



# Promoting Speaking Skills Through English Storytelling in Madrasah Diniyah: An Islamic Non-Formal School in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Since English is used frequently in everyday life, exposure to it is essential in non-formal education. Using storytelling techniques and incorporating English as local content can help create a new learning environment and combat boredom that stems from formal school fatigue. This study investigated how English storytelling can enhance speaking ability and foster a positive attitude toward learning English among non-formal school students. The research involved 52 students at Madrasah Diniyah, an Islamic non-formal school in Central Java utilizing test, questionnaire, and parent interviews. The research findings showed that the English Storytelling Technique can increase students' motivation to learn in non-formal schools and also improve their speaking ability. This is evidenced by the significant improvement in students' speaking ability, increasing from the initial level of 55% to 87% at the final level. The student's parents believe that because the Islamic non-formal school offers English language instruction, their children are more encouraged to learn the language. Therefore, the study suggests that the exposure of English learning should be given more and intensively to non-formal school in the future learning.

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## Introduction

English is crucial in education because almost all areas of life contact with English as a legitimate international language. Exposure to English itself must be obtained through education both formal and non-formal for students to have more opportunities to learn. Fortunately, non-formal education or non-formal school has been widely conducted in Indonesia. Non-formal education refers to instructional activities that take place outside of the classroom to fulfill the educational requirements of specific students and to obtain knowledge, skills, training, and direction (Rahayu, 2020). Students who attend non-formal schools are afforded opportunities to cultivate values, skills, and competencies that diverge from those established by the official school curriculum (Marliasari & Oktaviani, 2019). Besides, non-formal educational institutions also play an important part in contributing to the improvement of the youth generation in education.

Through extracurricular and after-school activities, informal schooling helps and enhances formal education (Widodo & Nusantara, 2020). Non-formal school usually lasts for a

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short time and uses customized lesson plans that are created based on the sociocultural traits of the intended audience (Almeida & Morais, 2024). The presence of non-formal schools is a new place for students to hone their abilities, particularly in English, which is an ability that must be mastered in this globalization era. One aspect of English that is important to be learned is speaking because speaking is an activity that people do to communicate with each other. In order to make improvement of students' speaking ability, one technique that can be used in teaching and learning activities is the storytelling technique (STT). By storytelling, students implemented their ability to speak English as a foreign language (Syafryadin et al., 2019). In the previous research by Syafryadin et al. (2019) about the use of storytelling to enhance Student's speaking ability, they revealed that Senior high school students are greatly impacted by digital storytelling techniques.

Apart from the previous studies, this research will focus on the effect of story-telling techniques in non-formal schools. One of the non-formal schools in Indonesia that has been spreading is Madrasah Diniyah. Jannah (2013) stated that madrasah is an Islamic education which broadly learned by academicians. As one of the non-formal Islamic educational institutions, Madrasah Diniyah was established to strengthen children's thoughts about Islam during after-school time (Diana, 2013). Parents are eager to send their children to Madrasah Diniyah since it has different atmosphere for learning. The specific materials that are given intensively like Fiqih, Mahfudotz, Nahwu, Shorof, etc contribute effectively to improving their knowledge about Islam and life.

From those explanations, this study then formulates the following research questions:

1. How can the English storytelling technique improve non-formal school students' speaking skills?
2. How are students' attitudes toward learning to speak by using English storytelling in non-formal schools?

### **Speaking Skill**

Speaking, one of the four fundamental language abilities assumes paramount significance in the language acquisition process for many students. The imperative nature of acquiring fluency in spoken English is underscored by its pivotal role in nurturing interpersonal relationships, exerting persuasive influence in various contexts, and navigating the intricacies of communication dynamics (Breene, 2012). To nurture and hone students' speaking capabilities, a plethora of pedagogical methods can be employed, with planning and repetitive practice emerging as indispensable components that significantly contribute to the enhancement of these skills (Harmer, 2001).

