



## IMPACT OF STORY-BASED PEDAGOGY ON SPOKEN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF UNDERGRADUATE LEARNERS IN PUNJAB: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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### Abstract

*In the Indian higher education context, spoken English proficiency continues to remain a major challenge despite years of formal instruction. Undergraduate learners often demonstrate grammatical awareness but lack confidence, fluency, and communicative effectiveness in real-life speaking situations. This gap can largely be attributed to examination-oriented pedagogy, limited exposure to authentic language use, and an overemphasis on accuracy at the cost of communication. In response to these challenges, story-based pedagogy has emerged as a learner-centred and meaning-oriented instructional approach that uses narratives to facilitate language acquisition. The present empirical study investigates the impact of story-based pedagogy on the spoken English proficiency of undergraduate learners in Punjab. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study was conducted over a period of eight weeks with sixty undergraduate students from a private degree college in Punjab. The participants were divided into an experimental group and a control group. Data were collected using pre- and post-speaking proficiency tests, structured classroom observations, and learner perception questionnaires. The findings reveal a significant improvement in fluency, pronunciation, coherence, and confidence among learners exposed to story-based pedagogy as compared to those taught through conventional methods. The study concludes that storytelling not only enhances linguistic competence but also lowers affective barriers, making spoken English learning more engaging and effective. The paper recommends the integration of story-based pedagogy into undergraduate ELT classrooms as a context-sensitive and sustainable instructional strategy.*

### Keywords

*Story-Based Pedagogy, Spoken English, English Language Teaching, Undergraduate Learners, Punjab, Empirical Study, etc.*

### Full Article

#### **Introduction:**

English occupies a pivotal position in the Indian education system, particularly at the level of higher education where it functions as a medium of instruction, academic discourse, and professional communication. Proficiency in English, especially spoken English, is often perceived as a marker of confidence, competence, and employability. Despite this socio-academic importance, a large number of undergraduate students in India struggle to express themselves orally in English, even after studying the language for several years at school and college levels. This paradox is especially visible in semi-urban and rural regions of Punjab, where students are introduced to English primarily as a subject rather than as a living language. Classroom practices frequently prioritize written examinations, grammatical correctness, and rote learning. Speaking activities, when conducted, are often limited, teacher-controlled, and anxiety-inducing. As a result,



learners develop a fear of making mistakes, experience hesitation, and avoid participation in oral communication tasks.

Traditional ELT methodologies, though well-intentioned, often fail to create meaningful communicative contexts for learners. The emphasis on structural accuracy and prescribed syllabi leaves little room for creativity, spontaneity, or learner voice. Consequently, students remain passive recipients of knowledge rather than active users of language. This situation calls for pedagogical approaches that humanize the classroom, encourage interaction, and allow learners to use English meaningfully.

Story-based pedagogy offers a promising alternative in this regard. Stories are intrinsic to human communication and cognition. They organize experience, convey meaning, and evoke emotional engagement. When used pedagogically, stories provide rich linguistic input, contextualized vocabulary, and opportunities for authentic interaction. They also create a non-threatening environment that encourages learners to speak without fear of constant evaluation.

The present study seeks to empirically examine the effectiveness of story-based pedagogy in enhancing spoken English proficiency among undergraduate learners in Punjab. By grounding the research in an actual classroom setting and employing both quantitative and qualitative tools, the study aims to contribute meaningful insights to contemporary ELT research in India.

### **Review of Literature:**

The use of storytelling as a pedagogical tool has been widely discussed across disciplines such as psychology, education, and linguistics. Bruner (1996) argues that narrative is a fundamental mode of human thought through which individuals make sense of the world. Stories enable learners to connect language with experience, emotion, and imagination, making learning more meaningful and memorable.

In the field of second language acquisition, researchers have emphasized the importance of meaningful input and interaction. Ellis (2003) highlights, language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in engaging contexts. Story-based pedagogy aligns closely with this principle by presenting language in coherent, meaningful, and relatable forms.

Wright (2009) suggests that stories reduce learner anxiety and foster a supportive classroom atmosphere. By shifting focus from isolated language forms to overall meaning, storytelling allows learners to participate without the fear of immediate correction. This is particularly relevant in contexts where learners experience high levels of language anxiety.

