learning more fun and focused on the student.

Stories have a unique power to help people learn to speak more confidently. Research has shown that using storytelling in the classroom can improve pronunciation, expand vocabulary, boost fluency, and even make students more willing to participate (Nuriyah et al., 2024). Telling and listening to stories gives learners a safe space to practice expressing their ideas, which can reduce anxiety and help them feel more confident. Yet, not every student benefits equally—some struggle because they don't get enough practice outside class, have limited vocabulary, or lack experience with storytelling (Mpumuje et al., 2024). These challenges show the importance of finding strategies that really work and understanding how to overcome obstacles so storytelling can truly help students improve their speaking skills.

This study focuses on GS Gikumba and explores how storytelling can make students better speakers. It looks at the methods teachers use, the difficulties learners face, and how storytelling affects their speaking abilities. The goal is to provide practical recommendations for teachers, students, and schools, encouraging storytelling to become a regular part of the language curriculum. By showing the value of stories in learning, this research hopes to inspire teaching practices that are more engaging, supportive, and centered on students' needs (Barungi et al., 2024)

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Several studies have explored the challenges learners face in speaking English. For instance, Nuriyah et al. (2024) found that students' oral performance improves when they engage in interactive activities such as storytelling, which provides a supportive environment for practice. Similarly, research on storytelling in language learning showed that narrative-based activities can enhance fluency, pronunciation, and classroom participation. These findings suggest that storytelling is an effective method for improving speaking skills. Despite these encouraging results, most research has focused on primary schools or general language classrooms, with little attention given to secondary school learners in Rwanda. Many studies also look only at short-term interventions, without examining whether improvements in speaking skills are sustained over time. The effects of storytelling on learners' confidence, anxiety reduction, and ability to express ideas in secondary school settings are therefore not yet fully understood. This gap highlights the need for research focused on GS Gikumba. By investigating how storytelling can help students overcome fear, increase vocabulary, and build confidence, this study aims to provide practical guidance for teachers. The findings could help develop strategies that strengthen oral English skills and encourage active participation among secondary school learners.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To evaluate storytelling strategies used to improve speaking skills;
- ii. To determine challenges faced by learners when using storytelling;
- iii. To assess the relationship between storytelling and speaking skill improvement.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What storytelling strategies are used to improve students' speaking skills?
- ii. What challenges do learners face when using storytelling to enhance speaking skills?
- iii. What is the relationship between storytelling and the improvement of students' speaking skills?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen's Input Hypothesis explains that language is acquired when learners are exposed to input slightly beyond their current level, often called "i+1" (Krashen, 1985). Learners need to understand most of the input while encountering new vocabulary and structures that stretch their abilities. This theory emphasizes that comprehension, rather than explicit grammar instruction, drives language development. In terms of speaking skills, students benefit from exposure to meaningful language that challenges them just enough (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Storytelling provides this kind of input by presenting vocabulary, expressions, and sentence structures within meaningful contexts. Through repeated listening and engagement, learners gradually acquire new language patterns. Storytelling also encourages active processing, supporting both comprehension and oral production. Krashen's theory thus underlines the value of slightly challenging, understandable input for improving speaking skills.

2.1.2 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration with more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers or peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory introduces the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. Storytelling provides opportunities for interaction, allowing students to listen, speak, and discuss within a scaffolded environment (Wertsch, 1991). Teachers can model pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structures, while peers offer feedback and collaborative practice. Repeated storytelling helps learners internalize language patterns, improve fluency, and gain confidence in speaking (Daniels, 2001). This theory supports the idea that meaningful social interaction enhances oral skills, making storytelling an effective strategy for developing speaking competence.

2.2 Empirical Review

Storytelling has long been acknowledged as an effective way to improve students' speaking skills. When learners listen to stories, retell them, or create their own, they interact with English in practical and meaningful contexts (Isbell et al., 2004). This method exposes students to new words and sentence patterns, helping them expand their vocabulary and language structures naturally. Storytelling encourages learners to participate actively, which reduces anxiety about speaking in front of peers. Repeated storytelling sessions reinforce both comprehension and oral production. Over time, students gain confidence and begin expressing themselves more clearly. The process also allows learners to connect ideas logically while practicing pronunciation and intonation. In this way, storytelling serves as a lively and engaging learning strategy.

