THE EFFECT OF STORYTELLING AS A TEACHING METHOD ON SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL PROGRAMS: AN ACTION RESEARCH

AbdulMahmoud Idrees Ibrahim[i]
Alzaiem Alazhari University,
Sudan
&
Shaqra University,
Saudi Arabia

Abstract:
This study aimed at investigating the effect of the storytelling strategies on improving the language speaking skills of grade-six elementary school boys in Sudan. It was designated to find out the effects of using storytelling on developing language speaking skills. It was assumed that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students and their peers in the control group on the language speaking skills test due to the storytelling technique. The total sample was 63 where there were 31 students in the experimental group and 32 in the controlled group. Pre-test and post-test were used to collect the data. The results of the study showed that there was a substantial effect of the storytelling technique on language speaking skills in favor of the experimental group. The results proved that English language traditional techniques don't meet the need of the students or attract their interest to improve their English language. Storytelling techniques were found very helpful to promote language speaking skills. The study recommended that teachers should be subjected to intensive training to cope with the learners' needs and to be aware of the communicative approach necessities.

Keywords: EFL learners; speaking skills; storytelling technique; student-centred: young learner

1. Introduction

Storytelling is an ancient literary art that has evolved with time and appears in various forms: pictorial, spoken, and written. It is of great importance in the educational process and literary art. It is an acceptable and desirable technique for different age groups. The storytelling process is implemented by fulfilling many conditions, the most important of

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[i] Correspondance: email a-ibrahim@su.edu.sa, amdid2@yahoo.com

which are: The presence of the literary-cultural background, the use of appropriate style, the implicit construction of the event, the plot, and the setting.

Language is the basic means of communication between humans, and it is either spoken or written, and both types have their own skills, speaking communication is the most widespread and used type of communication among people. Speaking communication is of great importance in our life, through which man can express his needs, understand others and communicate constructively with them with written or spoken discourse. Speaking skill is an art that deals with purpose and emotion, and focuses on emotion more; the speaker wants to persuade and influence others. Speaking is considered more essential than the other skills. The ultimate goal of teaching and learning a foreign language is to help learners to be competent users of the target language. Language competence is the capability of using grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately in the target language. In that sense, learning a foreign language involves the development of a set of competencies as established by the CEFR (Common European Framework), which are the pragmatic, linguistic, and sociolinguistic competencies. These components together form communicative competence, speaking is being one of the four language skills (Richard, 1990).

Speaking is the act of passing on information, expressing thoughts and feelings in verbal language. The term is also used for the performance or process of delivering speeches or lectures. Speaking is a collaborative means of creating a sense that includes producing and receiving a language message (Brown, 2001; Burns & Joyce., 1997). A speaker's skills and communication habits affect the accomplishment of any exchange (Van Duzer, 1997). A weakness in the students' speaking skills in English as a foreign language was noticed, especially those students in the primary stage. In this regards the traditional EFL methods are accused of this weakness (Ali, 2012; Attia, 2015). It was observed that the majority of English language teachers neglect to teach speaking skills efficiently; therefore, the storytelling technique study came as a response to these observed shortcomings. Therefore, the study will investigate the effective role of storytelling techniques in developing and promoting both speaking skills to young EFL learners.

The present study tried to find out the answer to the following questions:

1) Are there any statistically significant differences between the average scores of the experimental group and their peers in the control group in speaking skills that are due to the storytelling technique?
2) What are the effects of using the storytelling technique on the EFL learners' speaking skills?
3) What aspects of speaking skills are improved through storytelling techniques?

The present study is expected to be of significance to teachers of English, as well as syllabus designers and all the stakeholders involved in the educational process to consider the power of storytelling on speaking skills in particular and learning English in general.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Storytelling and Speaking Skills

Storytelling is an art of narration that is based on two foundations: the content that includes the events, and the way the story is told; it is the way the narrator tells a story to others. It concerns both the storyteller and his hearer, the situation in which the subject of the story is transferred from its realistic image to the linguistic image to evoke an atmosphere of imagination. It is an ancient expressive art form, based on: bidirectional interaction between the narrator and the listener through a direct and close link between the two parts. It uses dramatic actions such as vocalization, body language, and gestures. The story is presented in different situations, whether historical, religious or cultural, formal or informal, according to the general context of the text. These stories are constantly changing depending on the memory, talent, or purpose of the storytellers (Anderson, 2005).

