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**THE IMPACT OF STORYTELLING ON STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE LESSONS**

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of storytelling on students' participation in English language lessons, focusing on National Diploma 1 (ND I) students at Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga. Anchored in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction, the research investigates how narrative-based instruction can enhance learner engagement and confidence in English classrooms. A quantitative design was employed, using structured pre- and post-intervention questionnaires administered to 60 ND I students to assess changes in participation and self-reported speaking confidence. The pre-intervention questionnaires were administered on the first week, followed by a six-week intervention which involved incorporating storytelling activities such as local folktales and guided narratives into regular English Language lessons and lastly the post-intervention questionnaires which were administered on the eighth week. Data analysis revealed a notable increase in student involvement, with higher frequencies of voluntary contributions and improved confidence scores. Findings indicate that storytelling fosters a supportive and interactive learning environment, reduces anxiety, and encourages students to use English more actively and meaningfully. The study concludes that storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing participation and recommends its integration into English language curricula, along with teacher training in narrative-based methods.

Keywords: storytelling, student participation, English language learning, sociocultural theory, questionnaire

Introduction

Storytelling, as both an ancient art and a pedagogical tool, has been increasingly recognized for its ability to transform language classrooms into interactive, learner-centred spaces. Unlike passive reading or rote memorization, storytelling involves narrating a tale from memory using expressive language, gestures, and visuals (Dujmović, 2006; Soleimani & Akbari, 2013). This technique engages learners cognitively, emotionally, and socially, making it particularly effective in contexts where language anxiety and low student motivation are barriers to participation.

In the Nigerian tertiary education context, particularly in English language classrooms, student participation remains limited due to several factors. These include fear of speaking incorrectly, limited vocabulary, and the prevalence of teacher-centred instruction. At Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga, for example, ND I students often struggle with confidence and verbal expression, hindering their active involvement in lessons.

Global studies support the integration of storytelling into English language instruction. For instance, Khodabandeh (2017) found that storytelling, even in virtual environments, significantly enhanced the speaking abilities of Iranian EFL learners. Her study demonstrated that both storytelling and related comprehension activities encouraged students to express themselves more clearly and confidently. Similarly, Sepahvand (2014) and Samantaray (2014) assert that storytelling focuses learners on meaning rather than form, thus reducing the fear of mistakes and encouraging spontaneous language use.

Furthermore, storytelling offers an organic way of exposing learners to grammatical structures, new vocabulary, and cultural values within a meaningful context (Amer, 2003; Mokhtar et al., 2011). In line with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which posits that learning occurs through interaction within a social context, storytelling allows learners to operate within their Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD) by scaffolding their oral contributions in safe, supportive environments.

Given these advantages, this study investigates the extent to which storytelling can improve classroom participation among National Diploma I students. It evaluates whether regular engagement with stories, particularly those rooted in students' own cultural background, can increase voluntary participation and confidence in English language use.

Despite the growing emphasis on learner-centred approaches in English language instruction, many Nigerian classrooms, especially at the tertiary level, continue to be dominated by traditional teacher-led methodologies. This often results in limited student engagement, low participation rates, and poor oral proficiency, particularly among students in non-English-speaking environments like Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga. National Diploma I (ND I) students frequently exhibit reluctance to participate in class discussions due to the fear of making mistakes, lack of speaking confidence, and a general lack of motivation.

Previous studies, such as Khodabandeh (2017), have demonstrated the positive impact of storytelling in improving speaking abilities among EFL learners in virtual settings. However, little is known about how storytelling affects learner participation in physical, face-to-face classrooms within the Nigerian polytechnic context. Moreover, existing studies largely focus on digital storytelling or virtual environments, leaving a gap in the literature regarding the use of

culturally embedded oral storytelling as a tool for fostering classroom interaction and participation.

This study, therefore, addresses this gap by examining the impact of storytelling on students' classroom participation during English language lessons. The problem lies in identifying whether storytelling, especially when grounded in familiar cultural narratives, can provide a practical and effective strategy to increase students' willingness to contribute orally, reduce anxiety, and enhance confidence in speaking English. Addressing this issue is crucial for improving not only language learning outcomes but also the overall communicative competence of learners in polytechnic institutions.

