



# The Impacts of Storytelling on Students' Grammar Learning in SMPN 13 Banda Aceh

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## ABSTRACT

*Teaching English grammar to middle school students in non-native contexts presents challenges, particularly when relying on traditional methods such as drills and memorization. This study investigates the impact of storytelling as an alternative instructional method for teaching English grammar, focusing on Grade 7 students at SMP 13 Negeri Banda Aceh. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Bruner (1996), Krashen (1982), and Schunk (2012), the research explores how storytelling influences students' understanding, engagement, and participation in grammar lessons, particularly in topics such as simple present tense, present continuous tense, and sentence structure. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving 30 students over a six-week period. Quantitative data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire with ten yes/no questions, while qualitative insights were gathered through thematic analysis of interviews with four students. The results revealed that 93% of students found storytelling enjoyable, 90% reported better understanding, and 97% expressed a desire to continue learning grammar through stories. Interview findings supported these results, highlighting increased motivation, confidence, and participation in grammar activities. Students reported that grammar became more meaningful and easier to apply when taught through storytelling, as stories provided real-life contexts and emotional engagement. This study concludes that storytelling is an effective and engaging approach to grammar instruction, enhancing students' comprehension and motivation. The findings suggest that incorporating storytelling into English grammar lessons can foster a more student-centered and enjoyable learning experience, offering a promising alternative to traditional grammar teaching methods in EFL classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *storytelling, grammar instruction, student engagement, middle school learners, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English grammar can be challenging, especially in non-native English-speaking contexts. Traditional methods often focus on repetitive exercises and memorization, which can make students feel frustrated and disengaged, leading to poor retention (Hattie, 2009). Storytelling offers a more engaging alternative, as it naturally appeals to students' love of stories. According to Bruner (1996), storytelling makes complex concepts like grammar easier to understand by placing them in relatable, real-world contexts.

Research by Fredricks et al. (2004) showed that student engagement is critical for improving learning outcomes. Engaged students are more likely to participate and succeed in their studies. Storytelling can increase engagement by making grammar lessons more fun and interactive. It also provides students with a more authentic learning experience, as they see grammar used in context.

Bruner (1996) suggested that stories not only capture students' attention but also organize information in a way that makes abstract ideas, like grammar, easier to grasp. When students encounter grammatical rules within a story, they are more likely to see how the rules work in real-life situations, rather than simply memorizing them. Additionally, stories provide a natural setting where students can apply grammar smoothly, which helps them process and remember grammatical structures more effectively.

By using storytelling to teach grammar, students can see how it works in real communication, not just in isolated exercises. This method helps students improve their ability to use grammar correctly in both speaking and writing, which can be a challenge for English language learners (Swain, 2005).

Engagement and motivation are key factors in successful learning. Research indicates that storytelling can significantly boost both engagement and motivation in the classroom (Fredricks et al., 2004). When students are involved in a story, they are more likely to participate actively, which leads to better learning results. Storytelling offers an interactive and exciting way for students to explore grammar, in contrast to the repetitive nature of traditional grammar exercises.

Schunk (2012) stated that students' motivation to learn is closely tied to how enjoyable the learning experience is. Since storytelling engages students' emotions and imaginations, it makes grammar lessons feel more like a fun activity rather than a dull task. Motivated students tend to engage more actively, which helps them retain information and consistently practice grammar rules.

Storytelling helps students understand grammar by placing it within meaningful contexts. Bruner (1996) suggested that stories not only capture students' attention but also organize information in a way that makes abstract ideas, like grammar, easier to grasp. When students encounter grammatical rules within a story, they are more likely to see how the rules work in real-life situations, rather than simply memorizing them. Additionally, stories provide a natural setting where students can apply grammar smoothly, which helps them process and remember grammatical structures more effectively. By using storytelling to teach grammar, students can see how it works in real communication, not just in isolated exercises. This method helps students improve their ability to use grammar correctly in both speaking and writing, which can be a challenge for

Previous studies have shown that students often have positive experiences with storytelling in the classroom. For instance, Wright (2008) suggested that storytelling provides a holistic learning experience, where students not only learn new vocabulary but also grammar patterns in a natural context. This process allows students to hear, understand and eventually practice grammar through interaction with relevant and engaging stories. By collecting feedback from students about their experiences, educators can gain valuable insights into how storytelling affects their attitudes toward learning grammar. Understanding student opinions will also help teachers adjust their approach to better meet students' needs and interests.