Cameron (2001) notes that narratives support language development by encouraging prediction, inference, and negotiation of meaning. Stories also facilitate vocabulary acquisition, as words are encountered in meaningful contexts rather than memorized in isolation. Moreover, storytelling naturally integrates listening, speaking, reading, and even writing skills.

In the Indian ELT context, several scholars have criticized the dominance of examination-oriented pedagogy. Kumaravadivelu (2012) advocates for a context-sensitive, post-method pedagogy that takes into account learners' socio-cultural realities. While communicative language teaching and task-based approaches have received scholarly attention in India, empirical research focusing specifically on story-based pedagogy at the undergraduate level remains limited.

Most existing Indian studies concentrate on school-level learners or theoretical discussions of communicative methods. There is a noticeable lack of classroom-based empirical studies that examine how storytelling can be systematically integrated into undergraduate ELT classrooms, particularly in private colleges. The present study seeks to address this gap.

### **Research Gap:**



Although storytelling has been recognized as an effective pedagogical tool in language learning, its application in Indian undergraduate ELT classrooms has not been sufficiently explored through empirical research. Existing studies tend to focus on general communicative approaches or theoretical discussions rather than classroom-based evidence.

Moreover, very few studies examine the impact of story-based pedagogy in private degree colleges in Punjab, where the socio-linguistic background of learners presents unique challenges. This study fills this gap by providing empirical evidence drawn from an undergraduate classroom, thereby contributing context-specific insights to ELT research in India.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of the present study are:

- To examine the impact of story-based pedagogy on the spoken English proficiency of undergraduate learners.
- To analyze changes in learners' confidence, fluency, and classroom participation after exposure to storytelling activities.
- To understand students' perceptions of story-based pedagogy as a tool for learning spoken English.

### **Research Questions:**

- ✓ Does story-based pedagogy significantly improve the spoken English proficiency of undergraduate learners?
- ✓ How does storytelling influence learners' confidence and participation in spoken English activities?
- ✓ What are students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of story-based pedagogy in ELT classrooms?

### **Methodology:**

#### **Research Design:**

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design allows for a comprehensive analysis of both measurable improvement in speaking skills and learners' subjective experiences.

#### **Sample:**

The sample consisted of sixty undergraduate students enrolled in the first year of a Bachelor's programme at a private degree college in Punjab. The researcher was actively involved in teaching these students, which allowed for sustained observation and interaction. The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group of thirty students and a control group of thirty students. Both groups were comparable in terms of age, academic background, and initial English proficiency.

#### **Tools for Data Collection:**

The following tools were used:

- A speaking proficiency test administered as pre-test and post-test
- A structured classroom observation checklist
- A learner perception questionnaire containing close-ended and open-ended items

#### **Procedure:**

The study was conducted over eight weeks. At the beginning of the study, both groups were administered a pre-speaking test to assess their baseline proficiency. The experimental group was





then exposed to story-based pedagogy, while the control group continued with conventional textbook-based instruction.

In the experimental group, instruction involved short stories, personal anecdotes, situational narratives, and guided storytelling activities. Learners engaged in retelling stories, role-plays, group discussions, and creative narrative extensions. Emphasis was placed on meaning, interaction, and fluency rather than error correction.

### **Data Analysis:**

Quantitative data from the speaking tests were analyzed by comparing mean scores of the pre- and post-tests. Qualitative data from classroom observations and questionnaires were thematically analyzed to identify patterns related to learner engagement, confidence, and perception.

### **Results and Discussion:**

The pre-test results indicated no significant difference between the experimental and control groups, suggesting comparable initial proficiency levels. However, post-test analysis revealed a marked improvement in the experimental group's spoken English performance.

Learners exposed to story-based pedagogy demonstrated greater fluency, improved pronunciation, and better coherence in their responses. Classroom observations revealed increased participation, reduced hesitation, and a noticeable decline in anxiety-related behaviours.