Literature Review

Storytelling has been increasingly recognized as a powerful tool in English language education due to its ability to facilitate engagement, improve language proficiency, and reduce learner anxiety. Scholars have emphasized that storytelling goes beyond entertainment; it provides learners with opportunities to interact with authentic language in meaningful contexts (Amer, 2003; Sanchez, 2014). It is particularly effective for developing the four core language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing through immersive and memorable experiences (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

Several studies have highlighted the role of storytelling in promoting students' participation and oral confidence. According to Mokhtar et al. (2011), storytelling enhances communicative competence by encouraging learners to express themselves without fear of judgment. Dujmović

(2006) argues that narrating stories from memory, rather than reading them, fosters spontaneity and interaction, which are crucial for language development.

In a related study, Khodabandeh (2017) investigated the use of storytelling via the Telegram app and found that students in both control and experimental groups demonstrated improved speaking abilities after exposure to story-based instruction. Though her study focused on virtual learning, it affirmed that storytelling, whether retold or followed by comprehension tasks, can positively influence language learners' confidence and oral fluency. Similarly, Sepahvand (2014) observed that oral reproduction of stories led to significant improvement in students' speaking skills, as it emphasized meaning over grammatical form and promoted active involvement.

From a psychological perspective, storytelling aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which asserts that learning occurs through meaningful social interaction within a learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Through storytelling, students are scaffolded by peers and instructors as they construct language meaning collaboratively.

In the Nigerian context, few studies have explored the use of indigenous storytelling traditions within formal English language instruction. Yet, Aina (2013) argues that folktales and oral narratives offer culturally relevant frameworks for language acquisition, particularly in second-language environments. This gap in localized research underscores the need to explore how traditional storytelling can be applied to boost learner participation in polytechnic classrooms.

Overall, the literature suggests that storytelling is an effective, low-cost strategy that enhances language learning by increasing student participation, reducing anxiety, and making learning more contextually meaningful.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning, which emphasizes the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) posits that learning is a socially mediated process in which learners construct knowledge through collaborative activities within cultural and linguistic contexts. Language, in this view, is not just a means of communication but a primary tool for thought and intellectual development.

A core concept in Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guided support. Through storytelling, teachers and peers provide scaffolding that allows learners to participate in language tasks they might not manage on their own. For example, when a student listens to or retells a story, they engage with vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns that are slightly above their current level, but within reach with support.

Storytelling aligns naturally with Vygotsky's sociocultural principles in the following ways:

Interactional Nature of Learning: Storytelling promotes dialogue between teachers and students as well as peer-to-peer communication. These social exchanges are the basis for internalizing new language forms and structures.

Cultural Mediation: Stories especially local folktales are carriers of cultural values and shared meanings. According to Vygotsky, learning is shaped by the learner's cultural tools, and storytelling provides an authentic medium through which language and culture intersect.

Scaffolding and Guided Participation: When learners are invited to retell or reconstruct a story, they receive guidance in the form of prompts, vocabulary support, or peer modelling. This scaffolding helps them gain confidence and gradually develop independence in language use.

Meaning-Making through Context: Unlike rote learning, storytelling situates language in a narrative context, making meaning construction more intuitive and accessible. Vygotsky stressed that learners grasp concepts more deeply when they are embedded in meaningful, socially relevant tasks.

Supporting Vygotsky's view, Khodabandeh (2017) found that storytelling activities, even when conducted through virtual platforms, encouraged learners to interact, reflect, and engage with English language content in a less stressful, more participatory manner. Similarly, Miller and Pennycuff (2008) argue that storytelling enhances not just language skills but also critical thinking and social interaction, further validating its theoretical alignment with sociocultural learning models.

In essence, the theoretical grounding of this study views storytelling as a culturally mediated, interaction-rich process that facilitates language development and classroom participation through social engagement and guided support. This framework underpins the study's design and interpretation of findings, providing insight into how and why storytelling can transform passive learners into active participants.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative pre-test/post-test research design to assess the impact of storytelling on students' participation in English language lessons. The approach allowed for a

systematic evaluation of changes in students' classroom engagement and speaking confidence before and after a structured intervention using storytelling as a pedagogical strategy.

