

The Effect of Story Completion on Students' English Speaking Skill: A Quasi-experimental Study

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ARTICLE INFO

Keyword : *quasi-experimental students' speaking skills in English learning at the second grade design, speaking skill, story of junior high school in Kecamatan Mandonga, Kendari, completion, English learning, Southeast Sulawesi. A quasi-experimental design was applied communicative technique*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of story completion on with two groups: the experimental group was taught using story completion activities, while the control group was taught through conventional methods. The participants consisted of 60 students, divided equally into experimental and control groups. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests using a speaking rubric assessing fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension. The results showed that the experimental group achieved a higher post-test mean score (74.8) compared to the control group (65.1). The hypothesis test in this study, conducted using an Independent Sample T-test, showed a significance (2-tailed) of less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This study implies that English teachers, particularly in Southeast Sulawesi, should incorporate story completion as a communicative technique to foster students' oral competence.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are one of the most important competencies in mastering English as a foreign language. However, for Indonesian students, especially at the junior high school level, speaking remains a major challenge. This is due to several factors, such as limited exposure to authentic English usage, lack of confidence, poor vocabulary mastery, and teacher-centered learning methods that emphasize grammar and written exercises over oral communication. As a result, students often find it difficult to express their ideas fluently and coherently in spoken English. Efforts to improve students' speaking skills have been the focus of much research. According to Brown & Lee (1994) in his book "Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy," the success of language learning depends largely on the extent to which students can engage in communicative interaction. This emphasizes the need for a shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to a more participatory and student-oriented approach.

The Indonesian government, through the Merdeka Curriculum and the previous 2013 Curriculum, has emphasized communicative competence as the main learning outcome. However, in practice, many schools, especially in non-urban contexts such as Mandonga District, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, still have low student speaking performance. Zondag (2024) in his research published in the "Language Teaching Research," assumed that "conventional methods such as drilling and reading aloud tend to inhibit students' creativity and spontaneity in speaking practice." This finding is reinforced by Hamouda (2013) and Wu & Wu (2008), who argued that the lack of activities that trigger authentic interaction makes students feel awkward and unmotivated to speak. Several language learning theories support the use of a communicative approach. The Interactionist theory, popularized by Michael Long, states that interaction is key in second language learning. Through interaction, learners obtain 'comprehensible input' and the opportunity to process 'comprehensible output' (Huang et al., 2024).

Story completion, as one of the communicative activities proposed in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), has been recognized as an effective technique for improving students' speaking skills. This technique allows students to collaboratively create and complete stories by adding their own contributions, which encourages fluency, imagination, interaction, and contextual use of language. A number of previous studies have shown positive results related to this technique. Wardhani (2018) in her study entitled "The Effect of Story Completion Technique on EFL Students' Speaking Ability," she found that students who used the story completion technique showed significant improvements in vocabulary use, sentence structure, fluency, and confidence. Similarly, Hamsia (2018) and Hukom (2019) concluded that story completion not only improves students' linguistic abilities but also promotes collaboration and reduces speaking anxiety.

However, empirical research on this technique is still limited, especially in the context of Southeast Sulawesi. The sociocultural background, local learning traditions, and linguistic exposure of students in this region differ from other regions, which can affect the effectiveness of a teaching method. For example, (Rahman et al., 2024) noted that geographical and socio-economic conditions in some areas of Sulawesi often impact students' access to materials and environments that support optimal English language learning.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by specifically investigating the effect of story completion activities on the speaking skills of second-year junior high school students in Kecamatan Mandonga, Kendari. Based on the background and literature review above, the research question that will guide this study is: To what extent can story completion improve the speaking skills of second-year junior high school students in Kecamatan Mandonga, Kendari?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking skills are a fundamental component of second language acquisition, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. According to Brown and Lee (1994), the success of language learning is strongly tied to the learner's ability to engage in communicative interaction. Speaking is not merely the production of sounds or words but the ability to convey ideas, emotions, and intentions effectively. In the Indonesian context, speaking has been identified as one of the most challenging skills for students due to limited exposure to authentic English, lack of confidence, and teacher-centered practices that prioritize grammar and written exercises over oral communication. Therefore, improving speaking skills has become a priority for both researchers and educators in EFL settings.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been widely recognized as an effective method to enhance speaking skills. CLT emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Wu and Wu (2008) argued that authentic communicative activities are crucial to motivating students and reducing their reluctance to speak. Similarly, Zondag (2024) highlighted that traditional methods such as drilling and reading aloud often suppress students' spontaneity, whereas CLT encourages creativity, fluency, and confidence. Thus, CLT provides the theoretical foundation for incorporating techniques like story completion in the classroom.