For a comprehensive elucidation of strategies aimed at refining students' speaking abilities, it becomes imperative to delve into the categorization of speaking skills. Brown & Abeywickrama (2018) posit a dichotomy between micro-skills and macro-skills within the domain of spoken language. Micro-skills encompass the aptitude to manipulate minute language units, including phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, and sentence structures. Conversely, macro-skills encompass a broader mastery of language elements, encompassing aspects such as fluency, discourse coherence, functional versatility, stylistic variation,

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cohesion, and the nuanced deployment of language communication options and strategies. This differentiation between micro-skills and macro-skills forms a foundational framework for comprehensively addressing the nuances of developing students' speaking proficiencies.

### **Teaching English by Using Storytelling**

The historical precedence of storytelling and its societal significance predates recorded human history, as oral storytelling served as the primary means for preserving and disseminating customs, beliefs, and cultural heritage in ancient times, alongside rock art. Stories have served as the oldest method for human beings to retain and retain information (Abrahamson, 1998). Therefore, storytelling has demonstrated its efficacy in oral cultures as an effective mechanism for encoding knowledge, enhancing its memorability, and facilitating its transmission to others. Abrahamson (1998) argues that civilizations survive through storytelling because they provide a continuous living experience for subsequent generations.

In the oral storytelling practice, situations are developed sequentially using language, gestures, and body language (Champion, 2014). Yet telling stories is only one aspect of storytelling. It could include not just coming up with a story but also using images, acting, singing, writing stories, and other related endeavors. The National Council of Teachers of English stressed in 1992 that storytelling is distinct from simply performing a play or reading a story aloud from a text or memory. Storytelling involves utilizing voice and gestures to tell a story to one or more listeners. Instead, storytelling involves creating mental images of a story's elements and communicating those images to an audience using voice and gestures. Furthermore, when a story is being told, both the storyteller and the listeners give their full attention and take part in the learning process. Barzaq (2009) characterizes storytelling as a technique for management of knowledge, enabling the conveyance of information to listeners while creating a sense that they have acquired insights. Furthermore, Barzaq emphasizes that narratives establish direct connections between concepts and occurrences, with visual storytelling being an effective method to achieve this objective.

Moreover, as outlined by Caine et al. (2005), storytelling has served as a fundamental means for individuals and societies to acquire, express, and preserve information and knowledge over the course of centuries. Extensive research has highlighted the substantial benefits of storytelling in enhancing speaking and listening skills. Examples include the studies conducted by Fox (1993), Davies (2007), and Tsou et al. (2006), which illustrate how storytelling enables young learners to orally organize narratives and engage with language. Haven (2000), in his research, posits that well-told stories facilitate faster, enhanced learning and retention of factual and theoretical information. Woolfolk et al. (2008) underscore the versatility of storytelling, which can incorporate diverse elements, including musical instruments, costumes, photographs, tangible objects, technology, and integration with the school curriculum. Barzaq (2009) perceives storytelling as an instructional tool due to its credibility, memorability, and ability to tap into human experiences as authentic and reliable sources of knowledge. Moreover, storytelling allows teachers to gain insights into students' backgrounds. Furthermore, Barzaq (2009) highlights additional benefits of storytelling, including the improvement of verbal skills, participation in discussions, enhanced

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imagination, exposure to new ideas, increased self-confidence, and the development of problem-solving skills based on the experiences and expertise shared through stories.

As per Alsofi (2008), the Storytelling Technique (STT) is deemed a crucial and valuable strategy facilitating the communal sharing of language learning experiences among listeners, leading to cooperative learning outcomes. Furthermore, listeners or learners might recreate the story's broad meaning and ideas by adding their own feelings and prior knowledge. Students can develop their imaginative and creative skills as well as their ability to recall, recall, predict, and memorize information by listening to a dramatic story. As a result, individuals can improve their own predicting abilities. Valenzuela (1999) asserted that stories are essential to people and education. Stories help people draw connections between their environment and themselves. When playing, young children frequently tell stories on the spur of the moment to convey their ideas about relationships with others, their goals, and the actions they hope to take in the future. According to Malkina (1995), storytelling functions as a linguistic and a life encounter. It possesses a unique capacity to delve profoundly into students' consciousness, reaching areas that conventional instruction may not reach. Through storytelling, the narrative mirrors the external world while engendering its reality, resonating with the emotional, cognitive, and psychological (educational) needs of the students (Malkina, 1995).