The human being does not acquire their mother tongue through chalk-and-talk classes in artificial circumstances or by drilling structures out of context, but by interacting and by engaging in meaningful use of language in a realistic situation. When children who want to learn have a chance to speak the new language, they feel they are making progress. Motivation is critical to the acquisition of a second language. Thus, storytelling in pedagogy is a learner-centered technique where the teacher narrates a story and the students retell it back with their own words and nonverbal performance to their peers the information and redeliver it to their peers (Safdarian 2013; Ebrahiminejad, et.al, 2014; Ling in Julia 2015; Fisher, 2021). Moreover, Andersen (2005) blames traditional reading skills for being time-consuming, difficult, and even painful for many learners. Speaking skills as a student-centered approach, need students to take turns, speak confidently, stay on topic, and speak with precision. Consequently, storytelling is a good technique for providing those speaking openings through different speaking activities.

2.2. Merits of Storytelling Technique

Storytelling is an effective technique in teaching morals, values, and cultural norms when it takes place in social environments that deliver genuine social clues about how knowledge is to be applied. Stories function as a means for passing on knowledge in a societal setting. The storytelling method emerges to help the learner to retain the language of the stories simply and recall it later effortlessly. Organizational psychologist Peg Neuhauser has found that a well-told story is much more powerful and is remembered better and for a much longer period than learning derived from facts and figures (Boris, 2017; Desi, 2020; Altweissi, 2022).

The storytelling technique integrates the four communicative skills along with each session but almost listening and speaking skills. In storytelling, it is essential to attract the learner´s attention by doing warmup activities, revising related vocabulary, or repeating the pronunciation of some words. While the story is developed, some dramatic

pauses take place at certain times convoyed with voice changes and body actions to perform characters and special situations of the story (Peck, 1989; Altweissi, 2022).

Figure 1: The Communication Process
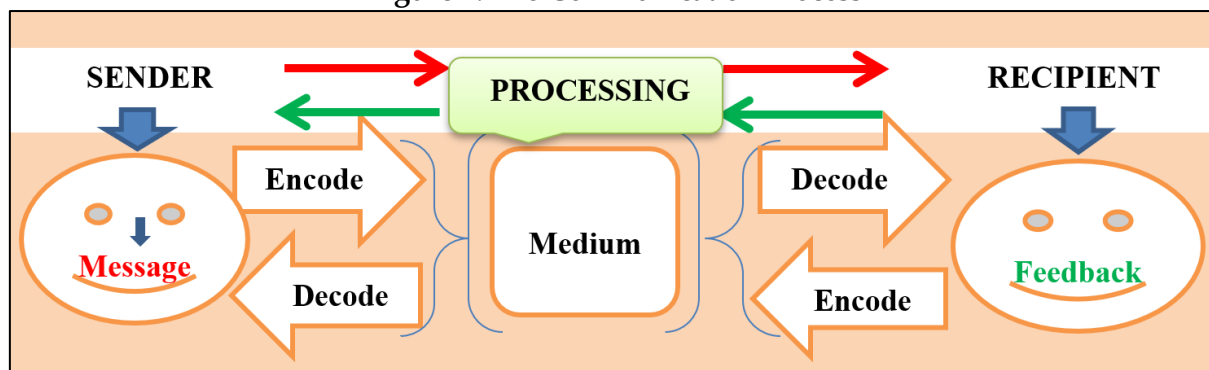
Source: AbdulMahmoud Idrees Ibrahim (2022).

English has become a predominantly worldwide language of communication. Therefore, it is the central source for communicating in various fields of knowledge and interrelationships. The mastery of communicative skills in English is appreciated as a priority for many language learners worldwide. Moreover, learners accordingly evaluate their success in language learning frequently, as well as evaluating their efficiency in speaking language skills. Richards (1990) states that social contact in communicating language functions is crucial in what you say and how you say it; with body language, or other non-verbal messages.

