



## Innovating Language Instruction in Madrasah Diniyah: The Use of English Storytelling to Enhance Speaking Skills and Learner's Well-Being

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### ABSTRACT

Madrasah Diniyah institutions often face persistent challenges in language instruction, including low student engagement and limited diversity in teaching methodologies. These issues can hinder both linguistic development and overall learner well-being. To address this concern, this study explores the integration of English storytelling as a pedagogical strategy to (1) promote students' speaking skills and (2) promote their emotional and psychological well-being during the learning process. Employing a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, the study was conducted over two instructional cycles involving 52 students from Madrasah Diniyah Kanzul Ulum. Data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods. Pre-tests and post-tests assessed improvements in speaking performance, focusing on fluency, vocabulary usage, and overall comprehension. Qualitative data were obtained through classroom observations, student questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with parents to capture behavioral and emotional responses to the intervention. The findings indicate a significant improvement in students' speaking abilities, with notable gains in verbal expression, confidence, and classroom engagement. Storytelling sessions fostered a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment, encouraging active participation and reducing student anxiety. Furthermore, students developed a stronger emotional connection to the material, which enhanced motivation and fostered a more positive attitude toward learning English. Parental feedback also revealed increased use of simple English expressions at home and greater enthusiasm for attending classes. These outcomes suggest that English storytelling not only supports language acquisition but also contributes to students' holistic development. Accordingly, it presents a promising instructional approach for enhancing both linguistic proficiency and well-being in non-formal Islamic educational settings.

**KEYWORDS:** English storytelling; speaking skill; Madrasah Diniyah; Non-formal education;

## Introduction

Education, as one of the elemental aspects of life, must be established in formal and non-formal ways or institutions. It has been carried out in Indonesia, particularly in the field of Islamic education. The majority of Indonesians, who are the world's largest Muslim population, have been influenced culturally by the establishments of Islamic education known as madrasah, including Raudlatul Athfal, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, and Madrasah Aliyah. The government and society are occasionally acknowledging the existence of madrasahs. Before the National Education System Law No. 20 was issued in 2003, Madrasah Diniyah (MADIN) was just called Madrasah. Madrasahs differ from one another in a number of ways. Madrasahs always change throughout times, producing models that have unique characteristics. The government began to pay attention to the development of madrasahs, offering recognition and infrastructure for them. Madrasahs provide education at the primary, secondary, and senior levels, known as madrasah ibtidaiyah, madrasah tsanawiyah, and madrasah aliyah respectively. Jannah (2013) stated that madrasah is Islamic education that academicians broadly learn. Besides, non-formal educational institutions also play an essential part in improving the youth generation in education. Islamic boarding school, Qur'an kindergarten learning (TPQ), and Madrasah Diniyah have become an inseparable part of the formal educational institution due to the fact that children now need more preparation to build their good character, specifically in line with religious values. MADIN particularly supports formal education by offering Islamic courses after school focusing on *Fiqh*, *Nahwu*, and Quranic *Tafseer* (Ciyarti, 2009; Ibad, 2022).

MADIN, as one of non-formal Islamic education institutions, is founded to nurture students' thought about Islam after school time (Ciyarti, 2009). Parents are eager to send their children to MADIN since it has a different atmosphere for learning. The specific materials which are given intensively like *Fiqh*, *Mahfudotz*, *Nahwu*, *Shorof*, etc, contribute effectively in improving their knowledge about Islam and life. Furthermore, a combination of teaching and guidance in learning Qur'an during the learning activities fosters children not

only being able to read Qur'an but also master the meaning to interpret its implementation in real life. However, Madrasah Diniyah has several problems in its development. As asserted by Azra (2006), Madrasah Diniyah has limited of funding, no standardized management, children find their boredom to study in Madrasah Diniyah for being exhausted to study in the formal schools, and the curriculum which relies on religious aspects(Jusuf, 2022).