The Interaction Hypothesis, proposed by Long and further developed by other scholars, reinforces the importance of communication in language acquisition. Huang, Lu, and Ou (2024) emphasized that learners acquire language through negotiation of meaning during interactions, where they receive comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output. In this process, learners adjust their speech, request clarification, and reformulate ideas, which collectively enhance their linguistic competence. Story completion aligns with this theory, as it creates opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning while collaboratively constructing narratives.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), also supports the pedagogical use of story completion. Through collaboration, more proficient peers can scaffold the language production of less proficient learners, enabling them to achieve higher levels of performance. In classroom contexts, this dynamic fosters not only linguistic growth but also social and emotional support, which helps reduce speaking anxiety. Story completion activities thus operationalize the principles of scaffolding and peer-assisted learning in communicative practice.

A growing body of research has investigated the effectiveness of story completion in EFL learning. Wardhani (2018) found that story completion significantly improved

students' vocabulary use, fluency, and sentence structure, while also enhancing their confidence. Similarly, Hamsia (2018) reported that story completion fostered active participation and reduced speaking anxiety among Indonesian students. Hukom (2019) further confirmed that the technique promotes collaboration, creativity, and linguistic development, making it suitable for classroom application in diverse EFL contexts.

In addition to Indonesian studies, international research has also highlighted the benefits of story-based techniques. Hamouda (2013) observed that lack of communicative activities leads to students' reluctance to participate in oral tasks, while story completion provides a low-pressure environment where learners can engage in meaningful interaction. Nor, Aulia, and Rahman (2024) demonstrated that story completion activities enhanced oral proficiency among learners by providing structured yet creative opportunities for practice. These findings consistently show that story completion is not only effective in improving linguistic elements such as vocabulary and grammar but also in building confidence and communicative competence.

Despite its demonstrated effectiveness, the application of story completion remains limited in some regions, particularly in under-resourced schools. Rahman et al. (2024) noted that geographical and socio-economic conditions in certain areas of Sulawesi hinder access to quality English learning environments. Consequently, techniques like story completion, which require minimal resources but offer rich interactional benefits, are particularly valuable in such contexts. By engaging students in collaborative storytelling, teachers can create communicative environments even in resource-constrained settings. The literature suggests that story completion is a pedagogically sound technique grounded in theories of interaction, communicative competence, and sociocultural learning. It has been shown to improve various aspects of speaking skills, including fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence, while also fostering collaboration and reducing anxiety. However, more empirical evidence is needed in diverse sociolinguistic contexts, such as Southeast Sulawesi, where students face unique challenges in English learning. This gap in research provides the rationale for the present study, which aims to explore the effect of story completion on junior high school students' speaking skills in Mandonga District, Kendari.

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design with a pre-test and post-test approach. The quasi-experimental design was chosen because it allows the researcher to investigate causal relationships in naturally occurring groups without random assignment, which is often impractical in educational contexts. As Creswell and Creswell (2017) argue, this design is particularly suitable for educational research where classes are already established. In this study, two intact classes were used: one served as the experimental group, and the other as the control group.

The population of the study consisted of second-grade students at junior high schools in Mandonga District, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select the participants, as it enables the researcher to choose subjects who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In this case, two classes were chosen based on their availability and the willingness of the school to participate in the study. Each class consisted of 30 students, resulting in a total of 60 participants divided equally between the experimental and control groups.

The experimental group was taught speaking skills using the story completion technique, while the control group received conventional instruction through methods such as reading aloud and question-and-answer practice. The story completion technique involved students collaboratively constructing and completing narratives in English, which encouraged creativity, interaction, and the use of language in context. In contrast, the control group followed teacher-centered methods that emphasized repetition and memorization rather than spontaneous communication.

The research instrument used in this study was a speaking test designed to evaluate five essential aspects of oral proficiency: fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension. The assessment rubric was adapted from Brown (2010), which provided detailed descriptors for each component on a scale of 1 to 5. This rubric ensured both validity and reliability by offering a systematic and objective framework for measuring students' speaking performance before and after the treatment.