Student questionnaires indicated that storytelling made learning enjoyable and relatable. Many learners reported that stories helped them think in English rather than translate from their mother tongue. These findings support existing research that highlights the role of meaningful input and affective factors in language learning.

### **Pedagogical Implications:**

The findings suggest that story-based pedagogy can serve as an effective instructional strategy in undergraduate ELT classrooms. Teachers may integrate short narratives, personal experiences, and culturally familiar stories to promote interaction and confidence.

Story-based activities encourage learner autonomy, creativity, and collaborative learning. They also allow teachers to address linguistic objectives without sacrificing learner engagement. Importantly, such practices do not require extensive infrastructural support, making them feasible in resource-constrained contexts.

### **Limitations and Scope for Further Research:**

The study is limited by its relatively small sample size and short duration. The findings are based on a single institutional context and may not be universally generalizable. Future research may involve longitudinal studies across multiple institutions and regions. Further studies may also explore the integration of digital storytelling or compare story-based pedagogy with other communicative approaches.

### **Theoretical Significance of Story-Based Pedagogy in ELT:**

Beyond its practical classroom utility, story-based pedagogy holds significant theoretical relevance within the broader framework of English Language Teaching. Storytelling aligns closely with sociocultural theories of language learning, particularly those proposed by Vygotsky, which emphasize the role of social interaction, mediation, and meaningful context in cognitive development. Language learning, from this perspective, is not an isolated mental activity but a socially constructed process shaped by interaction and shared meaning.

Stories function as mediational tools that scaffold learners' linguistic development. When learners engage with narratives, they operate within their zone of proximal development,



supported by peers, teachers, and the narrative structure itself. This collaborative meaning-making process enables learners to internalize linguistic patterns more naturally than through rule-based instruction.

Furthermore, story-based pedagogy resonates with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that emotional factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence significantly influence language acquisition. The present study's findings indicate that storytelling lowers learners' affective filters by creating a relaxed and engaging classroom atmosphere. Students feel less threatened by evaluation and more willing to experiment with language, which in turn accelerates acquisition.

From a discourse perspective, stories expose learners to cohesive and coherent language use. Unlike isolated sentences or mechanical drills, narratives demonstrate how ideas are logically connected, how tense and aspect operate in extended speech, and how pragmatic meaning is conveyed. Thus, storytelling contributes not only to fluency but also to discourse competence, an essential yet often neglected component of spoken English proficiency.

### **Story-Based Pedagogy and Learner Identity:**

An important but underexplored dimension of spoken English pedagogy is its impact on learner identity. Many Indian undergraduate learners perceive English as an elite or intimidating language associated with authority, correctness, and social hierarchy. This perception often results in psychological distancing, where learners view English as "not their language."

Story-based pedagogy plays a crucial role in reshaping this perception. When learners narrate personal experiences, local incidents, or imagined situations, they position themselves as legitimate users of English rather than passive learners. The language becomes a medium of self-expression rather than a test of correctness.

During the intervention period of the present study, learners increasingly drew upon their own experiences while narrating stories. This shift suggests that storytelling enables learners to negotiate their identities in English, fostering a sense of ownership over the language. Such identity affirmation is particularly important in multilingual contexts like Punjab, where English often coexists with Punjabi, Hindi, and other regional languages.

By allowing learners to bring their lived realities into the English classroom, story-based pedagogy bridges the gap between language learning and identity formation. This integration strengthens motivation and sustains long-term engagement with spoken English.

### **Role of the Teacher in Story-Based Classrooms:**

The effectiveness of story-based pedagogy largely depends on the teacher's role as a facilitator rather than a transmitter of knowledge. In traditional ELT classrooms, teachers often dominate speaking time, correct errors immediately, and control classroom discourse. Such practices, while well-intended, can inhibit learner participation.

In contrast, story-based classrooms require teachers to adopt a supportive and flexible role. During the intervention in the present study, the teacher minimized interruptions and allowed learners to complete their narratives even when errors occurred. Feedback was provided selectively and constructively, focusing on meaning rather than form.