Therefore, a new atmosphere of learning in MADIN should be undertaken. One of the ways is embedding English as local content subject in MADIN. As non-religious subject, English has significant role nowadays. Every sector of life involves English to be the part of global society. Therefore, children deserve to get more exposure and drilling in learning English, not only in formal schools but also in non-formal schools like in Madrasah Diniyah. Innovations are then needed to go in line with this concern. One of those is by integrating literary works for their learning engagement, including the use of storytelling in English learning. In cultural perspective, storytelling has been important to civilization since before written history. In prehistoric times, oral storytelling was the only way for people to talk to one other and keep their cultural values, beliefs, and legacy alive. Abrahamson (1998) says that stories are the earliest way that people have kept and shared information. Because of this, storytelling made things easier to remember and share, which made it a great way to encode knowledge in oral traditions. (Habibie, 2021) asserts that storytelling was crucial for the survival of civilizations throughout generations to foster transmission of life experiences throughout generations.

Several studies about MADIN have shown their benefits in promoting education in this institution among others are Dina (2021) who investigated about Madrasah Diniyah in terms of children character building. The study proposed a concern on how Madrasah Diniyah contributes to build children character and it resulted that children who study MADIN have righteous morals, especially which reflect Islam religion such as being discipline in reciting Qur'an and high politeness to the teachers. Another study which was conducted by Badrudin (2017) concerned on the policy of government for MADIN. According

to the study the policy has not given significant support to MADIN as an integral part in the provision of national education system in Indonesian context. The study found that the policy has not supported MADIN as an integral part in the provision of national education system in Indonesia. In the local scope, the condition results in difficulties in its implementation.

There remains a research gap in investigating how English, especially through storytelling, can be used to enhance students' speaking skill. This study has some points to investigate which have not been exposed by the above studies. First, this study is concerned on embedding English as a non-religious subject in MADIN, which will give a new atmosphere to students in their process of teaching and learning, which has not been addressed by the existing studies. Second, speaking skills will be specifically exposed to encourage students in the teaching and learning process through storytelling. The skill is chosen for students studying at MADIN, who are mostly young learners. Teaching English through oral performance will be preferable for them since it is more interactive. From all those descriptions, research questions are formulated in the study as follows;

1. How can English storytelling improve the speaking skills of Madrasah Diniyah students?
2. How is students' well-being toward learning speaking by using English storytelling in Madrasah Diniyah?

## **Method**

This study applied Classroom action research sought to understand and learn about the phenomena that occurred during the process of teaching-learning, to offer solutions to the problems that arose (Burns, 2010). Action research uses intervention to gather and evaluate data, as well as implementations to address educational challenges. Burns (2010) also highlighted that classroom action research shows the reasons for the therapy's influence, as well as what happens while treatment is given, and illustrates the entire process from

treatment's inceptions on the issue of action. It is carried out in the classroom by the teacher of the course, mainly with the purpose of solving a problem or improving the teaching/learning process. The following procedures are included in classroom action research:

1. Making plans

This stage encompasses identifying a problem or issue and coming up with a plan to enhance one particular area of the research setting. This is the stage of forward-thinking when you think. Given the realities and limitations of teaching setting, what kind of research is practical, and what possible advancements can be possibly achieved?

2. Taking action

The well-researched strategy integrates specific intentional interventions into teaching situations that teachers carry out over a certain amount of time. The interventions are 'critically informed' as the teachers develop new and different ways and assess their current assumptions.

3. Observation

This stage involves methodically observing the activity's impact and recording the actions, context, and viewpoints of those participating. This stage involves gathering information about what is happening by using "open-eyed" technologies.

4. Reflection

On the purpose of making sense of what happened and improve comprehension of the topic being studied, it is necessary to do evaluation, discussion, and reflection on activity's effects. In order to make things better or to share research experience with others as part of continuous professional growth, more cycles of action research can be applied. According to Kemmis (1983) and Hopkins (2008), action research is a type of self-reflective inquiry that people in social or educational settings do in order to (a) improve the efficacy and fairness of (b) their understanding of those practices, (c) the contexts in which those practices occur, and (a) their own practices themselves.

