

## Story-Telling and Diary-Telling: Student's Experience

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### Abstract

*Storytelling has become one of the methods of learning foreign languages, especially learning with the EFL classroom setting. However, learners still face challenges when using this method. The psychological burden is assumed to be the culprit of the obstacle; therefore, a setting of learning that is less burdensome is required. A study club such as a diary-telling activity is one alternative that can be employed. This qualitative study underwent two stages: the first one on the challenges perceived by students in formal class storytelling activities and the second stage occurred in a more informal situation, i.e., a diary-telling fun club. Descriptive qualitative design was used to each describe the findings at the consecutive study stage. The data were gathered through students' reflective writing after performing their storytelling for the first study stage and students' experience after a one-month fun club for the second stage. In the first stage finding, anxiety, preparation steps, and lack of talent became the stressors for them as the story they told was written by others. On the contrary, problems faced in the diary-telling activity were easily overcome. It was revealed that personal factors became the determinants of the students to be able to convey both storytelling in class and diary-telling in speaking club.*

### Keywords

EFL; storytelling; diary-telling; vocabulary; psychology



## I. Introduction

Speaking is one of the main abilities in learning English for non-English speaking students. Various methods have been applied to make it easier for students to learn it, one of which is storytelling. The success of storytelling for foreign language learning is among other things dependent on the mastery of the language's vocabulary. This is evident since the more vocabulary mastered by a learner, the more comfortable the learner to communicate or express the message using the pertinent foreign language being studied or vice versa. For this reason, foreign language teachers are challenged by prominent problems when implementing create-to-learn language learning activities in schools (Liu, Tai & Liu, 2018) including the use of storytelling in class. Spoken language is an interaction of two or more, it means that the speaker and listener involved in it. There are types of spoken language formal and informal. Formal is known as the official communication and need prepared before the communication, example of formal communication is social gathering, speech and ceremony. Informal communication doesn't take places true the officially and the context of conversation is stretched in all direction. (Purba, N and Mulyadi, 2020)

In performing storytelling, all information is spread and shared through the activity of telling, either written or orally. This also includes teaching in a class when a teacher builds interactions to share his/her knowledge to his/her students when telling must be inseparable part of the teaching processes. Similarly, experiences are also shared through

story; some are long and some are short, but always they are shared through a story which is told (Caminotti & Gray, 2012).

Therefore, storytelling can be a bridge for human social interaction and is commonly used in education for learning, explaining, and entertaining. For education, storytelling can be part of foreign language learning, especially on oral and speaking skills with the focus on the mastery of vocabulary. All through the history, conveying the values circulating in society as well as information, knowledge, culture, etc. have taken on many forms (Campbell & Cox, 2018) when computers or any other high-tech media are used to create, tell, and share multimedia stories.

This is one reason that storytelling is a highly interesting topic to discuss in the realm of English teaching in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. Moreover, English learning that occurs in a more natural, meaningful, and interactive context can be enhanced and this will lead to a situation that motivates students to connect with their learning to use more English words in the classroom to express them appropriately according to the situation (Kalantari & Hashemian, 2015).

The benefits of storytelling in English classes include, among other things, students that can learn from one another and share experiences (active student interactions) while receiving important practice in using their English skills, students' critical thinking skills that can occur because stories in storytelling help them reflect on the issues raised in the story, the power to reach out deep in sensitive areas of students that may not be visited by regular teaching (Vecino, 2006), and students' increased progress in specific language skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, sequencing, and story recall (Mokhtar, Halim & Kamarulzaman, 2011). Most importantly, storytelling is effective in improving communication skills because this activity when it occurs in a learning setting will enable students to know a number of things related to communication skills.

Storytelling in EFL classes is inseparable from integrating literature from the local culture, for instance Indonesian, to English senses. This cultural integration provides an authentic model of language use with its rich potential. For this matter, teaching and learning materials for EFL classes can take short stories that include speaking activities. As a product of creative writers, short stories might have many pedagogical benefits for EFL teachers and learners (Ceylan, 2016). When storytelling is chosen using those stories, the cultural aspect containing in the stories can be delivered more lively as there is an interaction between the storyteller and listeners with the earlier posing as the information sender.