Communication skills (speaking and writing) have found great importance in the field of English teaching since they were stated as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing receiving and processing information (Brown, 2001). Speaking tends to be the most significant of the four skills. Thus, according to Ur (2006), people who know a language are raised as speakers of that language, as if speaking covered all types of knowledge; and many, if not all, foreign language learners are primarily keen to know to speak. Teaching speaking to young language learners (YLLs) is an interesting and challenging duty for teachers because YLLs are at an early age and they are attentive to learning many new things, particularly a foreign language. Young learners are energetic learners since they create knowledge from networking with the situation (Cary, 1998). Speaking is essential because students need to be able to relate to others and develop effective communication strategies.

A diversity of approaches has been implemented to enhance the performance of the speaking skills of EFL learners. Educators found the results of many teaching methods disappointing; learners were sometimes incapable to interact outside the classroom. For example, the audio-lingual method which focuses mainly on speaking and listening; was considered by many EFL teachers and learners to be boring and unpleasant (Bretz, 1990). Moreover, the communicative function of the language is realized as the main objective rather than the perfect knowledge of the system.

Therefore, the communicative language teaching method CLT encourages the development of speaking skills by promoting interaction as a means of learning a language. It instigates learners to use the knowledge of the formal aspects of the language to communicate successfully in authentic situations. One of the principles of CLT is to emphasize learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. On the other hand, the Communicative approach makes emphasis a balance between fluency and accuracy and it is the most appropriate for those learners who want to improve and gain confidence in their speaking skills (Harmer, 2009). Therefore, storytelling was found as an effective technique and very helpful to bridge the gap of the absence of the native environment interaction.

2.3. Storytelling and Language Skills

Storytelling is a teaching technique that has the unique and extraordinary capability of developing different skills at once. The central communicative skills are: speaking, listening in this regard. Learning a new language often motivates students to acquire it to enjoy the new experience. It is important to maintain those high levels of motivation and a way of achieving it through storytelling, so well-designed storytelling methods can contribute to developing the learners' aural-oral skills. When the teacher tells a story to his students the usual reaction is their willingness to involve in the discussion to show their understanding and their knowledge. Storytelling is spontaneous and popular art that dominates our folk tales; therefore, it is an excellent technique to be utilized to expose learners to the foreign langue. With this exposure, an atmosphere of learning will exist and the teacher can utilize this opportunity to create different speaking skills activities in the classroom related to the story told to improve the communicative skills. The ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is to be used confidently with few unnatural pauses, which (Nunan, 2003) calls fluency.

Storytelling not only contributes to the development of speaking but is also preceded by listening. While the teacher tells the story in the classroom, students must listen carefully to understand the meanings of the vocabulary in different language contexts and structures. Enjoying listening to stories engages learners in uttering and expressing sounds and using language accurately (Macleod, 2006). The listening skill can be also developed through different listening events in the EFL classroom. These events will be always related to the story told by their teacher.

Communication in storytelling refers to the ability to interact with others during communicative activities. Storytelling promotes writing skills by encouraging learners to write their own stories, give impressions of stories that they have already heard, or even write a scenario of the tale. Kassem (2021) conducted a training course using the debate technique; the study revealed that training EFL students on communication had improved significantly their spoken and written performance and reduced their anxieties. Comprehending a spoken word in oral communication is a similar process to understanding the written word (Haven & Ducey, 2007). Listening to stories motivates learners to read written stories and this enhances reading skills. Moreover, storytelling

improves the performance of speaking skills since it is a very impressive technique for the students to remember and comprehend. It was observed that the learners imitate the way their teacher narrates a story when they got back home. Storytelling helps in realizing linguistic communication, as the speaker represents the meanings of the story and performs it expressively through vocal tones, intonation, pitch, or loudness, along with body language and facial expressions (gesture and posture) which promotes social skills and vocal performance skill. Besides that, storytelling helps the students to retain expression and vocabulary when do write about the very topic. Furthermore, the role of narration is not limited to the familiar language skills but goes beyond that to the thinking skills that are concerned with understanding the meanings of words as well as placing them in the right places following the rules of the target language, and thus allowing the speaker to display his thoughts and present them in a sequence and harmony (Baldo, 2005). Furthermore, storytelling allows learners to experience different cultures and different styles of narration; as well it attains curiosity and evokes imagination. It evolves through the intrinsic urge to communicate and share experiences and develops positive attitudes towards foreign language and language learning.