Data collection was carried out in three stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. In the pre-test, both groups were asked to perform a story-retelling task to measure their baseline speaking ability. The treatment phase lasted for six sessions, during which the experimental group practiced through story completion activities, while the control group underwent conventional instruction. Finally, in the post-test, students were asked to complete the same speaking task as in the pre-test, allowing the researcher to compare their progress and measure the impact of the intervention.

The data gathered from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were employed to provide an overview of students' performance in each group. To test the hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was conducted using SPSS software. According to Pallant (2016), the t-test is appropriate for comparing mean differences between two independent groups and determining whether those differences are statistically significant. This analysis provided empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of story completion compared to conventional teaching methods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the study, both groups were given a pre-test to measure their initial speaking ability. The experimental group achieved a mean score of 58.7, while the control group obtained 59.2. The statistical analysis confirmed that there was no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between the two groups at this stage. This indicates that both groups had a relatively similar level of speaking competence prior to the treatment.

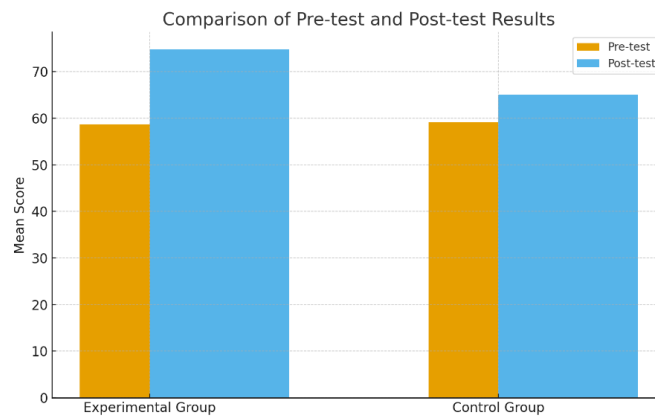
Post-test Results

After six sessions of treatment, both groups were tested again using the same rubric. The experimental group's mean score increased significantly to 74.8, while the control group only reached 65.1. The statistical test revealed a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the two groups, suggesting that the experimental group outperformed the control group after being exposed to story completion activities.

Figure 1.
of Pre-test and
Results
Improvement

In terms of
the experimental

demonstrated an average increase of +16.1 points, while the control group showed only +5.9 points. The magnitude of improvement in the experimental group was nearly three times greater than that of the control group. This finding highlights the effectiveness of story completion in boosting students' speaking performance.



Comparison
Post-test

Rate

improvement,
group

Table 1. Mean Scores of Pre-test and Post-test

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean
Experimental Group	58.7	74.8
Control Group	59.2	65.1

Moreover, it was understood that the story completion technique had a significant effect on students' speaking ability. The post-test mean of the experimental class ($M = 74.8$) exceeded that of the control class ($M = 65.1$). An independent samples t-test confirmed the difference, $t(58) = 4.37$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that students taught through story completion outperformed those taught with conventional methods.

Table 2. Independent Samples Test

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
							Lower
Equal variances assumed	F = 0.423, Sig. = 0.518	4.37	58	0.000	9.70	2.22	5.25
Equal variances not assumed		4.37	57.6	0.000	9.70	2.22	5.25

Table 2 shows the results of the Independent Samples Test. The significance value of Levene's Test was greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.518$), indicating that equal variances were assumed. The t-test result showed $t(58) = 4.37$, $p < 0.05$, confirming that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The mean difference of 9.70 points indicates that students in the experimental class outperformed those in the control class. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.215$) further suggests a high level of impact.

Moreover, the data clearly demonstrate that story completion had a positive impact on students' speaking development. The significant increase in the experimental group suggests that students benefited from the interactive and creative nature of the activity. Unlike the control group, which relied

on conventional methods, the experimental group had more opportunities to:

1. Practice spontaneous speaking in a meaningful context.
2. Collaboratively construct stories, which promoted turn-taking and active participation.
3. Reduce anxiety and hesitation by sharing responsibility with peers during story completion.
4. Acquire and use new vocabulary within a communicative situation, leading to better retention.