According to Alterio & McDrury (2003), Learning will become more profound, difficult, and interesting when educators and students use storytelling to model reflective thinking. Furthermore, learning reflectively by using storytelling has the added advantage of fostering transformational self-awareness and development as an individual. Students connect with the material more deeply and meaningfully when they tell stories and listen to others, which helps them learn new things. Teachers can use this type of content for a variety of purposes, including SL/FL instruction and first language instruction. Overall, stories are employed as an understandable input when educating a language. As stated by (Garvie, 1990), A teaching strategy that is acquisition-oriented places a high value on narrative. Using storytelling as literature input is a useful strategy for achieving this, especially when it comes to ESL instruction, where it is important to emphasize the value of happy reading.

### **Madrasah Diniyah as Non-Formal School**

Almeida & Morais (2024) stated that non-formal education develops from people's hobbies and demands and involves them in their interpersonal interactions. Compared to formal education, non-formal schools are less organized and much more flexible (Romi & Schmida, 2009). This aligned with the introduction of non-formal education which is carried out outside formal school hours.

Widodo & Nusantara (2020) stated that the features of Formal Education (FE) or Formal school and Non-formal Education (NFE) differ due to variations in learning objectives, requirements, environments, cultures, and knowledge levels, among other factors. So compared to formal education, non-formal education is more varied.

Madrasah Diniyah as an example of a Non-formal school in this study, has some characteristics of the non-formal school. At first, the learning system used the "halaqah" method, which is a learning model in which the teacher sits on the floor surrounded by

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students (*santri*), listening to the delivery of religious knowledge. However, the halaqah model has shifted along with the times. The changes made from the halaqah system to the classical system.

The shift of the "halaqah" system that applies in Islamic boarding schools to the classical system in Madrasas provides a new situation in learning. Religious education at Diniyah madrasas. The aforementioned educational paradigm, commonly known as "religious school" or "diniyah school," is characterized by its exclusive focus on religious education, with limited exposure to general knowledge (Yusuf, 2019). In conjunction with the progressive growth of Madrasah Diniyah in the immediate area, the government has instituted regulations about the various kinds of Madrasah Diniyah, as outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia Number 13 of 1964. which among other things explains; Madrasah Diniyah is an educational institution that gives traditional education and training in Islamic religion knowledge to groups of a minimum of 10 (ten) children aged 7 (seven) to 18 (eighteen) years.

Education and teaching (at Madrasah Diniyah), despite providing further religious information to children who believe they are not given religious instruction in public schools.

### **Research Methods**

This study applied classroom action research which was to understand and study the occurrence that took place during the teaching and learning process, and to purposefully try to propose a solution to the issue that occurred (Burns, 2019). Action research employs and adapts intervention to collect and analyse data and apply solutions to educational difficulties. Burns (2019) further argued that classroom action research states the cause of the treatments' effects, as well as what occurs when therapy takes place and defines the entire procedure from the start of treatment through the effects of the treatment given to the topic of action. It is conducted in the classroom by the course teacher, mostly to solve a problem or improve the teaching/learning process through several stages; planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Action research, as defined by (Kemmis, 1983), is a kind of introspective investigation carried out by participants in social (including educational) contexts with the goal of improving the rationality and equity of (a) their own social or educational behaviours, (b) their comprehension of these practices, and (c) the environments in which the practices are carried out. It is particularly intellectually motivating when conducted cooperatively by participants, while it is frequently performed by individuals as well as in collaboration with outsiders.

In this study, practical or mutual collaborative of action research, which enables researchers and teacher collaboration, was applied. The research process was made up of various steps which were (1) identifying the problem, (2) planning the data collection process (i.e., how and how often), (3) collecting and analyzing data, (4) preparing an action plan based on the findings obtained, and finally (5) reporting/sharing the findings. The dynamic and flexible structure of action research allows for a distinctive planning for each study. This current study was designed in a dynamic and flexible structure that focuses on solving the problems that arose during the application rather than a predetermined, fixed process.