Stories fill the academic atmosphere with joy and bliss and have an effective role with minimal effort and high recall because the stories provide suspense that makes the addressee want more (Hawkins, 2011). There is something in storytelling that excites students and compels them to listen, and that is something about the structure of the story that allows it to enter the mind more easily than usual talk (MacDonald et al., 2013). The native language is acquired naturally not by sitting at a school desk doing pencil and paper tasks or drilling structures out of context; speakers practice it by interacting meaningfully in an authentic community and intensive exposure. Laura (2013) claims that a second language should be learned the similar way we learn our native language and storytelling is an optimal situation and the best way of attaining better results. The following subjects will be the focus of this study:

- Pronunciation: The act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation.
- Vocabulary: The body of words used in a particular language.
- Fluency: This means speaking easily, reasonably quickly, and without having to stop and pause a lot.
- Accuracy: This refers to how to correct learners' use of the language system is, including their use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.
- Interaction: This refers to the ability to interact with others during communicative tasks.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Sample
It was a quasi-experimental study set to identify the role of storytelling as an educational technique and its role in enhancing speaking skills. The subjects were the 6th-grade of a

primary school for boys in the neighboring District School, Omdurman, Sudan in the academic year 21/20222. The total number was 63 divided already into two homogeneous groups, according to the achievement grades they obtained in the latest transmission exams. Then randomly, section A (31) was selected as an experimental group and section B (32) as a control one. Their ages range from 11 to 12.

Table 1: The Population Sample

Study Groups	N	%
Experimental group	31	49.2
Control group	32	50.8

1.2 The tests

Pretest and post-tests were used as a tool for collecting data; to evaluate the effect of the storytelling technique on the students' performance. The situational test was used to assess the sample performance in speaking skills which they were already having. The test was built on a rubric of five aspects (pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, and interaction). An oral pre-test was given for both groups based on a short story to assess whether there are individual differences between the two groups before applying the experiment.

While the control group was taught via the traditional method; the experimental group was taught by the storytelling techniques. At the end of the first term, a post-test was directed for both groups to compare and evaluate the findings to see how the storytelling technique contributed to developing speaking skills.

1.3 Procedure

The procedure for storytelling was roughly divided into three parts: pre-telling: while telling and post-telling (Wright, A. 1995). In the pre-telling, the purpose was to warm up the students and flourish an atmosphere to comfort the worry of listening to English stories without any translation.

a) **While story-telling activities:** In this part, the teacher checks the students' understanding of the language of the story by asking questions about what is going on. During the storytelling process, teachers act as a model in telling the story using well-known narrative techniques to empower and motivate learners to speak and keep their attention throughout, Peck (1989). Satriani, (2019) admits the use of the mother tongue when the teacher feels there is a difficulty during the activities.

b) **Post-storytelling activities:** After the storytelling takes place, the teacher encourages students to create or retell the story in their own way, using techniques such as asking questions about specific situations of the story that can create controversy between students to increase interaction and the opportunity to speak more.

c) **Post-storytelling activities**: After telling the story: the teacher asks the students questions about certain situations in the story that can provoke controversy among the students to increase interaction and provide an opportunity to speak more, as he asks them to tell the story of some of the parts of it. For this purpose, four practitioners from the faculty of education whose major was English, were selected during their practicum period to teach the storytelling techniques. Moreover, the student-teachers apply the experiment with all the convoying duties, such as the pre and post-tests using the observation checklist below which was adapted from the speaking rubric of Maulany (2013: 35) and modified.

Table 2: Checklist Scores for Assessing Speaking Skills

Name		
Group		
Date		
Aspects	**Information**	**Score**
Pronunciation	Very clear and easy to understand.	19-20
	Easily understood despite the influence of the mother tongue can be detected.	16-18
	There are pronunciation problems so listeners need full concentration.	13-15
	There are serious pronunciation problems that cannot be understood.	10-12
Grammar	No or few grammatical errors.	19-20
	Sometimes there is a mistake but it does not affect the meaning.	16-18
	Often make mistakes making the meaning hardly comprehensible.	13-15
	Severe solecism that it could not be understood.	10-12
Vocabulary	Use the appropriate vocabulary and expressions.	19-20
	Occasionally using less precise vocabulary and should be explained again.	16-18
	Often using inappropriate vocabulary.	13-15
	Vocabulary is very limited so the conversation cannot be happening.	10-12
Fluency	Very fluent and speak effortlessly.	19-20
	Fluency is slightly disturbed by the language problem.	16-18
	Often hesitated and stalled because of the language limitations.	13-15
	Talk is disjointed and stopped so that the conversation cannot be happening.	10-12
Interaction	Participated and interact with teacher and peers always.	19-20
	Participated and spoke with teacher and peers most of the time.	16-18
	Participated and cooperate with teacher and peers sometimes.	13-15
	Participated and communicated with teacher and peers rarely.	10-12

The rubric based on five-point-Likert scale scoring: (90– 100 = Excellent; 80 – 89 = V. good; 60 – 79 = Good; 50 – 59 = Average; 0 – 49 = Poor) to indicate the level of ability.