Storytelling can also use personal experiences from daily activities written in a diary. Because it is a self-experience, the speaker will find it easier to express what has been experienced, mainly with the support of sufficient vocabulary mastery. A diary can be a personal notebook containing a person's daily experiences (Klimova, 2015). The contents of the notes are a reflection of what he/she has gone through in one day (when written on a daily basis) or a collective story from several days (when written not on a daily basis). By writing his/her notes in a diary, or often called a journal, certain life experiences in the past can be traced back when the writer reread what he/she has written

As writing a diary can be a personal lesson in English writing skills, when a group of students forms, for example, a speaking club with the topic of its members' daily experiences, their speaking ability is likely to be improved from the activity. Therefore, this study aimed to explore what had been experienced by speaking club members when speaking in front of audience using written material from their diaries compared to previous storytelling experiences in formal classrooms. The results of this study are expected to become a new learning method in English education so that it will increase the variety of language learning.

## II. Research Method

This study was conducted in two stages, i.e.,

1. the first stage that took place in the literary appreciation class with storytelling activities focused on obtaining data about obstacles in public speaking and
2. the second stage that took place in an informal speaking club using a diary as a material for speaking skills in the group.

The second stage was a continuation of the first stage but with a reduced number of participants. This was done because in the stage there was a requirement that participants had to pass the literary appreciation class with a minimum grade of B.

## III. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Storytelling obstacles in formal classes

#### a. The perceptions of the participants on performing storytelling

All participants wrote their perceptions about the challenges in learning using storytelling. Based on the coding process, some of them only wrote down some difficulties but some wrote down more difficulties and at least eleven items of challenge grouped into three big categories, i.e., anxiety, preparation steps, and having no talent could be collected from the class related to storytelling activities (Table 1). Of course, this was related to the level of English mastery of each individual participant.

**Table 2.** List of Challenges Faced by Students for Performing Storytelling

No	Category	Challenge	N
1.	Anxiety	Nervousness	27
		Feeling unprepared	23
		Being afraid of receiving bad responses	20
		Having negative thought on self	16

Anxiety. Anxiety became the first challenge faced by most participants in the study. Most of them stated that they always felt anxious not during the performance taking place but during the waiting time before the turn. The feeling was sometimes only a slight freight or nervousness that perhaps could be handled when the participants could control their feelings.

‘At first I was a little worried. No, I was just nervous. But after I spoke, my nervousness began to diminish and I was able to control myself. But for me, it was enough to disturb me at that time.’ (P.1)

Feeling unprepared also became one source of anxiety for the participants in delivering storytelling. They stated that seeing the paper containing the outline of the story was adding to the anxiety.

‘My heart beat fast as I was waiting for my turn while I was always back to see my outline. Really, I felt unprepared even though I had practiced many times. It felt like I was going to go to war so that everything I had memorized was all gone. I was really anxious.’ (P.3)

Some participants were also afraid that they would get a bad response from their friends. When they felt that their appearance was not liked by their friends, it made them nervous and could not continue their performance well anymore.

*'When I saw the facial expressions of my friends, I felt that they didn't want to listen to me so I thought that my storytelling had failed. I was immediately nervous and did not have the enthusiasm to continue my performance properly.'* (P.16)

Participants felt nervous because they were too negative about themselves in conveying storytelling. The thought became a challenge that caused nervousness when they had to perform in front of their peer friends.

*'Perhaps I had negative thoughts about me that I definitely wouldn't be able to show storytelling in front of many people. Negative thoughts were really a source of my nervousness when I had to stand in front of other people.'* (P.27)

For some participants, self-confidence was a very difficult thing to have when they had to perform in front of people. They stated that their self-confidence was always related to the level of nervousness or anxiety.

*'I am not confident specially when I must be talking or conveying my thought to others. I was nervous and felt I could not do it. I also did not know how to increase this confidence.'* (P.29)

Preparation steps. It turned out that, in order to prepare for the appearance of storytelling, the participants had to work extra, not only in time but also in material. For them, finding the right story to be told in storytelling was also one thing that had been very tiring.