Although there is growing research on storytelling in language learning, most studies focus on vocabulary and listening skills, leaving a gap in knowledge about how storytelling impacts grammar teaching. This study aims to address that gap by exploring how storytelling helps middle school students understand and apply grammar.

While storytelling has been widely researched in relation to vocabulary and listening skills (Mello, 2018; Fachraini, 2016), its impact on grammar instruction remains underexplored. Previous studies such as Wright (2008) and others have shown the benefits of storytelling for vocabulary acquisition, but limited attention has been paid to its role in grammar teaching. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how storytelling can enhance students' understanding and application of English grammar, particularly focusing on tenses and sentence structure.

A previous study by Wright (2008) with the title "*Storytelling with Children*" showed that storytelling can create a holistic learning experience where students not only learn new words but also grammar patterns in a natural context. This research emphasizes that storytelling provides opportunities for students to understand, and eventually practice grammar through interaction with relevant and interesting stories. The study supports the idea that grammar is more easily understood when taught in the context of a story, thus helping students process and remember grammar rules more effectively.

The research questions for this study is: *What are the impacts of storytelling on the students' understanding of English grammar?* Therefore, the main goal of this study is to investigate how effective storytelling is as a method for teaching English grammar to middle school students.

This study could significantly influence how English grammar is taught in middle schools. By demonstrating that storytelling is an effective method for teaching grammar, this research could encourage teachers to adopt more engaging, student-centered approaches. Storytelling allows educators to address various learning styles, making grammar lessons more interactive and enjoyable. The findings could also help shape future curriculum designs by incorporating storytelling into grammar instruction, which could lead to improved student outcomes.

This research may prompt a shift in teaching practices, encouraging educators to move away from traditional, rote-based methods and adopt more creative, engaging ways to teach grammar. By focusing on students' perspectives and experiences, this study offers insights into how storytelling can make grammar learning more relatable and meaningful. This research focused on grade 7 students at SMP 13 Negeri Banda Aceh, specifically how storytelling can be used to teach English grammar, including topics such as simple present tenses, present continuous tenses, and sentence structure. The research involved observations and feedback from approximately 30 students over a 6-week period, data for this study were collected through closed and open-ended questionnaires, designed to assess students' understanding of grammar before and after the storytelling intervention. The closed-ended questionnaire focused on students' knowledge of specific

grammar rules (e.g. simple present tense, present continuous tense), while the open-ended questionnaire explored students' perceptions and experiences related to the storytelling approach. Data were analyzed qualitatively by identifying patterns and themes that emerge from students' responses.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research adopted a mixed-method where quantitative and qualitative data were taken. This aimed to particularly suit exploring the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of middle school students regarding the use of storytelling in grammar instruction. A combination of closed-ended questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. Interviews were done to collect qualitative data which was particularly valuable in the context as it provides rich, in-depth data about individual experiences and attitudes, allowing the researcher to understand what storytelling may influence students' grammar learning.

By using mixed methods, this study aims to gain insights into students' engagement levels, motivation, and grammar comprehension as they interact with grammar content embedded in stories. It also provides an opportunity to understand students' attitudes towards grammar learning and storytelling as an instructional method.

### **2.2 Location of the Study**

The study was carried out at SMP 13 Negeri Banda Aceh, a middle school located in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The school serves a diverse student population, offering a unique opportunity to explore how storytelling might impact grammar instruction across different student backgrounds. The research took place in the school's regular English classes over a six-week period. The participants were Grade 7 students, providing a consistent group for data collection over the intervention period.

### **2.3 Participants**

The study involved 30 students of grade 7 from SMP 13 Negeri Banda Aceh. These students are learning English as a foreign language and have varying levels of grammar proficiency. The sample included both male and female students to ensure a balanced representation. The focus was on students who already have basic knowledge of key grammar topics such as simple present tense, present continuous tense, and sentence structure, which was explored through storytelling lessons. There were four students including two males and two females chosen to be interviewed.