The study was conducted among National Diploma I (ND I) students at Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga, across seven randomly selected academic departments: Science Laboratory Technology, Computer Science Technology, Computer Engineering Technology, Electrical Electronic Engineering Technology, Mathematics & Statistics, Business Administration and Management, and Public Administration. A total of 60 students were selected using purposive sampling. The sample was drawn to ensure departmental representation and consisted of students who demonstrated regular class attendance and willingness to participate in the study.

Two main instruments were employed for data collection. The first was a 15-item structured questionnaire using a Likert scale to measure students' perceptions of their participation, comfort with speaking English, and views on storytelling as a teaching method. The second instrument was a classroom observation checklist designed by the researcher to track actual student behaviour during lessons. Observable indicators included voluntary participation, group engagement, enthusiasm, and frequency of English language use. The instruments were validated by language education experts and pilot-tested on a similar group of students, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.81 for the questionnaire.

The study spanned eight weeks and was implemented in three phases. In Week 1 (Pre-Test Phase), the structured questionnaire was administered, and baseline classroom observations were conducted to establish the students' initial participation levels. During the Intervention Phase (Weeks 2–7), storytelling activities were integrated into regular English language instruction. These included the narration of Nigerian folktales, group discussions, student-led retellings, and

creative storytelling exercises such as role play and story continuation. Students were encouraged to express themselves freely in English during all activities, with the teacher serving as facilitator and guide. In Week 8 (Post-Test Phase), the questionnaire was re-administered, and follow-up observations were conducted to assess changes in student participation and confidence.

Quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics (means and percentages) to identify patterns and trends. A paired sample t-test was also conducted using SPSS (Version 23) to determine whether the observed differences in pre- and post-intervention results were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Observation notes were thematically analysed to enrich the quantitative findings and provide insight into how students interacted with storytelling-based instruction.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the General Studies Department. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was sought before participation. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the research process.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyses the data collected through pre- and post-intervention questionnaires and classroom observations. The focus is on measuring changes in students' participation and speaking confidence during English language lessons following a six-week storytelling intervention. Data were collected from 60 ND I students across seven departments at Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga.

1. Pre-Intervention Student Participation and Confidence

Prior to the intervention, baseline data were collected to assess students' initial levels of engagement in English lessons. Table 1 summarizes key findings from the pre-intervention questionnaire.

Table 1: Pre-Intervention Student Responses on Participation and Confidence (n = 60)

Item	Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Q1	I regularly contribute to discussions in English class.	28%	22%	50%
Q2	I feel confident speaking English during class activities.	32%	18%	50%
Q3	I enjoy participating in English lessons.	40%	30%	30%
Q4	I feel anxious when asked to speak in English.	65%	15%	20%
Q5	I believe storytelling can improve my speaking skills.	20%	50%	30%

Interpretation:

The pre-intervention data indicate low levels of classroom participation and speaking confidence. Only 28% of students reported active participation, while half admitted to feeling anxious about speaking in English. Notably, most students were either unsure or unconvinced about the potential of storytelling as a learning tool, suggesting unfamiliarity with this method.

2. Post-Intervention Participation and Confidence

After six weeks of incorporating storytelling activities into English lessons, the same questionnaire was re-administered. Table 2 presents the post-intervention results.

Table 2: Post-Intervention Student Responses on Participation and Confidence (n = 60)

Item	Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Q1	I regularly contribute to discussions in English class.	73%	15%	12%
Q2	I feel confident speaking English during class activities.	72%	18%	10%
Q3	I enjoy participating in English lessons.	85%	10%	5%
Q4	I feel anxious when asked to speak in English.	25%	20%	55%
Q5	I believe storytelling can improve my speaking skills.	90%	8%	2%

Interpretation:

The post-intervention responses show significant improvement in both participation and confidence. Active participation rose from 28% to 73%, and confidence in speaking increased from 32% to 72%. Anxiety levels dropped sharply, and a large majority (90%) now agreed that storytelling is beneficial for improving their speaking skills. These results indicate a positive shift in students' attitudes and behavior as a result of the storytelling intervention.