4. Results and Discussion

Speaking skills: a pre-test was held to determine the equivalency of the experimental and the control group and to determine whether the differences between the two groups were statistically significant. To check the equivalency, statistical analysis and tabulation of means and standard deviation were done using an independent T-Test value.

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviations, and (T) Value
of the Scores Obtained by the Participants on the Pre-Test

Study Groups	Mean	SD	T	DF	Sig(2-tailed
Experimental group	3.83	1.06	0.96	61	0.44
Control group	3.85	1.04			

An independent-samples T-Test was conducted to compare all participants' scores of the two groups on the pre-tests. As Table 4 above shows, there was no significant difference in scores for the control group (*Mean* = 3.83, *SD* = 1.06) and the experimental group (*Mean* = 3.86, *SD* = 1.04), *T-Value* (0.96) *p* = .44 (two-tailed). The difference in the means was less than ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) which confirms that there was no significant difference in scores for both groups.

An independent sample T-Test was performed to compare the means of two groups to determine if there was statistical evidence that the relevant sample means were significantly different. This test helped to find an answer to the main question of the study whether there are any statistically significant differences between the average scores of the experimental group and their peers in the control group in speaking skills due to storytelling technique; the independent samples T-Test was conducted and the results of the study were tabulated below and presented to find out the effect of storytelling on improving speaking skills.

Table 5: Means, Standard Deviations, and (T) Value
of the Scores Obtained by the Participants on the Post-Test

Aspects	Group	Mean	SD	No	T	Sig.
Pronunciation	Experimental	4.21	0.85	31	76.19	0.00
	Control	2.85	1.60	32		
Vocabulary	Experimental	4.32	0.69	31	97.72	0.00
	Control	2.72	1.32	32		
Fluency	Experimental	4.17	0.67	31	87.79	0.00
	Control	2.87	1.37	32		
Accuracy	Experimental	4.11	0.68	31	65.84	0.00
	Control	2.81	1.44	32		
Interaction	Experimental	4.26	0.59	31	60.24	0.00
	Control	2.83	1.65	32		