*'At first I was really confused to determine what short stories I would convey in this storytelling. I had to really get a story that I thought was easy so that I would have no trouble showing it later. However, the selection of the short story also became an obstacle for me because I spent a lot of time just looking for a suitable story.'* (P.5)

For some participants, the challenges in preparation steps included finding the right vocabulary to illustrate the story they were about to show. Some also stated that pronunciation became an obstacle when they practiced preparing for the appearance of their stories. These things made the preparations take so long that they always felt unprepared when they had to present storytelling in time.

Vocabulary. In order to tell stories, we must have a lot of vocabulary. So if we forget the vocabulary, we will improvise. After all, vocabulary isn't always easy to find. In my preparation, sometimes those special words were very difficult to find in English.

*Sometimes, I felt stressed myself when I was stuck and I couldn't get the vocabulary I wanted.'* (P. 22)

*'I was afraid the most that I thought I would make a mistake in the pronunciation of a word. Therefore, I continued to practice over and over again so that I didn't make a pronunciation error. However, the more I practiced, the more I was not sure of some of my pronunciations.'* (P.23)

Ensuring that the process of talking in storytelling with the time allotted was also a separate stressor in preparing the performances. This was because that sometimes many sentences were forgotten so that the fitting of time always experienced obstacles.

'Fitting the time was very difficult for me. Sometimes, I felt like I had said everything, but when I heard it back from my recording, I found that a lot had been missed,

so the time was very short. Sometimes, I even forgot the sentence and I had to remember again so that the time was getting delayed. It's hard!' (P.26)

### **b. Having no talent**

Some participants revealed that they had no talent in storytelling. They felt difficulties in their nature and performance in the storytelling process. The inconclusive nature clearly became a challenge that had to be overcome when they delivered the storytelling.

*'Very difficult for me. I have absolutely no talent in storytelling. Actually, I didn't think that, in this lecture, I would be a storyteller. It was very difficult for me to do it because I was not talented in storytelling. Because I was not talented, my performance when I had to tell stories became very bad. Honestly, I always thought about my appearance during the storytelling.'* (P.18)

This talentlessness was also reflected in the difficulty in diving into the characters conveyed in the story. Feelings of anger, happiness, or sadness would appear flat due to the difficulty of the participants in expressing several different moods.

*'I am a typical person who can't express my feelings well. Thus, when I had to dive into the characters in the story that I had to perform, this was a very big obstacle for me.'* (P.13)

### **c. Diary-telling**

Characteristics of participants. Of the ten students recruited in this activity, four were male and six were female. Eight people got an A in the literature appreciation class and only two people got a B grade. Seven people came from semester 5 and three people were from semester 7. Table 3 presents the characteristics of the participants in this second stage of the study. More vocabulary. By writing daily experiences in their diary, more events were written that required more vocabulary. The consequence was that the participants were always ready with their dictionaries. They were also better trained to feel the sense of a word or idiom that might differ between Indonesian and English.

*"My vocabulary increased a lot and I was able to put it into practice right away. This has the effect of increasing the sharpness of my 'taste' in determining the right words in my sentences. For example, I did not write 'I am confused' but instead I wrote 'I have no idea'. This group is really useful, Ma'am."* (PGA.1)

*"I am more and more diligent in opening the dictionary and the result is that my vocabulary is improving every day. This is more than a storytelling activity in class. The focus now is not on just one story but on more stories that I encounter every day."* (PGB. 1)

Ability to write more smoothly from day to day. The activity of writing daily personal experiences caused the participants to be more trained in writing. The ideas that they saw and experienced for themselves gave rise to endless inspiration in this activity. From day to day, the obstacles they previously faced in writing unravel and became easier to overcome.

*"I really feel the benefits of this activity in terms of improving my skills in writing. In the past, I always had a hard time getting started writing. Ideas*

*seemed to go away and never come. But now, I am getting more fluent in writing, as if it just flows.” (PGA.2)*

*“Writing seems easier now. In the past, I wasn’t used to writing unless I was doing assignments or taking writing classes. For me, writing used to be a tough activity because we were required to have ideas to be ready anytime. But now, in this activity, I really enjoy writing.” (PGB.4)*

More fluent in speaking. Speaking was no longer the main menu in diary-telling activities because this activity involved discovering new vocabulary and writing. Like the two previously mentioned, the participants’ speaking ability also increased significantly based on their experiences. Because they already knew what they were going to talk about, they tended to be active to share their experiences in front of all group members.