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## Setting and Participants

The study was done at Madrasah Diniyah Kanzul Ulum, Central Java, Indonesia. It is a non-formal school that reinforces students in Islam lessons and the only non-formal school in Central Java that applies English as its local content. The learning process carried out after-school period starts from 2.30 PM up to 04.30 PM. The participants were 52 students of Madrasah Diniyah Kanzul Ulum. Most of them were in the range of 8 to 13 years old.

## Data Collection

The data were gathered both quantitatively and qualitatively.

### Quantitative Data

Quantitative data for the study were gathered through a speaking exam. A test consists of a set of tasks designed to assess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of an individual or a group of people. The students took the weekly test and the cycle test, two speaking assessments. Weekly tests were given for the meetings, but cycle tests were given to track the development of the student's speaking abilities. Additionally, pre-tests and post-tests were used by the researcher to gather data. The study evaluated students' speaking abilities using Hughes (2004) components. There are five fundamental elements or guidelines for speaking, including the following:

**Table 1.** Accent

Score	Descriptions
1	Pronunciation can sometimes be incomprehensible.
2	Comprehension becomes challenging due to numerous unacceptable errors and a pronounced accent, requiring extensive repetition.
3	"Foreign accent" necessitates careful listening, and incorrect pronunciation leads to frequent confusion and obvious grammar or vocabulary problems.
4	There is a distinct "foreign accent" and frequent incorrect pronunciations that do not interfere with comprehension.
5	There are no evident mispronunciations, it lacks the qualities of a native speaker.
6	Native word pronunciation, without sign of "foreign accent".

**Table 2.** Vocabulary

Score	Descriptions
1	Even the most basic discussion requires a limited vocabulary.
2	The vocabulary is limited to basic survival and individual issues. (such as time, food, transportation, and family).
3	Word choice frequently falls off, and vocabulary limitations make it difficult to discuss a number of common social and professional issues.

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4	A professional vocabulary is sufficient to address specific concerns; any non-technical subject is possible discussed with certain intersections due to generic vocabulary..
5	A proficient command of a broad and precise vocabulary encompassing both specialized terms for complex practical issues and general vocabulary suitable for diverse social situations.
6	The vocabulary demonstrates a comparable level of precision and comprehensiveness to that of a native speaker.

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**Table 3.** Fluency

Score	Descriptions
1	Conversation is almost unattainable because speech becomes awkward and disjointed.
2	Except for short or habitual expressions, the speech is notably sluggish and erratic.
3	Speech tends to be hesitant and fragmented, often leaving phrases unfinished.
4	Speech occasionally exhibits caution, resulting in discrepancies caused by modifications and word searching.
5	Speech flows smoothly and effortlessly, but the speed and consistency noticeably deviate from that of a native speaker.
6	Speech on a variety of professional and general themes as natural and fluid as a native speaker.

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**Table 4.** Comprehension

Score	Descriptions
1	Understanding inadequately for even the most basic of conversations.
2	Highly simplified communication on common social and tourist-related topics is comprehensible; however, it necessitates frequent repetition and modification.
3	When participating in a conversation, understands cautious, somewhat restricted communication, but could involve significant repeating and rephrasing.
4	When engaged in a discourse, there is a substantial understanding of standard educated speech; nonetheless, regular repetition and rephrasing are required.
5	Except for very informal or uncommon things, or extremely quick or speech that is slurred, understands all in normal educated conversation.

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- 6 Demonstrates the ability to recognize all aspects of language, both formal and informal, that an educated native speaker would be expected to comprehend.

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### **Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data represents the students' circumstances, situations, and reactions throughout the teaching-learning process. A questionnaire was also given to parents of students to get further data about students' well-being.

#### 1. Interview

The researcher conducted two interview sections. The first interview with students was conducted to learn about the students' reactions to English Storytelling. And the second to their parents to know their opinion due to children's motivation to study in Madrasah Diniyah.