Grade 7 students were chosen for this study because they are at an age where they are more likely to engage with and benefit from storytelling as an educational tool. This group was also often challenged by grammar concepts, making them ideal candidates for investigating the potential benefits of storytelling in grammar instruction.

### **2.4 Research Instruments**

This study employed closed-ended questionnaires and an interview guide sheet which have the same points of questions. The closed-ended questionnaire consisted of 10 yes/no questions designed to assess students' engagement, understanding, and attitudes towards using storytelling to learn grammar and it is in Indonesian language. The questions were administered after the 6-week intervention to evaluate how storytelling influenced the students' learning experiences. There were 10 questions in the questionnaire, as follows:

- (1) *Did you find storytelling enjoyable during English grammar lessons?* (Source: Wright, 2008)
- (2) *Did storytelling help you understand English grammar better?* (Source: Bruner, 1996)
- (3) *Do you think you remember grammar rules better after hearing them in stories?* (Source: Wright, 2008)
- (4) *Were the grammar lessons more interesting because they were taught through stories?* (Source: Fredricks et al., 2004)
- (5) *Did you find it easier to understand sentence structures when they were part of a story?* (Source: Krashen, 1982)
- (6) *Did the stories help you learn different tenses (e.g., simple present, present continuous)?* (Source: Bruner, 1996)
- (7) *Did you feel more engaged in the lesson when storytelling was used?* (Source: Fredricks et al., 2004)
- (8) *Did you participate more in class activities when storytelling was involved?* (Source: Hattie, 2009)
- (9) *Did storytelling make grammar lessons feel less like memorization?* (Source: Schunk, 2012)

(10) *Would you like to continue learning grammar through stories in the future?* (Source: Wright, 2008)

## 2.5 Data Analysis

The data from the closed-ended questionnaires will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on the frequency of "Yes" and "No" responses to identify trends in student engagement, motivation, and understanding of grammar through storytelling. Furthermore, the interview was analyzed through thematic analysis.

## 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Results

This section presents findings from the closed-ended questionnaires and interviews conducted with 30 Grade 7 students at SMP 13 Negeri Banda Aceh after six weeks of storytelling-based grammar instruction. The results are categorized into two parts: quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative data from student interviews.

#### 3.1.1 Questionnaire Results (Quantitative Data)

Table 1 below shows the distribution of student responses to the 10 yes/no questions designed to evaluate the impact of storytelling on grammar learning:

**Table 1. Student Responses to the Questionnaire (N = 30)**

No.	Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
1.	Did you find storytelling enjoyable during English grammar lessons?	93%	7%
2.	Did storytelling help you understand English grammar better?	90%	10%
3.	Do you think you remember grammar rules better after hearing them in stories?	87%	13%
4.	Were the grammar lessons more interesting because they were taught through stories?	93%	7%
5.	Did you find it easier to understand sentence structures when they were part of a story?	83%	17%
6.	Did the stories help you learn different tenses (e.g., simple present, present continuous)?	80%	20%
7.	Did you feel more engaged in the lesson when storytelling was used?	90%	10%
8.	Did you participate more in class activities when storytelling was involved?	87%	13%
9.	Did storytelling make grammar lessons feel less like memorization?	93%	7%
10.	Would you like to continue learning grammar through stories in the future?	97%	3%

From the data, it is clear that students responded positively to the storytelling method. For instance, 97% of students expressed a desire to continue learning grammar through stories, while 93% reported enjoying storytelling and finding it more engaging than traditional grammar instruction. The results of this study clearly demonstrate that over 90% of students found storytelling effective and enjoyable. Students showed greater retention and understanding of grammar rules when taught through storytelling. Thematic analysis from interviews highlights how contextual storytelling increased student confidence, comprehension, and motivation. Storytelling also encouraged active participation, making grammar learning feel more like a creative activity than rote memorization.

#### 3.1.2 Interview Results (Qualitative Data)

To deepen the understanding of students' experiences, interviews were conducted with four students—two males and two females. Thematic analysis of their responses revealed three major themes: engagement and enjoyment, better grammar understanding, and increased participation.