3. Statistical Analysis: Paired Sample T-Test

To determine the statistical significance of the observed differences in pre- and post-intervention scores, a paired sample t-test was conducted. Participation and confidence scores were computed for each student based on their questionnaire responses.

Table 3: Paired Sample T-Test Results for Participation and Confidence

Variable	Mean (Pre)	Mean (Post)	T	df	p-value
Participation Score	2.4	4.1	-10.82	59	0.000
Confidence Score	2.5	4.0	-9.94	59	0.000

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Interpretation:

The t-test results confirm that the increase in both participation and confidence scores is statistically significant ($p < 0.000$). This suggests that the changes observed were not due to chance but were likely a direct result of the storytelling intervention.

Observation Data

In addition to self-reported data, classroom behaviour was tracked before and after the intervention using a structured observation checklist. Key indicators of participation included frequency of voluntary responses, number of students engaging in group storytelling, and attentiveness during English lessons.

Table 4: Observation Summary of Student Participation (n = 60)

Indicator	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
Voluntary classroom responses	Low (avg. 2–3 students per class)	High (avg. 18–20 students per class)
Group storytelling involvement	Rare (less than 10%)	Frequent (over 70%)
Active listening and attentiveness	Moderate	High
Student enthusiasm (body language, etc.)	Low	Very High

Interpretation:

Observation data aligned with survey results. Before the intervention, few students voluntarily contributed to class discussions. By the end of the storytelling phase, most students were eager to participate in group activities and story retellings. There was also a marked improvement in classroom attentiveness and enthusiasm, with many students showing readiness to express themselves in English.

The findings of this study indicate that storytelling significantly enhanced students' participation and speaking confidence in English language lessons across the seven participating departments at Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga. Prior to the intervention, students exhibited low levels of engagement, with many reporting anxiety and discomfort when asked to speak in class. However, following the six-week storytelling intervention, there was a marked increase in voluntary classroom contributions, improved confidence in spoken English, and a more positive attitude toward English lessons. Statistical analysis confirmed that these improvements were significant

and not due to chance. Observation data further supported these results, revealing higher levels of attentiveness, group interaction, and student enthusiasm during storytelling sessions. Additionally, students overwhelmingly expressed the belief that storytelling made learning more enjoyable and less intimidating, thus fostering a supportive and interactive classroom environment conducive to language learning.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the effect of storytelling on students' participation and speaking confidence in English language lessons among National Diploma I (ND I) students at Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga. The findings provide compelling evidence that storytelling is a highly effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing learner engagement and creating an interactive, student-centered classroom environment. Prior to the intervention, many students demonstrated low levels of participation and self-confidence, often avoiding opportunities to speak in English due to fear of errors and peer judgment.

However, the introduction of storytelling led to a notable transformation. Students became more willing to speak, showed increased enthusiasm during lessons, and reported greater confidence in their ability to express themselves in English. These improvements were not only evident in the self-reported questionnaire data but were also confirmed through direct classroom observation and supported by statistical analysis.

The results affirm the relevance of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in second language learning, particularly its emphasis on the importance of social interaction, scaffolding, and cultural tools such as storytelling. More broadly, the study demonstrates that storytelling can serve as a bridge

between language learning and cultural relevance, fostering a more inclusive and less intimidating learning atmosphere.

In conclusion, storytelling is more than a classroom activity, it is a powerful instructional method that brings language to life, motivates learners, and builds confidence. It is particularly well-suited for Nigerian tertiary institutions, where learner diversity, large class sizes, and limited resources demand innovative and cost-effective teaching strategies.

Recommendations

Considering the study's findings, it is recommended that storytelling be integrated into English language teaching at the National Diploma level, particularly in contexts where student participation is low. Teachers should be encouraged to adopt storytelling as a regular instructional strategy to create more engaging and interactive classroom environments. To support this, professional development programs should be organized to train teachers on effective storytelling techniques, including the use of culturally relevant narratives that resonate with students' backgrounds.

Additionally, efforts should be made to encourage student-led storytelling activities, as these not only boost speaking confidence but also foster creativity and collaborative learning. By using storytelling as a consistent classroom practice, educators can help students overcome language anxiety and develop greater fluency in English through meaningful, contextual use.

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