However, learners often face challenges when using storytelling to develop speaking skills. Limited vocabulary or difficulty arranging sentences can make it intimidating to retell or create stories. Some students feel anxious about speaking publicly or fear making mistakes, which can affect participation (McDrury & Alterio, 2003). Time limitations and uneven teacher support can also reduce the effectiveness of these activities. Cultural differences or unfamiliar story content may make it harder for learners to relate or stay engaged. Without careful guidance, learners may feel frustrated or lose interest. Recognizing these challenges is important for teachers to create supportive environments. Adapting storytelling activities to meet students' needs ensures that everyone benefits from this method.

Despite these obstacles, storytelling remains a strong tool for improving both language and cognitive skills. It encourages learners to organize events, describe characters, and construct narratives, enhancing critical and creative thinking (Wright et al., 2006). Students learn to plan their ideas carefully, present them logically, and express themselves with clarity. Storytelling also promotes peer collaboration, allowing learners to give and receive feedback, which strengthens confidence and oral competence. By combining creative thinking with language practice, students become more fluent and accurate speakers. These activities also help learners engage more deeply with the language, making learning enjoyable and meaningful. Storytelling thus integrates skill development with active, hands-on learning.

Furthermore, storytelling has a lasting impact on motivation and engagement. Students often find it exciting to share personal experiences or invent imaginative tales, which increases their interest in language learning (McDrury & Alterio, 2003). Seeing their efforts reflected in successful storytelling performances boosts self-esteem and encourages further participation. The interactive nature of storytelling fosters collaboration, discussion, and peer support. Through repeated practice, learners gain fluency, improve vocabulary usage, and refine pronunciation. They also develop the ability to think quickly and respond spontaneously in conversations. Overall, storytelling connects learning with



creativity, communication, and confidence, making it an invaluable approach for improving speaking skills in English classrooms.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine and describe the relationship between storytelling and students’ speaking skills. The design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to observe and analyze existing classroom practices without manipulating any variables. Through this approach, the researcher was able to collect detailed information about how storytelling activities influence students’ speaking ability and classroom participation.

3.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted at GS Gikumba, located in Gasabo District, Kigali City. The school was selected because it provides a relevant environment where storytelling is used as a teaching strategy to support language learning. The setting enabled the researcher to collect reliable and context-based data related to students’ speaking skills development.

3.3 Research Population

The target population of this study consisted of 40 secondary school students from GS Gikumba. These students were selected because they actively participate in classroom storytelling and speaking activities. Their participation provided important information about how storytelling contributes to improving speaking skills.

3.4 Sample Size

The study used a census sampling technique in which all 40 students were included in the study. This approach ensured that every member of the population contributed to the data collection process. Using the census method increased the accuracy and reliability of the research findings.

3.5 Research Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected using questionnaires containing Likert scale questions. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about storytelling strategies used in the classroom, challenges faced during storytelling activities, and the development of students’ speaking skills. The Likert scale helped measure students’ opinions and experiences in a structured way, making data analysis easier and more reliable.

3.6 Data Analysis

While correlation analysis evaluated the connection between speaking skill development and storytelling techniques, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data in order to find trends and patterns.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Table 1 shows that all 40 sampled participants responded, yielding a 100% response rate, which indicates full participation. This complete response enhances the reliability and representativeness of the study findings. This means the data collected can be trusted since no participant was left out. It also shows strong engagement of respondents in the study.

Table 1
Response Rate

Sampled	Responded	Response Rate
40	40	100%

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The demographic distribution shows that most respondents (55%) were aged 17–20, followed by 25% aged 12–16 and 20% aged 21 and above, indicating that the majority were in late adolescence, a stage conducive to language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Females slightly outnumbered males, representing 52.5% compared to 47.5%, suggesting a fairly balanced gender composition. This profile aligns with McDrury and Alterio (2003), who found that both male and female learners benefit from interactive language activities. The age and gender distribution

supports the suitability of the participants for engaging in storytelling strategies. Overall, the demographic characteristics provide a strong foundation for examining the impact of storytelling on speaking skills.