Action research can be conducted alone or in conjunction with others, but it is most successful when done in a group setting. To get a better outcome, two cycles were employed. If classroom action research (CAR) meets or beyond the set standards, it is considered effective. If at least 80% of students complete the test with a score of 70 or above, this research will be regarded as a success one. It gives an implication that starting with the pre-test and concluding with the post-test in Cycle 2, students must get a goal score of 70 on the English-speaking test during CAR. Additionally, the subsequent Classroom Action Research (CAR) action will be stopped if the successful action condition is satisfied. If CAR does not match the requirements, it might be considered failed. The following cycle would then see the alternate action.

### **Setting and Participants**

The research conducted at *Madrasah Diniyah Kanzul Ulum*, Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia. The subject or participants in this research was 52 students of *Madrasah Diniyah Kanzul Ulum*.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection of the study were collected quantitatively and qualitatively.

### **Quantitative Data**

The quantitative data from the research was acquired using the Speaking Test. A test is a series of practice exercises used to assess an individual's or group's abilities, intelligence, ability, and attitudes. There were two speaking examinations offered to students: a weekly test and a cycle test. Weekly tests were for weekly meetings, but cycle tests were given every cycle to determine how well students' speaking skills were improving. In addition, to collect the data pre-test and post-test is performed. The study assessed students' speaking performance using Hughes' (2003) components. There are five general components or rules of speaking, including *accent*, *vocabulary*, *fluency*, and *comprehension*.

Table 3.2 The English Language Speaking Skills Assessment (Accent)

Score	Description
1	Pronunciation frequently unintelligible
2	Frequent gross errors and a hefty accent make understanding difficult, requiring frequent repetition.
3	“Foreign accent” requires concentrated listening, and mispronunciation leads to occasional misunderstanding and apparent errors in grammar or vocabulary.
4	Marked “foreign accent” and occasional mispronunciations, which do not interfere with understanding.
5	No conspicuous mispronunciations, but would not be taken for a nativespeaker.
6	Native pronunciation, with no trace of “foreign accent”

Table 3.3 The English Language Speaking Skills Assessment (Vocabulary)

Score	Description
1	Vocabulary is inadequate for even the simplest conversation.
2	Vocabulary limited to basic personal and survival areas (time, food, transportation, family, etc.)
3	The choice of words is sometimes inaccurate, and vocabulary limitations prevent the discussion of common professional and social topics.
4	Professional vocabulary is adequate for discussing special interests; general vocabulary permits discussing any non-technical subject with some circumlocutions.
5	Professional Vocabulary is broad and precise; general vocabulary is adequate to cope with complex practical problems and varied social situations.
6	Vocabulary as accurate and extensive as that of an educated native speaker

Table 3.4 The English Language Speaking Skills Assessment (Fluency)

Score	Description
1	Speech is so halting and fragmentary that conversation is virtually impossible.
2	Speech is very slow and uneven except for short or routine sentences.
3	Speech is frequently hesitant and jerky; sentences may be left uncompleted.
4	Speech is occasionally hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and groping for words.
5	Speech is effortless and smooth, but perceptively non-native in speed and evenness.
6	Speak on all professional and general topics as effortlessly and smoothly as a native speaker.

Table 3.5 The English Language Speaking Skills Assessment (Comprehension)

Score	Description
1	Understand too little for the simplest type of conversation.
2	Understands only slow, elementary speech on common social and tourist topics; requires constant repetition and rephrasing
3	Understands careful, somewhat simplified speech when engaged in a dialogue, but may require considerable repetition and rephrasing
4	Understands quite well every day, educated speech when engaged in a dialogue, but requires occasional repetition and rephrasing
5	Understands everything in everyday educated conversation except for very colloquial or low-frequency items, or exceptionally rapid or slurred speech
6	Understands everything in both formal and colloquial speech to be expected of an educated native speaker

### *Qualitative Data*

The qualitative data describes the students' current state, situations, and responses during the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, parents of

students were given a questionnaire to collect further information about their children's well-being.

a. Interview

The researcher conducted two separate interview sections. An interview was conducted during the most recent meeting to learn about the students' reactions to the Retelling Technique for Teaching Speaking Skills.

b. Observation Sheet

Along with the state of the class as assessed by a checklist, the observation sheet showed the students' participation in the teaching and learning process during each cycle. The researcher is gathering data on "Storytelling Technique (STT)" using an observation sheet.