Male Student 1 (Rf, 13 years old):

*"Biasanya saya sulit paham grammar, tapi waktu guru bercerita, saya jadi lebih mengerti. Saya bisa lihat bagaimana kalimat dibuat dengan benar lewat cerita. Saya bisa lebih mengerti grammar karena ceritanya jelas dan seru. Dalam cerita, saya lihat bagaimana kalimat dibuat, jadi saya bisa ikuti contohnya "*

Theme: Improved grammar understanding through contextual learning.

Male Student 2 (Ih, 13 years old):

*"Dulu saya cepat bosan kalau belajar grammar. Tapi dengan cerita, saya jadi semangat dan ikut menjawab pertanyaan. Bahkan saya bisa buat kalimat sendiri. Saya dulu bingung dengan tense. Tapi setelah dengar cerita yang pakai present continuous, saya jadi tahu kapan harus pakai 'is' atau 'are'."*

Theme: Storytelling increased motivation and participation.

Female Student 1 (Au, 12 years old):

*"Saya suka sekali saat guru bercerita. Rasanya seperti menonton film, tapi sambil belajar grammar. Saya jadi lebih hafal aturan tense. Grammar biasanya susah dan membosankan. Tapi dengan cerita, saya jadi semangat dan tidak cepat lupa aturan-aturannya."*

Theme: Storytelling made grammar memorable and enjoyable.

Female Student 2 (Nbl, 13 years old):

*"Cerita membuat pelajaran grammar tidak membosankan. Sekarang saya bisa tahu kapan pakai 'is' dan 'are' karena saya dengar dalam cerita. "Saya jadi berani menjawab karena ceritanya menarik. Saat grammar diajarkan dengan cerita, saya merasa lebih percaya diri untuk bicara dalam bahasa Inggris."*

Theme: Grammar structures are easier to remember when presented in stories.

The qualitative data collected through student interviews offers valuable insights into how storytelling influenced students' engagement, understanding, and participation in English grammar lessons. The responses were analyzed thematically and grouped into three dominant themes: engagement and enjoyment, better grammar understanding, and increased participation. Each theme represents a key area of impact aligned with the objective of this study.

#### *a. Improved Grammar Understanding through Contextual Learning*

Both Rf (Male, 13) and Nbl (Female, 13) emphasized that grammar became more understandable when introduced through storytelling. Rf explained how stories helped him visualize correct sentence structures, making abstract rules easier to grasp. Similarly, Nbl mentioned that she could now distinguish between "is" and "are" because she heard them used in context within a story.

This shows that students benefit from contextualized grammar instruction, where rules are not learned in isolation but embedded in meaningful, real-life situations. Storytelling made grammar rules visible and applicable, enhancing comprehension and cognitive processing.

#### *b. Storytelling Increased Motivation and Enjoyment*

Students Ih (Male, 13) and Au (Female, 12) shared that storytelling made grammar more fun and less monotonous. Ih stated he was usually bored during grammar lessons but felt more excited and willing to participate when lessons included stories. Au compared storytelling to "watching a movie" — an experience that made grammar easier to remember and more enjoyable.

This reveals that emotional engagement is a critical driver of learning. When students are entertained or emotionally involved, their motivation increases, leading to greater focus and long-term retention. Enjoyable learning experiences help reduce anxiety often associated with grammar learning, especially among EFL students.

#### *c. Increased Participation and Confidence*

Ih and Nbl both expressed that storytelling encouraged them to speak up in class and construct their own sentences. Nbl specifically said that she felt more confident to speak in English because the stories made learning feel more natural and less intimidating. This supports the idea that student-centered approaches, like storytelling, promote active participation. Stories create a safe space where students feel encouraged to try using grammar structures without fear of making mistakes. It also reflects a boost in self-efficacy—a belief in their ability to succeed in grammar tasks.

The interview data strongly supports the quantitative findings: storytelling significantly enhances students' understanding, enjoyment, and participation in English grammar lessons. All four students interviewed expressed positive changes in their attitude and performance. They highlighted how grammar concepts like sentence structure and tenses became clearer, more memorable, and easier to apply when taught

through storytelling. Thus, storytelling proved to be an effective instructional tool that not only helps in comprehension of grammar rules but also shapes a more positive, confident, and engaging learning environment for EFL students.