Teachers also function as co-narrators in story-based pedagogy. By sharing personal anecdotes or modeling storytelling techniques, teachers humanize the classroom and reduce power distance. This relational dimension fosters trust and encourages learners to take linguistic risks. Teacher preparation is therefore essential for successful implementation. Educators need training in selecting appropriate stories, designing storytelling tasks, and managing classroom interaction.



Without such preparation, storytelling risks being reduced to a superficial activity rather than a pedagogically meaningful practice.

### **Assessment of Spoken English through Storytelling:**

One of the persistent challenges in ELT is the assessment of spoken English. Traditional assessment methods often prioritize accuracy over communicative effectiveness, thereby discouraging learners from spontaneous speech. Story-based pedagogy invites a rethinking of assessment practices.

In the present study, speaking assessments focused on fluency, coherence, intelligibility, and confidence rather than grammatical perfection. Learners were evaluated on their ability to convey meaning, sustain discourse, and engage listeners. Such criteria align more closely with real-life communication demands.

Story-based assessment also allows for formative evaluation. Teachers can observe learners' progress over time through repeated storytelling tasks, identifying patterns of improvement and areas requiring support. Peer feedback during storytelling sessions further enhances reflective learning.

Reconceptualizing assessment in this manner reinforces the pedagogical philosophy underlying storytelling: language as communication rather than mere correctness.

### **Integration of Story-Based Pedagogy into Undergraduate Curriculum:**

For story-based pedagogy to have sustained impact, it must be integrated into the undergraduate English curriculum rather than treated as an occasional activity. Curriculum designers may incorporate storytelling as a core component of spoken English modules.

Story-based units can be aligned with existing syllabus objectives such as vocabulary development, functional language use, and oral presentation skills. Stories may be drawn from literary texts, contemporary social contexts, or student-generated narratives, ensuring both academic relevance and learner engagement.

Institutional support is equally important. Timetabling flexibility, reduced emphasis on rote-based examinations, and encouragement of innovative pedagogy can empower teachers to adopt storytelling more confidently. Without systemic support, pedagogical innovation remains limited to individual classrooms.

### **Ethical Considerations in Classroom-Based Research:**

Conducting empirical research within one's own classroom raises important ethical considerations. In the present study, care was taken to ensure voluntary participation, confidentiality, and transparency. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, and their academic evaluation was not influenced by their participation.

The teacher-researcher maintained reflective awareness to minimize bias during observation and interpretation. Such ethical mindfulness strengthens the credibility of classroom-based research and reinforces its academic legitimacy.

### **Relevance of the Study in the Post-Pandemic ELT Context:**

The post-pandemic educational landscape has intensified the need for interactive and human-centred pedagogy. Extended periods of online learning have affected learners' spoken communication skills, confidence, and social interaction.

Story-based pedagogy, with its emphasis on dialogue, emotion, and shared experience, offers a valuable response to these challenges. Whether implemented in physical classrooms or blended learning environments, storytelling can restore the interpersonal dimension of language learning that was disrupted during remote instruction.





Thus, the relevance of the present study extends beyond its immediate context, addressing broader pedagogical concerns in contemporary ELT.

### Extended Conclusion:

The extended findings and discussions of this study reaffirm that story-based pedagogy is not merely an instructional technique but a holistic approach to spoken English teaching. By integrating cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic dimensions of learning, storytelling creates conditions conducive to meaningful language use.

The empirical evidence from undergraduate learners in a private degree college in Punjab demonstrates that storytelling enhances fluency, confidence, and learner engagement more effectively than conventional methods. The study contributes to Indian ELT research by offering classroom-grounded insights and advocating for pedagogical practices rooted in human communication.

In an era where English education must balance global demands with local realities, story-based pedagogy emerges as a powerful, adaptable, and learner-centred approach. Its integration into undergraduate ELT classrooms can play a transformative role in reshaping spoken English teaching in India.

### Conclusion:

The present empirical study demonstrates that story-based pedagogy has a positive and significant impact on the spoken English proficiency of undergraduate learners in Punjab. By creating meaningful communicative contexts and reducing affective barriers, storytelling enables learners to engage with English as a living language. The study underscores the need for pedagogical innovation in Indian ELT classrooms and recommends storytelling as a sustainable and context-sensitive instructional approach.

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