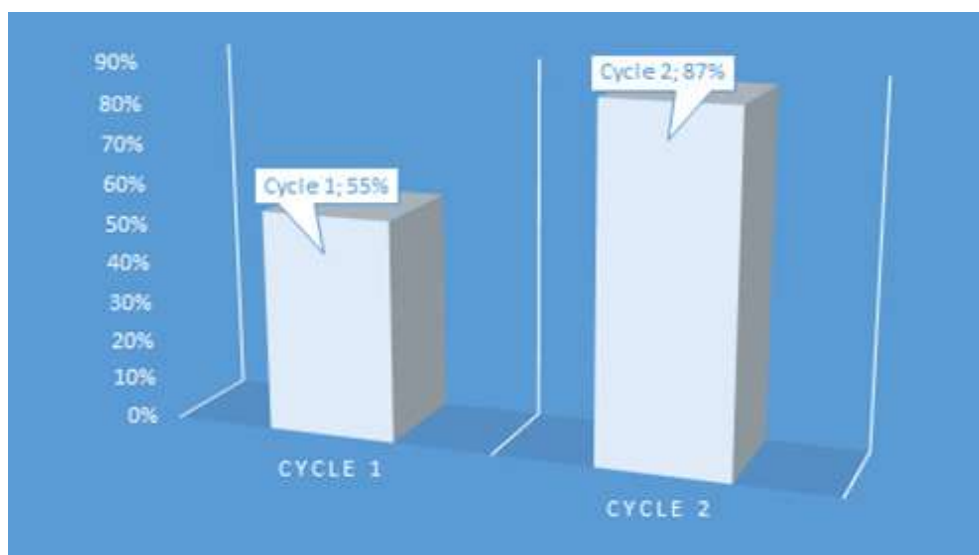
#### 2. Observation

Using a list of questions, the sheet of observations displayed the activities of the students during the learning and teaching process in each cycle, as well as the state of the class.

### **Findings**

#### **Improvements in Students' Speaking Skills**

After applying the English Storytelling technique in two cycles, the children's speaking skills were increased. The data for this enhancement came from their activity observation sheets. Figure 1 shows the students' results after the first and second cycles.



**Figure 1.** Results from the Observation Sheet.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the initial cycle of implementing the Storytelling Technique (STT) resulted in an average student score of 55%, which notably rose to 87% following the completion of the second cycle. These findings provide evidence of enhanced English-speaking skills among students following the implementation of two storytelling cycles utilizing the STT.

#### **The Impact of English Story-Telling Technique on Students' Speaking Skills**

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Based on the collaborator's observations, during the initial simulation, the researcher's explanation, use of body language and movements, and fluency in grammatically correct statements were lacking. Consequently, the children exhibited poor performance in the initial assessment. However, following the researcher's subsequent modeling of narrative delivery, accompanied by improved guidance on storytelling techniques, the students successfully assimilated and replicated the taught skills, leading to significantly higher scores in the final cycle. Figure 2 depicts the students' responses.

Figure 2: Students; Improvement 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycles.



Figure 2. showed a great improvement in students' speaking skill between the first and second cycle.

### Students Responses Toward the Implementation of Storytelling Technique

Following the completion of cycle 2, the researchers utilized a questionnaire to assess the challenges encountered by students and their responses to the application of the Storytelling Technique (STT). The questionnaire sought feedback on three specific characteristics. Table 1 presents the collected data derived from the questionnaire responses, illustrating the effects observed from employing the STT.

Table 5. Results of the Questionnaire.

Indicators in the Questionnaire	Items Number	Frequencies	%
Developing a study motivation	8, 9	31	86
Actively researching	2, 4, 10	29	80
Helping to develop speaking abilities	3, 5, 6, 7	32	89

## Discussion

### The Application of English Storytelling Techniques in Madrasah Diniyah As a Non-Formal School

In the first cycle's first session, the researcher applied the method of lectures and discussions. As it was the introductory session, the teacher carefully introduced the lesson's topic. The discussion covered not only the definition of narrative texts but also their purpose, generic structures, and linguistic characteristics, and included relevant exemplars to illustrate the concepts being discussed. After clarifying the concepts and presenting samples of narrative texts, the teacher inquired whether the students were familiar with any folktales.

In the subsequent session of the first cycle, the researchers exemplified the narrative delivery technique and supplemented it with a storytelling film to instruct the students on the art of storytelling prior to their own presentations. Regrettably, the researchers' explanation of storytelling remained insufficient, resulting in the students' ongoing difficulty in achieving satisfactory performance levels.