*“This activity is like taking an extraordinary intensive course. This must be applied to all students from the first semester they come to university. The synchronization between my mind and mouth is better trained now which contrasts sharply with my ability before participating in this activity. Anyway, I really enjoy this activity because it benefits me, not only speaking but also writing.” (PGA.5)*

*“I speak more fluently now in English. Frankly, when I was about to start this activity, I was still worried that I would not develop my speaking skills like in the literary appreciation class. It’s really different from that class. I speak confidently and in familiar situations. I also wonder when I can speak more fluently; whereas, I am among those who only speak a little, especially when asked to tell a story. Thank you Ma’am for being involved in this activity.” (PGB. 3)*

Fewer obstacles. The presence or absence of pressure affects the participants’ ability to speak in front of an audience. When they participated in this activity, they felt that the burden was much lighter than that from the activities in the previous class. This made them easier to overcome the obstacles they faced during the diary-telling activities.

*“This is different from when we were in the previous class. In that class, we had a burden because we would be graded. Thus, there was a feeling of discomfort when we were observed and evaluated. However, this is different from what I experienced in this diary-telling activity. I do face some obstacles, but I find it easier to overcome. What’s more....., my friends in the group often provide inputs so that I can be more qualified in writing or speaking. I’m so moved Ma’am by this achievement.” (PGA.3)*

*“It is very different from the formal class, Ma’am. The obstacles I face, for example feeling very anxious, can be immediately overcome by having jokes thrown by my friends so that I can relax. If this activity had been done since a long time ago, maybe this activity would really have helped me, who has limitations in achieving English skills, not like other friends.” (PGB. 2)*

## **3.2 Discussion**

### **a. Challenges in Storytelling**

#### **1. Anxiety as a main obstacle for speaking in front of public**

In performing storytelling, nervousness becomes the first challenge for the participants. Storytelling is included in public speaking and nervousness is a major obstacle to this. This nervousness actually originates from the anxiety felt by someone when going to speak in public. According to Kirkwood and Melton (2002), people who

feel anxiety while speaking in public generally tend to avoid situations where they have to perform, but when they encounter such situations, they suffer intense distress and anxiety (Kirk (2002). This condition is the source that nervousness can develop into a failure in public speaking, in this case represented by storytelling.

When going to tell a story in front of the class, this means that a student will be the center of attention because he will be clearly seen by his friends who will listen to his story. This situation, conspicuousness which is standing out in one's environment, is likely to produce anxiety (Beatty, 1988). When uncontrolled, this will be a very serious obstacle for anyone who wants to speak in public. Often, this feeling occurs because the speaker lacks experience in public speaking. For the issue in the study, storytelling should have equipped with adequate preparation how to speak well in front of people. This needs a focus in learning so that the participants should have had enough knowledge to overcome their anxiety.

A person who is accustomed to having negative thoughts or repetitive negative thinking will be very unprofitable when he has to stand to speak in public. Repeated negative thoughts are usually characterized by uncontrolled thoughts about the negative aspects of future events so that a person's current situation is unstable (Arditte, Shaw & Timpano, 2016). because the emotional and psychological state of a person is already confining his soul to positive thinking. Ultimately, these negative thoughts may trigger anxiety (Keertz, Koran, Stevens & Bjorg, 2015).

To control anxiety, students need to practice referring to the extent to which students believe they are able to avoid failure and achieve success (Martin & Marsh, 2003). Students who believe they have little or no control over their anxiety are increasingly uncertain whether they can avoid failure or bring success. Therefore, students need to build self-belief or confidence in their ability to understand or to do well in what they set out to do, to meet challenges they face, and to perform to the best of their ability.