## **Result**

### *The Use of Storytelling Techniques for Teaching Speaking*

In the meeting session of the first cycle, it was used a format of lecturing and discussion. The lesson topics were explained in great detail because it was the first meeting. In addition to defining a narrative text, the researcher also discussed its uses, general forms, linguistic characteristics, and examples of narrative texts. The students were asked whether they had heard any folk stories after being discussed and shown to them some examples of narrative prose. Meanwhile, in the second meeting of the first cycle, a storytelling video was given and it was also demonstrated how to tell a narrative before asking them to demonstrate their storytelling skills in class. Unfortunately, because the students did not get a clear explanation of how to tell a narrative text, the students continued to struggle.

In the last meeting of the first cycle, worksheets were used to boost the students' motivation to narrate a tale. At the start of the conference, the teachers separated students into six groups. A story title of "Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih" was given and each group was instructed to create a story based on the title. The students were not provided a plot, so they could make up their own story. The topic was presented in details because this was the first meeting. In addition to defining a narrative text, the students also discussed its

uses, general forms, linguistic characteristics, and examples of narrative texts. The students were asked whether they had heard any folk stories and continued the discussion and it was shown to them some examples of narrative prose.

At the second meeting of the first cycle, the researcher showed the students a storytelling video and demonstrated how to tell a narrative text before inviting them to show off their storytelling skills in class. Unfortunately, because the researcher did not provide a clear explanation of how to tell a narrative text, the students continued to struggle. At the last meeting of the second cycle, the researcher made improvements to the worksheet activities. The same groups of students as at the last meeting were assigned to them. Each group was then required to create a narrative text using pictures. The entire collection of pictures told a story. To assist them in developing the plot, important remarks were added beneath each image. In front of the class, the students were instructed to use their own words to report the outcomes of their discussions.

### ***Improvements in Student Abilities and Teacher Performance***

According to the observation sheets for the teacher's performances, it was found that teachers' teaching performance improved between the first and second cycles, or from first to sixth sessions. The percentage score for the teaching performances enhanced from 61% in the first cycle to 86% in the second. Figure 1 shows the teacher's performance scores in the first and second cycles.

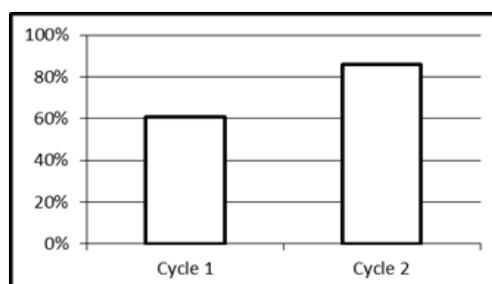


Figure 1. Evaluation of the Teacher's Performance in the First and Second Cycles

Additionally, the finding showed that the ability of students' was improved. The data for this improvement were gathered via observation sheets of their activities. Figure 2 shows the students' results after the first and second cycles.

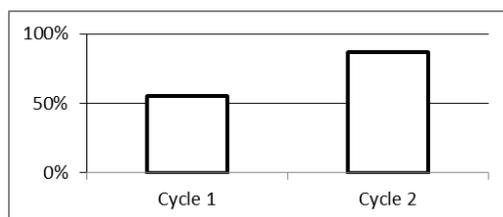


Figure 2. The Results of Student Observation Sheets

Following the first cycle of STT, the students' average score was 55%; however, following the second cycle, it rose to 87%, as shown in Figure 2. This demonstrated that following two cycles of storytelling utilizing STT, the students' English-speaking abilities increased.