Using the teacher-discussion method, the researchers covered the lesson topic in detail in the first cycle's first session. This entailed not only defining narrative texts, but also exploring their purpose, structural elements, and linguistic characteristics, and providing examples. Following the discussion and presentation of narrative text samples, the students were prompted to share their knowledge of folktales. In the subsequent session of the first cycle, the researchers demonstrated English storytelling techniques. However, a comprehensive explanation has yet to be provided by the researchers.

Given the aforementioned outcomes, the second cycle was conducted with the aim of achieving improved results. The objective of the instruction remained consistent, focusing on enhancing students' English speaking skills through the Storytelling Technique (STT). However, the researchers modified the learning activities to seek greater advancements in students' speaking abilities and to elevate the performance of teachers.

During the initial meeting of the second cycle, the researchers conducted two demonstrations on narrative delivery. A concise folktale was presented to the children, accompanied by explicit instructions on conveying stories through body language, hand gestures, and expressive movements. Notably, the researcher wrote grammatically strong sentences frequently used in storytelling on the board. Subsequently, several students were selected to perform the same scenario in front of the class after receiving modelling and explanation.

Furthermore, an alternative teaching approach was employed in the second session. Students were grouped differently to facilitate fresh discussion partners, promoting varied engagement with the Storytelling Technique (STT). Each group received a worksheet outlining the assigned tasks, while tale fragments were distributed to be arranged into a coherent narrative. Following that, those who hadn't performed at the prior event were invited to tell a story during this session.

In the final session of the second cycle, the researchers expanded the list of assignments. Students were instructed to maintain the same groupings as the previous session. Utilizing a series of photographs that collectively conveyed a story, each group was tasked with creating their narrative. The researchers provided key lines beneath each image to assist in story development. Ultimately, students were directed to present the outcomes of their discussions to the class, employing their own words.

The questionnaire findings, presented in Table 1, revealed a positive inclination among students toward the utilization of the Storytelling Technique (STT) for enhancing their speaking skills through narrative texts in the classroom. Interestingly, all of the questionnaire's topics received ratings of 80% or higher, indicating that students gave positive answers. Hence, the implementation of STT was deemed effective, reflecting a

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successful application in facilitating students' English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking proficiency.

Based on the interview result with the student's parents about students' learning motivation in Madrasah Diniyah related to the use of English as local content and applying English storytelling in-class activities to promote students' English-speaking skills, parents were pleasant with the implementation of English as local content in Madrasah Diniyah, indicating that parents have shown an excellent perspective on using English as local content in Madrasah Diniyah. The implementation of English as local content has had a positive impact on parents. Specifically, it has motivated their children to study in Madrasah Diniyah, which is typically present in the classroom.

The majority of parents have observed a difference in their children's behavior, particularly in their confidence to speak and their thoughts about English. This suggests that the introduction of English language instruction has benefited kids' development. According to Hanifah & Heriyudanta (2022), the increased confidence in speaking English due to the use of the technique of storytelling technique makes students pay attention, especially to the story that is conveyed interestingly, which will make them happy and foster interest in learning. These results strongly indicate that the use of STT technique to improve students' speaking skill obviously proven and promote their positive attitude to English learning motivation in Madrasah Diniyah as non-formal school in Indonesia which has never been done by the previous researches. Furthermore, the result about students' attitude was confirmed by interview result with their parents which showed that the implementation of English storytelling technique to teach their children in Madrasah Diniyah affect the children motivation to study in this non-formal school and foster their English-speaking skills.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of the STT for teaching and studying English in Madrasah Diniyah progressively boosted student engagement and involvement. The STT supported educators and students in the process of teaching and learning. Furthermore, parents assume that their children were more motivated to study in Madrasah Diniyah since they got a new atmosphere of learning there. Allotting English as local content in Madrasah Diniyah and conducting the class activities by using STT promoted their learning motivation, especially their motivation in English speaking.

To help students become more proficient speakers, that is advised that English teachers utilize the STT to conduct speech lessons in elementary schools, like those at Madrasah Diniyah. Furthermore, this technique will assist students in exploring their own ways of recounting a narrative. It is also recommended that more research be done on this approach to see how effective it can be in improving students' capacity to communicate at various academic levels in order to generate competent, precise and properly constructed sentence.

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