## **2. Good preparation for good outcomes**

Getting ready for an exam is difficult for a number of reasons (Pressley, Yokor, Meter, Etten & Frebern, 1997). This also applies to preparing storytelling performances conducted in class as part of learning a course. The selection of stories will be very important in the smooth performance later. A story that has a difficult plot will make it very difficult for students to convey the story's contents again. Conversely, a story with an easy plot will make it easier for students to retell the story.

In storytelling that uses English, vocabulary is certainly very important because vocabulary is the main media for storytelling. Therefore, when a student will deliver storytelling, the preparation of the vocabulary needed in telling the selected story must carefully be considered and carried out. The vocabulary preparation is of course to avoid the moment when a student forgets one or two important words used in the story. This vocabulary preparation can be done by writing a list of new words that have not been used so far. These new words must be written and memorized using sentence examples in the story. Memorization by rote for new words is a priority over words that are already familiar and memorized before.

The next preparation after mastering the new vocabulary is to ensure that all words used in the story are pronounced correctly, whether using British English or American English so that consistency is maintained. Vocabulary pronunciation should be matched with dictionaries in either books or digital so that the pronunciation of one word can be guaranteed. Time allotment is another thing to consider. A student who wants to perform storytelling must practice to adjust the time given for each performance and the time he

spends to retell the story. This is very important in order that he will not run out of time or be very short finishing retelling the story.

To solve this problem, a teacher can actually apply the appropriate teaching and learning method, for example, by borrowing the idea of Bloom's Taxonomy (Köksal, Dincay & Ulum, 2018) in which its application can be adjusted to the need of the teaching and learning processes that can include:

- Remembering: the teacher gives main materials concerning storytelling and the students memorize what has been given by the teacher. In this stage, all materials related to storytelling are given, including preparation in dealing with obstacles in conveying storytelling, for example tips on dealing with anxiety when speaking in front of others. This is very important to emphasize because teaching methods that involve speaking ability may mean that there will be a process of communication between the storyteller and the listener of the story. When material to reduce anxiety or nervousness is not provided, some students who experience it may fail to deliver storytelling.
- Understanding: the students have a process of comprehending the materials given and store the information properly in their mind. In this very important stage, each student must be asked to understand each material given while looking for additional information regarding storytelling skills. They are also asked to focus on honing their talents in speaking, especially public speaking and overcoming nervousness.
- Applying: the students apply the materials given in form of practice to implement in the real action. This includes, for example in English storytelling, the preparation of story selection, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, mentality, and so on. Mental preparation must also be taken into account.
- Analyzing: the students are attempting to break down each part of storytelling elements and what factors can advantage and disadvantage their practice. In this stage, the students have to really understand what will be presented in detail including other aspects that will support their performance.
- Evaluating: the students conduct peer assessment of what they have done in the practice to determine strength and weaknesses they have done so far. The assessment must also include the performance as a whole, not only the English aspects but also other aspects that count.
- Creating: by referring to the practice they have done, the students create similar activities performed in the previous practice and apply it for the real storytelling performance. This stage is the determining stage of student activities based on the exercise they have already done. Students with good preparation will naturally get good results and vice versa.

This taxonomy can be likely to work optimally to overcome the second category of challenge faced by the participants in the study. By applying such method, students in general will have considerable time and preparation for better outcomes in the learning.

### **3. Having no talent in performing storytelling**

Different people might have different talents. People can be very competent in dealing with certain parts of the interaction process, and less skilled with other parts. Howe, et al. (1998) stated that "it is widely believed that the likelihood of becoming exceptionally competent in certain fields depends on the presence or absence of inborn attributes variously labelled 'talents' or 'gifts' or, less often, 'natural aptitudes' (Brinkmann, Weerdenburg, 2014). With this statement, the seeds of talents present in different individuals may vary as well.



There are many areas of expertise that can be honed or studied which will certainly be influenced by each individual's talents, ranging from art, science, to the mastery of foreign languages. (Howe, Davidson & Sloboba, 1998) Storytelling is a part of literary art and public speaking skills that maybe not everyone can do. For those who have the talent to tell stories, storytelling will certainly be easy to do, including students who take English Language Education as their major by displaying the storytelling in English. However, for those who are not gifted, this activity will become a burden; thus, to be able to do it requires extraordinary efforts.