As is presented in the above Table 5, the scores of the participants in the post-test were higher in favor of the experimental group who studied with the storytelling technique in comparison with the control group who studied via the traditional technique. Based on the scores obtained on the effect of storytelling in improving speaking skills in each of its sub-skills, the values were statistically significant in favor of the experimental group, as the scoring averages of the experimental group were higher than the control group and therefore this result indicates that storytelling was effective and powerful in developing speaking skills.
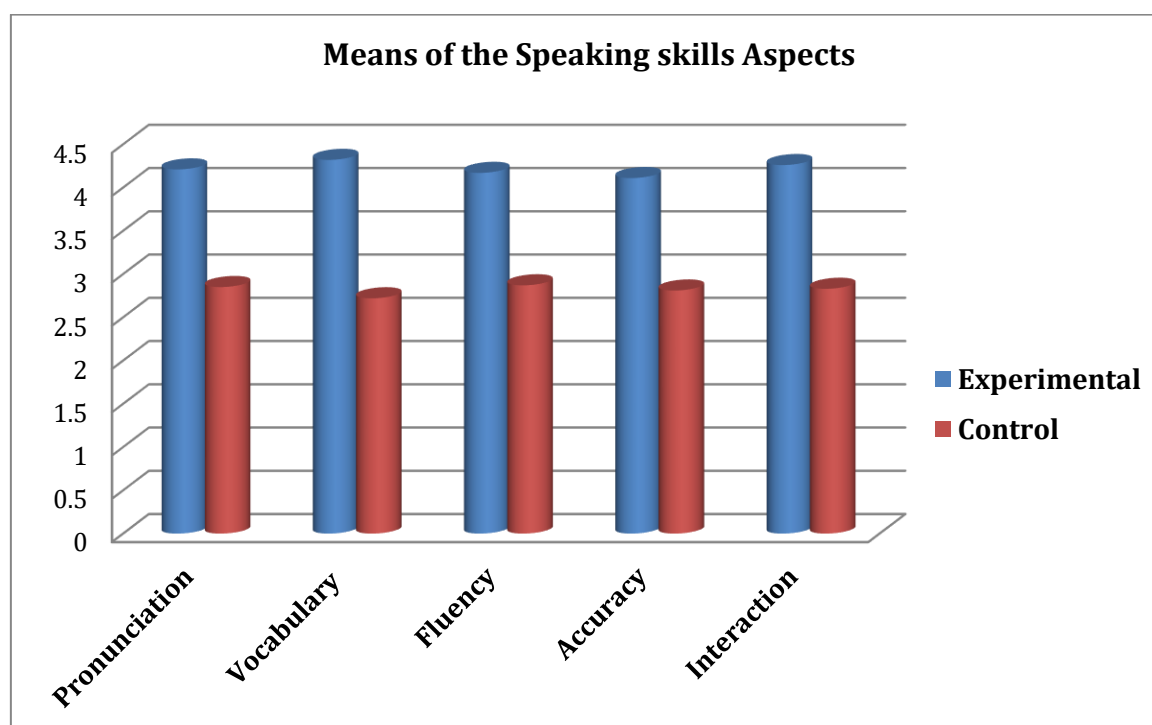
Figure 2: Total Means for the Five Aspects of Speaking Skills

The average means scored by students of the experimental group for the five categories were 4.21, 4.32, 4.17, 4.11, and 4.26 respectively, out of a maximum mean score of 5.0. Also, a higher score for the favor of vocabulary and interaction was obtained. It was evident that Learners who studied with the storytelling technique showed a noticeable superiority compared to their peers in the control group, as shown in Figure 2 Storytelling brings language to life and creates an immersive, participatory experience that lets young learners enjoy the language through the story and that makes them feel the language environment. Storytelling conveys the message in a way that stimulates people's minds and evokes emotion. Berry (2000) supports the supposition that when stories evoke feelings, the cognitive parts of the brain are stimulated to store new information. Also, (Richter & Koppett, 2000) states that storytelling has the benefits of learning based on experience because of the extent of active participation that occurred during storytelling.

Table 6: Means, Standard Deviations, and (T) Value
of the Scores Obtained by the Participants on the Post-Test

Study Groups		Mean	SD	T	Sig (2-tailed
Total	Experimental group	4.21	0.68	92.03	0.00
	Control group	2.82	1.34		

Summarizing all means, SDs, and T-Test values of scores obtained from all sub-skills results extracted from the total in Table 2 show that there is a statistically significant effect at the significance level (a ≤ .05) in favor of the experimental group. After obtaining the scores of the pre-test and post-test, the mean and standard deviation of the scores were calculated to determine the effectiveness of the storytelling technique in developing the EFL learners' speaking ability.

The results revealed that the storytelling technique was effective and powerful in developing speaking skills. This positive effect is attributed to attracting students' attention and increasing their focus to communicate actively with their teacher, which positively contributed to enhancing their speaking skills. This confirmed that significant development of the participants' speaking skills had occurred. These results indicate that the proposed storytelling technique was effective in enhancing the participants' level of speaking competence. These findings are consistent with Van Groenou's (1995) view that the use of storytelling in the classroom can enhance language development and improve speaking skills for learners of English as a foreign language. The findings revealed that the majority of the students in the experimental group were highly motivated and interacted positively in response to the techniques that were used in storytelling. Even the weak students had participated enthusiastically. The previous appraisal finds an answer for the second question of the study, which examined the effects of storytelling technique on the EFL learners' speaking skills.

In this paragraph, there is an answer to the third question that looks at the aspects of speaking skills that are improved through storytelling techniques. These results indicated that the storytelling technique had contributed significantly to the development of the speaking sub-skills (pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, and interaction), which are the focus of the study, among the students of the experimental group. The storytelling technique created an atmosphere of motivation and raised the degree of attention and interaction among them, which increased their superiority compared to their peers in the control group who were taught with the traditional method. The results of the study agreed with those of (Macleod, 2006; Hawkins, 2011; Rodas et al., 2011; MacDonald et al., 2013), which revealed that the storytelling technique has great potential as an educational tool.