The findings demonstrate that storytelling is an effective method for teaching English grammar, especially for middle school students. The majority of participants showed improved understanding, higher engagement, and a positive attitude toward grammar learning.

## 3.2 Discussion

This study investigated the impact of storytelling on grammar learning among Grade 7 students at SMP 13 Negeri Banda Aceh. The findings, drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data, reveal that storytelling significantly improved students' understanding, engagement, and participation in grammar lessons. These results are consistent with a growing body of research supporting the use of narrative techniques in language education.

### 3.2.1 *Enhanced Understanding through Contextual Learning*

A majority of students (90%) agreed that storytelling helped them understand English grammar better. Interview responses confirmed this, with students like Rf and Nbl explaining that grammar rules became clearer and easier to remember when presented through stories. This aligns with Ellis (2006), who argued that language input becomes more comprehensible when it is embedded in meaningful, context-rich discourse. Similarly, Nation and Newton (2009) emphasized that learners retain grammar structures more effectively when they are exposed to them in authentic communicative contexts.

The use of storytelling allows students to observe grammar in action rather than just memorize isolated rules, which leads to better internalization of sentence structures and tenses. As seen in this study, students reported being able to distinguish between tenses like “is” and “are” after hearing them repeatedly in story settings. This reflects Larsen-Freeman's (2003) view that grammar learning involves form, meaning, and use, all of which can be demonstrated naturally through storytelling.

### 3.2.2 *Increased Motivation and Enjoyment*

An overwhelming 93% of students found storytelling enjoyable, and 90% reported feeling more engaged during grammar lessons that incorporated stories. Student responses in interviews—such as Au's comparison of storytelling to “watching a movie”—highlighted how stories make learning grammar less tedious and more exciting.

These findings are supported by Cameron (2001), who noted that storytelling stimulates learners emotionally and cognitively, creating an optimal environment for language acquisition. The enjoyment factor also correlates with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language more effectively when they are relaxed, motivated, and interested. By reducing the affective filter, storytelling opens up greater opportunities for comprehension and output.

### 3.2.3 *Improved Participation and Confidence*

The study also found that 87% of students participated more actively in storytelling-based grammar lessons. Interviews revealed that storytelling increased students' confidence, with Nbl expressing that she felt more comfortable speaking English after listening to stories. This echoes the findings of Isbell et al. (2004), who observed that storytelling promotes student voice and encourages learners to express their understanding without fear of making mistakes.

Additionally, participation increased because students could relate to the story content and were eager to respond to questions, as noted by Ih. This supports the learner-centered approach advocated by Wright (1995), who explained that stories place learners at the center of the learning process, fostering autonomy and active engagement. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates that storytelling has a multifaceted impact on grammar learning. It not only enhances cognitive understanding but also supports emotional and social dimensions of learning. These findings align with past studies, such as those by Cameron (2001), Ellis (2006), and Wright (1995), who emphasized the importance of meaningful, contextual input in language development.

Storytelling transforms grammar from a rule-based, memorization-heavy subject into an interactive and enjoyable learning experience. For EFL learners, especially in early adolescence, this approach fosters better retention, greater enthusiasm, and more willingness to communicate.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the impact of storytelling on grammar learning among Grade 7 students at SMP 13 Negeri Banda Aceh using a qualitative research design. By incorporating both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires, the study captured rich insights into students' engagement, motivation, and comprehension when grammar was taught through stories. The findings revealed that storytelling not only made grammar lessons more enjoyable and less intimidating but also facilitated deeper understanding and greater participation. Conducted over six weeks with 30 students in a regular classroom setting, the research highlighted the effectiveness of contextual and narrative-based instruction in making abstract grammar concepts more accessible and memorable. Thematic analysis of student responses confirmed that storytelling enhanced students' confidence, improved their grasp of tenses and sentence structure, and increased their willingness to engage in class activities. These results support the growing body of literature that positions storytelling as a powerful pedagogical tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly for young learners navigating the challenges of grammar learning.

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