### ***Modeling's Effect on Students' Storytelling Skills***

The collaborator believes that during the initial modeling, the researcher did not provide instructions on how to utilize gestures and body language to make utterances that were both linguistically correct and fluid. The students thus did badly on their initial examinations. However, the students were able to comprehend and imitate what the researcher demonstrated once the researcher modeled the narrative once more and gave them advice on how to tell a story more effectively. As a consequence, they received significantly higher scores in the final cycle. The students' results are displayed in Figure 3.

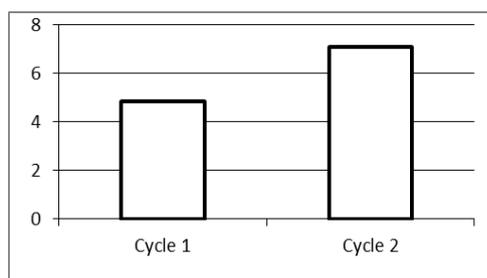


Figure 3. The Storytelling Ability of Students in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

Figure 3 demonstrates an increase between the first and second cycles.

### ***Students' Reactions to the Application of Storytelling Techniques***

In order to ascertain the students' challenges and reactions to using Story telling hapas, the researcher sent them a questionnaire after cycle 2. Three indicators were included in the questionnaire. The information obtained from the questionnaire replies about the impact of utilizing the STT is shown in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Results of the Questionnaire

Indicators in the Questionnaire	Items Number	Frequencies	
Becoming motivated in studying	8, 9	31	6
Studying actively	2, 4, 10	29	0
Becoming helpful to improve speaking skills	3, 5, 6, 7	32	9

The researchers concluded that the use of story topic to teach speaking through narrative texts in the classroom was well received by the students based on the data in Table 3.6. The fact showed that every section of the questionnaire had scores of 80% or greater, indicating positive student responses, served as evidence of this. The storytelling technique thus had a favorable effect. The storytelling technique was effectively applied, and the students responded well to using it to acquire spoken EFL. The positive responses from the students show how storytelling can create an engaging and enjoyable learning environment. In addition to actively participating in class activities and finding storytelling helpful for improving their speaking skills, several students reported feeling more motivated during the learning process. It notifies that incorporating storytelling resulted in a dynamic and engaging learning environment in which students felt more comfortable expressing themselves in English.

Furthermore, interviews with parents revealed strong support for implementing English as a local content subject at MADIN. Parents raised the innovation, stating that including English learning, particularly through storytelling, added a new and enjoyable dimension to their children's non-formal education. They noticed their children became more enthusiastic about attending Madrasah and showed a greater interest in the learning activities.

Additionally, according to several parents' report, there were significant changes in their children's linguistic behavior. They reported that their children had begun to use simple English expressions at home and seemed more confident when attempting to communicate in the foreign language. Referring to the changes in behavior, it showed that storytelling helped them improve their communicative skills in the classroom and encouraged the practical use of English in everyday situations.

In general, a high degree of acceptance and gratitude for the use of storytelling in English class was expressed by both parents and students. It illustrates that it is not only feasible but also useful to use English through storytelling in an informal Islamic educational context in order to foster language development and learning motivation. The results of the study further emphasize the value of student-centered and contextualized teaching methods in promoting young learners' speaking skill.

## **Discussion**

According to the study, using Storytelling technique (STT) to teach speaking greatly increased instructor's efficacy and students' performance. It is in line with some previous studies revealing the contribution of storytelling activity in fostering students' speaking skill (Zuhriyah, 2017; Nair & Yunus, 2021). Several educational approaches were improved to address early difficulties during two cycles of classroom action research, which resulted in noticeable gains in students' English-speaking proficiency and livelier classroom interactions.

Students had trouble with storytelling in the early phases of implementation because there was no clear modelling and scaffolding (Arifin et al., 2022). This is consistent with earlier studies showing that when presenting story tasks to

language learners, structured input and explicit modeling are essential (Bromley, 2002; Cameron, 2001). Even though the first cycle featured instructional lectures, video resources, and group projects based on the folktale “Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih”, students found it difficult to effectively express topics like body language, gestures, and intonation.