Storytelling is a new teaching trend in teaching languages. Educators try to adopt it in classes for all ages. Also, the use of the narration method created a comfortable atmosphere and a departure from the norm as in the traditional method, which led to breaking down barriers, as well as creating an atmosphere of incentive that appeared in improving spoken skills. This improvement is attributed in the second place to the

immediate feedback that was evident in the students' response to the comprehension questions, the meanings of words, pronunciation, and retelling of the story or part of it. Moreover, the improvement in the students' speaking skills may be attributed to the adoption of a student-centered strategy which made the student in a position of responsibility and challenge. Likewise, this method gives extra time for the student to practice speaking and interacting with peers spontaneously.

The storytelling technique enables the student to transfer his experience to home or playmates in the neighborhood, which increases and improves, and reinforces his speaking skills. The freedom which the student feels during the storytelling classes enables him to express and interact with the issues that are under focus for discussion gives him self-confidence. Besides, the stories are rich in high-end vocabulary and striking expressions that the student acquires effortlessly and implants in his attention, which increases his linguistic and increases his communication ability. The same result has been drawn by (Karagöz, et al, 2010; Ahmed, 2022).

5. Recommendations

The study recommended the following:
- Storytelling should be incorporated into the English Language programs.
- Storytelling techniques require to be taken into consideration in various stages of study.
- Students should be encouraged to listen to and watch videos to live native speech.
- Oral composition and discussion lessons have to be practiced frequently.
- A new assessment system for spoken abilities is essential to be included within the examinations system.
- Well-trained teachers are needed and they should be acquainted with storytelling modern techniques.
- Activities that encourage creativity and motivate students to use critical thinking are very crucial to promoting language awareness.
- Encourage students to watch videos and films of great works written in English to enhance their language.

6. Conclusion

The results of this action research revealed that employing storytelling in teaching English as a foreign language has contributed to a noticeable improvement in speaking skills along with other language skills, as we cannot isolate speaking from its integral role with other skills. Since language is speech basically, attention should be paid to speaking skills not tedious homework activities or memorizing silly quotations because speaking contributes significantly to improving the overall level of the language. It is desirable to provide a real environment where meaningful communication occurs. The method of teaching by storytelling technique had proven its effectiveness and ability to achieve the

vital goal. After applying the storytelling technique through this study, it became clear that it has not limited to speaking skills, but also other considerable aspects were perceived, e.g.:

- The students interacted and participated enthusiastically during the sessions.
- The students felt happy and relaxed while the storytelling procedure.
- The students' vocabulary improved significantly in selecting sophisticated words.
- Many students deduce the main ideas from the lesson easily and smoothly.
- Many students' pronunciation had improved and they spoke fluently.
- Some students express their imagination and awareness and creativity.
- The students' communicative skills were improved and their shyness was reduced.

Storytelling as a teaching technique has become a trend in the pedagogy of language teaching. Many studies have reported that storytelling develops many linguistic skills besides its emotive and social traits. Storytelling inspires the learners to create their knowledge through different meaningful activities and learning situations. Storytelling flourishes an authentic atmosphere for the learners to learn English through English. Many students found that storytelling is a relaxing technique to learn English without any stress at all; therefore, family, teachers, curriculum developers, and stakeholders should take care of it.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author
AbdulMahmoud Idrees Ibrahim is an associate professor of ELT at the Faculty of Education, Alzaiem Alazhari University, Sudan. He earned his BA in Education (English Language & Arts), his MA in Linguistics from Yemen University, and his Ph.D. in ELT from Nilain University, Sudan. He is currently seconded as a faculty member at Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia. He worked in the field of EFL for more than four decades in Sudan and abroad, as well as a teacher trainer in many teachers' training institutions. He was also a material developer and critical reader at the Open University of Sudan. He had been an active lecturer of English and Arabic in many Sudanese and Yemeni universities. He founded the graduate diploma and MA program for the faculty of education at Alzaiem Alazhari University. He participated in many seminars, conferences, and workshops. He has more than forty publication, research papers and books. His research interests include contrastive linguistics, translation, poetry, education, and literature.

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