These improvements not only enhanced the students' test scores but also reflected observable changes in classroom dynamics. Students in the experimental group became more engaged, eager to volunteer, and less afraid of making mistakes compared to those in the control group. This behavioral change further supports the quantitative data, reinforcing the conclusion that story completion is a highly effective technique for improving speaking skills.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the use of story completion significantly improved the speaking skills of the experimental group compared to the control group. This result aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasize meaningful interaction, fluency development, and learner-centered activities. By engaging in story completion, students were not only practicing linguistic forms but also negotiating meaning, constructing ideas collaboratively, and expressing themselves in spontaneous ways.

From a sociocultural perspective, this result can also be explained through Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Story completion provided opportunities for students to scaffold one another's language production, where stronger students offered linguistic input that weaker students could imitate and gradually internalize. This social interaction reduced anxiety and created a supportive classroom environment conducive to language learning.

The significant improvement of +16.1 points in the experimental group compared to +5.9 points in the control group also reflects the role of cognitive engagement. Story completion requires students to predict, imagine, and recall vocabulary in real time, which activates multiple cognitive processes such as working memory and semantic association. In contrast, the control group, which relied on conventional methods such as reading aloud, did not stimulate the same level of mental effort or creativity, resulting in a more modest improvement.

These findings are consistent with previous studies by Hamsia (2018), Hukom (2019), Nor et al. (2024) and Wardhani (2018), who also reported that story completion promotes fluency, vocabulary richness, and confidence. However, the current study adds new evidence from Southeast Sulawesi, a context with relatively limited English exposure compared to Java or major cities in Indonesia. This suggests that story completion is adaptable across diverse sociolinguistic environments, making it a practical strategy for teachers in under-resourced schools.

Interestingly, qualitative observations during the treatment sessions showed that students in the experimental group became visibly more enthusiastic and collaborative. They competed to add creative ideas to the unfolding stories, laughed when peers made unexpected twists, and demonstrated reduced hesitation in using English. This behavioral evidence strengthens the quantitative data, showing that story completion not only raises test scores but also transforms classroom dynamics toward a more active and communicative environment.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The treatment lasted only six sessions, which may not fully capture the long-term impact of story completion on speaking development. Additionally, the speaking test focused on short-term performance rather than sustained oral competence in authentic contexts. Future research could extend the duration of treatment, combine story completion with digital media (e.g., online collaborative storytelling), or investigate its effects on different proficiency levels. The discussion underscores that the improvement in speaking skill is not accidental but the result of a pedagogically sound, communicative, and interactive learning technique. Story completion engages students cognitively, socially, and emotionally, making it a powerful tool for enhancing speaking skills in EFL contexts like Southeast Sulawesi.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effect of story completion on the speaking skills of second-grade students at a junior high school in Kecamatan Mandonga, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi. The findings revealed that the experimental group, which was taught through story completion, showed significantly greater improvement in speaking performance compared to the control group taught by conventional methods. In the experimental group, the mean score increased from 58.7 in the pre-test to 74.8 in the post-test. It means that the gain score of the students was 16.1 points. Meanwhile, the increase of students' achievement in the control class was not as significant as in the experimental class. The mean score increased only from 59.2 in the pre-test to 65.1 in the post-test, and the gain was only 5.9 points.

The result showed that the t-value was 4.37, which is higher than the t-table (2.00). The two-tailed significance was $p < 0.001$, which is lower than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference in students' speaking achievement between those who were taught through the Story Completion Technique and those who were taught through conventional methods. This finding indicates that the Story Completion Technique had a significant positive effect on improving students' speaking ability.

These results confirm that story completion is an effective strategy to enhance students' speaking ability in an EFL context. Its strength lies in encouraging students to speak spontaneously, collaborate with peers, and construct meaning interactively. Beyond measurable test scores, story completion also fostered greater student engagement, reduced speaking anxiety, and created a more communicative classroom environment.

In practical terms, English teachers are encouraged to integrate story completion into their classroom practices as a means of developing fluency, confidence, and creativity in speaking. Curriculum designers may also consider incorporating story-based interactive activities into English learning programs, particularly in contexts where students have limited exposure to authentic English communication.

Although the study was limited by its short duration and scope, it provides valuable evidence for the pedagogical effectiveness of story completion. Future research could expand this investigation by exploring its long-term effects, using digital storytelling platforms, or applying it to different grade levels and learning contexts. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on communicative language teaching in Indonesia and highlights the potential of story completion as a simple yet powerful technique to improve students' speaking skills.

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