In the early stages of implementation, students struggled with storytelling due to the lack of explicit modeling and practical scaffolding. This aligns with prior research indicating that clear modeling and structured input are critical when introducing narrative tasks to language learners (Bromley, 2002; Cameron, 2001). Although the first cycle included instructional lectures, video materials, and group work based on the folk story "Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih," the limited guidance on performance aspects such as intonation, gestures, and body language contributed to students' difficulties in expressing themselves effectively.

During the second cycle, the integration of visual story prompts and explicit modeling of narrative delivery significantly increased student engagement and performance. This improvement echoes findings by (Akhmad et al., 2023) who emphasized that when learners are given multimodal supports—such as images and guided storytelling steps—they are better equipped to construct and deliver coherent oral narratives. The jump in students' average scores from 55% to 87% supports the view that visual aids and collaborative scripting tasks can reduce linguistic anxiety and stimulate more confident oral production (Ellis & Brewster, 2002).

Moreover, the observed improvement in teacher performance from 61% to 86% reflects the importance of reflective teaching and responsive lesson design in promoting student learning. The increased use of worksheets, story prompts, and cooperative learning methods contributed to a more interactive and student-centered classroom. As suggested by Harmer (2007), such adjustments often lead to a more motivating environment, particularly in EFL contexts where learners may have limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

The questionnaire findings with satisfaction levels above 80% show that students responded well to the implementation of English storytelling technique, which further endorsed the benefit of storytelling toward the affective and motivational aspects. These results are in line with those of Haven (2007), who contended that storytelling academic increases emotional involvement and give significance to language learning. Students specifically reported that they were more excited, autonomous, and motivated during the English class. Their emotional characteristics had supported the acquisition of a second language (Krashen, 1982)

The positive student responses to the implementation of Story Telling Technique (STT), as indicated by questionnaire results with satisfaction scores above 80%, further validate the motivational and affective benefits of storytelling. These findings support the conclusions of Haven (2007), who argued that storytelling activates emotional engagement and makes language learning more meaningful. In particular, students reported feeling more motivated, confident, and enthusiastic during English lessons—critical affective factors that facilitate second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982).

In addition, parental feedback confirmed that the use of storytelling fostered not only linguistic improvement but also greater enthusiasm toward attending Madrasah. Parents observed their children using simple English expressions at home, indicating that the impact of storytelling extended beyond the classroom. This observation is consistent with the concept of situated learning, which emphasizes the transfer of language use from formal to informal contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Overall, the successful implementation of STT in this study highlights the potential of contextualized, learner-centered instruction in non-formal Islamic education settings. By incorporating culturally relevant content and interactive learning strategies, teachers can foster both communicative competence and learner motivation. The effectiveness of STT observed in this study aligns with other research advocating for narrative-based pedagogy as a means to develop

fluency, accuracy, and expressive skills among young EFL learners (Wright, 1995; Speaker & Taylor, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

Teaching speaking through narrative texts using Storytelling Technique (STT) has been shown to improve students' verbal communication abilities as well as their ability to construct accurate, grammatically sound, and fluent sentences. The teacher's capacity to provide speaking lessons in a more dynamic manner was also enhanced by the use of STT. In the context of Madrasah Diniyah, the integration of STT significantly increased student engagement and active participation. Both students and teachers benefited from the approach, and feedback from parents indicated that students were more motivated to attend classes due to the novel and enjoyable learning environment. Incorporating English as a local content subject and applying storytelling-based activities contributed to increased enthusiasm for learning English, particularly in speaking. It is recommended that English teachers, especially those working in elementary-level non-formal education such as Madrasah Diniyah, adopt the STT to improve students' speaking proficiency. Additionally, this method encourages learners to explore diverse ways of constructing and narrating stories, fostering creativity and self-expression. This study also serves as a practical extension of the author's broader research on student well-being, demonstrating how affective and psychological dimensions of learning can be supported through innovative teaching strategies like storytelling, particularly in Islamic educational settings. Future research is encouraged to further examine the application of this strategy at higher levels of education to assess its broader impact on fluency, accuracy, and learner development.

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