As aforementioned, storytelling focuses on the storyteller on how a person presents himself to tell a story in front of others. It is not only a matter of English proficiency, but more than that, it is a matter of talent and psychological aspects. Some people enjoy being the center of the attention; however, some do not. This is a very significant input for any teacher to include initial observation on the students' characteristics before applying some certain teaching methods that involve public speaking.

### **b. Diary-telling experience in improving English language skills**

Before discussing the speaking ability from making use of the diary, writing skills are the initial activities before speaking skills take place. However, both are actually the two forms of communication, i.e., oral communication and written communication. In written communication, messages can be thought of in a relatively longer time so that the quality of the writing is better. However, this ability is not necessarily owned by an individual. Mostly, a person's writing is something that is difficult to do because finding ideas for writing materials does not just come up in a second.

To some extent, one can self-evaluate whether he/she can write easily or even get into trouble every time he/she starts writing. In fact, in a variety of settings, people must have experienced things that impressed or were very memorable to them. Through personal experiences in a diary or personal journal, one can compare experiences that have just been experienced with past events. This is a very valuable wealth to generate inspiration in writing.

The boredom experienced by someone, for example, can be an inspiration to write in a diary. This proves that putting ideas into writing is very easy if based on personal experience. Equipped with this 'feeling of boredom', the circumstances that can cause that feeling can be explored deeper, and self-honesty will be involved with the desired aversion in response to the discharge of the feeling. Looking for ideas and sources of inspiration for this feeling, for example, will relate to timing, location, situation, and much more, so that there will be more and more points that can be written materials, which will later become a source of conversation. For this reason, taking advantage of time is very important to increase ideas, inspiration, and productivity of writing.

Places such as bathrooms, bedrooms, classrooms, cafeteria, or anywhere are ideal settings for ideas and sources of inspiration. To take advantage of this important time and place, it is also necessary to provide stationery at any time, such as notes on a smartphone, so that at any time the ideas that come directly can be put into writing. Because ideas and sources of inspiration come suddenly and are not necessarily timed, it is advisable not to get in the habit of delaying writing down these ideas, because most of them will easily be forgotten. A good article writer always records every phenomenon and oddity that exists in nature, both seen and felt, in writing.

After the experience is written, the writing can become a 'template' (Stapleton & Wilson 2017). for speaking activities. Diary-telling will be easier to do because the contents of the story to be revealed are things that have been experienced personally and

have been written systematically. This is a very good personal lesson for English learners to do so that their speaking skills are very well honed. This personal experience also serves as a bridge to see the future from the window of the past that has been written so that when this becomes the subject of group discussions, wise solutions tend to be easy to come by. What happens then is that the realism of the story will become natural. It is based on ideas that are completely factual and are not made up. Honesty in writing will impact on honesty in speaking since the latter requires eye contact between the speaker and the listener.

Speaking in front of friends informally does have a very different burden when speaking to be evaluated formally. The psychological burden that appears in the literature appreciation class does not appear or at least very minimal appears in the diary-telling group. In fact, one's disposition when it comes to public speaking can be practiced. This diary-telling activity with informal settings will train a student, for example, to speak fluently when he or she has to speak in a formal setting. Therefore, the right learning situation should greatly reduce the psychological burden of the learners so that the desired learning outcomes can be realized.

#### IV. Conclusion

In addition to the many benefits that can favor English learning for EFL classes, storytelling is also perceived to provide its own challenges for the students. Anxiety, preparation steps, and lack of talent are some of the things that are found in the study. In storytelling, the ability of students who become storytellers is not only measured from academic ability in English but also from aspects of mental readiness and talents of these students. Therefore, the use of the storytelling method which involves students as the main actors requires adequate classroom preparation by equipping students not only in the course material aspects but also in psychological aspects. In contrast, participants in diary-telling activities give different responses because of the less stressed psychological burden on the situations. On the other hand, this activity provides many benefits in improving the writing and speaking skills of learners so that this activity becomes a recommendation that English Language Education institutions can do in improving both English skills for their students.

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