

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background, problems, the objectives, the significance, and the limitation of the study.

1.1 Background

English is often referred to as the global lingua franca, meaning it is the common language used for communication between speakers of different native languages. In an increasingly globalized world, proficiency in English allows individuals to communicate effectively with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Having proficiency in English also enable developed countries, such as Indonesia to gain educational advancement as most high-quality academic resources, research papers, and online learning platforms are in English. However, according to EF English Proficiency Index 2024, which ranks 116 Countries and regions by their English skills, Indonesia ranks 80th globally and 12th out of 23 countries in Asia, with a score 468, indicating a low level of English proficiency (EF English Proficiency Index, 2024). Therefore, to empower learners and professionals to grow beyond local limitations and engage with the global education landscape is essential to find a way to have better English proficiency

Language proficiency has long been understood to encompass fluency, which is commonly defined by temporal features such as the speed and smoothness of speech. While proficiency includes a range of skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension, fluency serves as both a component and a catalyst of broader

language competence. Fluency is especially important because it shows how well someone can speak and express their thoughts clearly and smoothly. Fluency also reflects a learner's ability to communicate smoothly and spontaneously. (Lennon, 1990). Being fluent means being able to speak English confidently in real situations, not just understanding grammar or knowing words. In schools and workplaces, fluency helps people take part in conversations, give presentations, and connect with others around the world. That's why fluency is a key part of English proficiency and an important goal for learners in countries like Indonesia. (Ho, 2018)

Nazarieh and Beigzadeh (2025) emphasize that enhancing speaking fluency, particularly through interactive methods, plays a vital role in accelerating language acquisition. This is achieved by facilitating real-time language processing, improving vocabulary retention, and fostering greater communicative confidence. Therefore, they further suggest that learners develop fluency because, as they develop fluency, their overall language proficiency also improves, highlighting the importance of fluency-focused instruction, particularly in EFL contexts such as Indonesia, where communicative competence in English is increasingly valued.

In a way of improving English fluency, many countries begin adopting English language as part of their education system at the primary level, and students are studying the language at younger and younger ages (Jenkins, 2009). The term young learner is interpreted differently around the world. (Gregson, 2024) defines a young learner as a child who is in their first six years of formal education, from the age of 6 to 12. The reason for this choice is that the lower limit of 6 roughly

corresponds to the start of formal schooling in many countries, while the upper age of 12 approximates to a time when many children have begun to experience significant cognitive and emotional changes.

According to Saragih et al. (2024), speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, as it demands the integration of multiple language components such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and appropriate language use. These demands are particularly difficult for young learners, who often have limited exposure to English and are still in the process of developing their native language abilities.

Traditional methods such as grammar drills and textbook dialogues often fail to provide learners with the authentic and interactive exposure necessary for developing true fluency in communicative competence. In response to this, educators have increasingly explored alternative strategies that promote natural language use, one of which is peer storytelling.

Peer storytelling offers learners a safe, low-pressure environment where they can practice speaking freely, develop narrative skills, and improve fluency through collaborative meaning-making. It encourages active listening, vocabulary recall, and spontaneous speech, all of which are crucial components of fluency. According to Hibbin (2016), engaging in storytelling supports children in developing self-expression, connecting with characters, enhancing empathy toward themselves and others, and fostering two-way communication skills.

Storytelling, particularly in peer-based formats, has been widely acknowledged as an effective strategy in EFL classrooms, especially for young

learners. According to Ramamurthy et al. (2024), through storytelling, young learners not only experience relief from anxiety and depression, but also gain a better understanding of mental health and learn to recognize helpful resources and peers around them. Beyond fostering creativity and engagement, peer storytelling plays a significant role in enhancing speaking fluency and boosting learners' confidence (Atta-Alla, 2012). Through frequent opportunities for oral practice, learners develop a more natural rhythm of speech and become more comfortable expressing ideas spontaneously. According to Dianelo et al. (2023), collaborative storytelling also creates a supportive space where learners feel less pressure, allowing shy or anxious students to participate more freely, which directly contributes to increased speaking confidence.

Based on the researcher observations as a teacher at English 1 Palembang, young learners frequently exhibit anxiety and hesitation when asked to speak in English. Several teachers report that even students with strong grammar knowledge struggle to express themselves fluently and confidently in speaking activities. To support the statement, the researcher takes a sample of EYL's unit scores at English 1 Palembang. Some learners can reach 80% grammar, 85% vocabulary, however they only reach 60% speaking which is assessed based on 4 factors (Communicative competence, lexical command, grammatical control, pronunciation). It can be concluded that, even with basic or even strong foundation of English-proficiency, some learners still struggle to be fluent in expressing themselves orally.

The researcher finds some similar problems in different studies. Research conducted by Franscy and Ramli (2022), identified several common problems faced

by senior high school Indonesian EFL learners in mastering speaking skills. Results of the data indicated that high school Indonesian EFL learners experienced problems both in linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. The linguistic aspects comprise (1) comprehension, (2) pronunciation, (3) vocabulary, (4) grammar, and (5) fluency. Whereas the aspects non-linguistic included; (1) nervous to speak, (2) no motivation, (3) afraid of making errors, and (4) low participation in class. In addition to that, Nasiihin and Otkarini (2022) state the problems contributing to low English-speaking skills among Indonesian senior high school students, include lack of vocabulary, negative perception to English, thinking English as difficult lesson no connection to the English teacher,

Therefore, finding strategies to enhance English-speaking fluency and confidence is essential. Nazariyeh and Beigzadeh (2025) explore the strategies to enhance English-speaking fluency and confidence by analyzing different studies. They mention that building confidence through supportive environments, participating in role-plays, assessing regularly, and seeking constructive feedback can help enhancing English-speaking fluency and confidence. Previous study has also highlighted the general effectiveness of storytelling in language learning (Isbell et al., 2004; Kim & Gilman, 2008), focusing on its impact on vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and listening skills to improve English fluency.

Although storytelling has been used in EFL classrooms, there is limited research on its role in enhancing both speaking fluency and confidence among young learners in Indonesian contexts. Therefore, based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in conducting research entitled “Improving Young

Learners' English-speaking Fluency and Confidence through Peer Storytelling at English 1 Palembang: A Classroom Action Research.” The researcher chooses the term as the title of her thesis.

1.2 Problems of the Study

The problems of the study were formulated in the following questions:

- a. How does peer storytelling impact the speaking fluency of young EFL learners?
- b. How does collaborative storytelling influence young learners' confidence in speaking English?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were formulated in the following questions:

- a. To investigate the effectiveness of peer storytelling in enhancing speaking fluency.
- b. To explore how collaborative storytelling can build confidence in young learners.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is expected that the findings of this study hold significant educational value as it explores peer storytelling as an interactive method to enhance young learners' English-speaking fluency and confidence. By focusing on this approach, the research aims to provide valuable insights for EFL teachers and schools into the benefits of collaborative, student-centered learning strategies in the context of language acquisition.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

This study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, it focuses exclusively on young EFL learners between the ages of 7 and 12, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or learning contexts. Secondly, the research is conducted within a specific classroom setting at English 1 Palembang, which may not fully represent the diverse learning environments found in other regions or institutions. Lastly, the scope of the study is limited to aspects of speaking fluency and learner confidence, excluding other important components of language proficiency such as grammar, vocabulary development, or listening comprehension.