Table 2

Demographic Distribution

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	12–16	10	25%
	17–20	22	55%
	21+	8	20%
Gender	Male	19	47.5%
	Female	21	52.5%

4.3 Effective Storytelling Strategies

Table 3 highlights the role of storytelling strategies in improving speaking skills among students. The findings show that the majority of respondents agreed that storytelling has a positive impact on various aspects of language development. Specifically, 90% reported that storytelling improves pronunciation, 95% indicated it increases vocabulary, and 87.5% believed it enhances fluency. Additionally, 97.5% of participants felt that storytelling boosts confidence, while 92.5% agreed it encourages greater participation in class. Notably, all respondents (100%) agreed that storytelling improves overall communication skills, demonstrating its effectiveness as a strategy for enhancing speaking abilities.

These results show that storytelling is a useful and effective way of teaching. It helps students improve their language skills while also building their confidence. Teachers can use it to make speaking lessons more interesting and interactive. It also makes students feel more comfortable when expressing themselves in class.

Table 3

Storytelling Strategies for Improving Speaking Skills

Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Storytelling improves pronunciation	36	90	4	10
Storytelling increases vocabulary	38	95	2	5
Storytelling improves fluency	35	87.5	5	12.5
Storytelling increases confidence	39	97.5	1	2.5
Storytelling increases participation	37	92.5	3	7.5
Storytelling improves communication skills	40	100	0	0

The results of this study support Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985; Lightbown & Spada, 2013), showing that storytelling provides slightly challenging input that facilitates language acquisition. Specifically, 90% of respondents reported improvements in pronunciation, 95% indicated an increase in vocabulary, and 87.5% believed their fluency improved. These findings align with Isbell et al. (2004), who emphasized that repeated engagement with stories helps learners internalize language patterns naturally. Storytelling encourages active processing of language, allowing students to comprehend and produce English in meaningful contexts. Overall, these results confirm that storytelling effectively strengthens key aspects of speaking skills among secondary school learners.

In line with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991; Daniels, 2001), the findings also highlight the social and motivational benefits of storytelling. The study shows that 97.5% of learners felt more confident, while 92.5% reported increased participation in class. Importantly, all participants (100%) agreed that storytelling improved overall communication skills, supporting McDrury and Alterio (2003), who found storytelling fosters a safe, interactive learning environment. Storytelling activities promote peer interaction, collaborative learning, and guided practice, enabling learners to practice speaking in supportive contexts. These results demonstrate that storytelling enhances not only linguistic competence but also confidence, engagement, and oral communication ability (Wright et al., 2006).

4.4 Challenges Faced by Learners

Learners often encounter several difficulties when using storytelling to improve their speaking skills. These challenges can affect participation, fluency, and overall confidence in speaking English. Common obstacles include fear of speaking in front of others, limited vocabulary, and language anxiety. Understanding these issues is important for designing activities that support learners and help them benefit fully from storytelling.

Table 4



Challenges in Using Storytelling

Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Fear of speaking in front of others	38	95	2	5
Limited vocabulary	36	90	4	10
Language anxiety	39	97.5	1	2.5
Lack of practice outside class	40	100	0	0
Lack of storytelling experience	34	85	6	15

The results in Table 4 reveal that students face notable challenges when using storytelling to improve speaking skills. Specifically, 95% of respondents reported fear of speaking in front of others, and 97.5% experienced language anxiety, which aligns with findings by McDrury and Alterio (2003) regarding learner apprehension in interactive language activities. Limited vocabulary was highlighted by 90% of participants, while 85% indicated that lack of prior storytelling experience affects their ability to fully engage. These obstacles demonstrate that even effective strategies like storytelling require additional support to address learners’ emotional and linguistic barriers.

Furthermore, all respondents (100%) identified a lack of practice outside the classroom as a major challenge, emphasizing the importance of continuous engagement beyond lessons. Addressing these issues is consistent with Krashen’s (1985) and Vygotsky’s (1978) theories, which stress the need for exposure, interaction, and scaffolded support in language acquisition. By providing extra opportunities for practice, peer collaboration, and guided feedback, educators can reduce anxiety and improve confidence. These findings suggest that overcoming such challenges is essential to maximize the benefits of storytelling on students’ speaking skills.

4.5 Relationship Between Storytelling and Speaking Skills

Storytelling plays a key role in improving students’ speaking skills in language learning. It gives learners a chance to express themselves in engaging and meaningful ways, helping them build confidence, fluency, and better pronunciation. This section explores how storytelling supports the development of speaking abilities based on the results in Table 5.

Table 5
Relationship Between Storytelling and Speaking Skills

Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Storytelling improves speaking performance	40	100	0	0
Storytelling improves confidence	39	97.5	1	2.5
Storytelling improves fluency	37	92.5	3	7.5
Storytelling improves pronunciation	36	90	4	10
Storytelling improves classroom participation	38	95	2	5

Table 5 highlights the strong positive relationship between storytelling and students’ speaking skills. All respondents (100%) agreed that storytelling enhances overall speaking performance, while 97.5% indicated increased confidence. Additionally, 92.5% reported improved fluency, 90% observed better pronunciation, and 95% noted greater classroom participation. These results align with Isbell et al. (2004) and Wright et al. (2006), who emphasized that repeated engagement with stories supports linguistic development and oral proficiency. The data confirm that storytelling is a highly effective strategy for fostering multiple dimensions of speaking competence in secondary school learners.

Furthermore, the findings support the theoretical frameworks of Krashen (1985) and Vygotsky (1978), which stress the importance of meaningful input, scaffolded support, and social interaction for language acquisition. Storytelling provides these conditions, enabling learners to practice language in engaging, collaborative contexts. By combining comprehension-driven input, peer feedback, and repeated practice, storytelling promotes confidence, fluency, and active classroom participation. These results suggest that when effectively implemented, storytelling can significantly enhance oral communication skills and overall speaking performance among students.

4.6 Correlation Analysis

Table 6 presents the relationship between storytelling and students’ speaking skills. The results show a strong positive connection between the two variables. This suggests that students who engage more in storytelling tend to perform better in speaking activities.

Table 6*Correlation Between Storytelling and Speaking Skills*

Variable	Storytelling Score	Speaking Skill Score
Storytelling Score	1.00	0.78**
Speaking Skill Score	0.78**	1.00

Table 6 shows the correlation between storytelling and students' speaking skills. The results indicate a strong positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient of **0.78**, suggesting that higher storytelling scores are associated with better speaking skill scores. This statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) demonstrates that storytelling is an effective strategy for enhancing students' overall speaking abilities.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that storytelling is an effective method for improving students' speaking skills. It significantly enhances confidence, fluency, vocabulary, and classroom participation. Despite these benefits, students still face challenges such as language anxiety, fear of speaking in front of others, limited vocabulary, and a lack of practice outside the classroom. Addressing these challenges is essential to maximize the impact of storytelling on speaking development.

5.2 Recommendations

To enhance students' speaking skills through storytelling, schools should incorporate storytelling activities into the language curriculum, ensuring that learners have structured opportunities to practice oral communication. Establishing speaking or storytelling clubs can further create an encouraging environment that promotes regular practice, peer interaction, and collaborative learning. Teachers play a critical role by using group storytelling activities that foster active participation and cooperation among students. They should encourage every learner to contribute during storytelling sessions, which helps build confidence, reinforce language structures, and strengthen overall oral communication skills. Similarly, students are advised to practice storytelling consistently, both inside and outside the classroom, as this supports improvements in fluency, vocabulary, and speaking ability. Active engagement in storytelling and classroom discussions is essential to consolidate the skills gained, ensuring that learners develop confidence and competence in their oral communication.

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