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## The effect of storytelling on improving pronunciation standards in A1 level students

*El efecto de la narración de cuentos en la mejora de los estándares de pronunciación en estudiantes de nivel A1*

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### ABSTRACT

Clear communication in English depends on accurate standard pronunciation; incorrect articulation of sounds can lead to misinterpretation, especially in the case of grammatical morphemes such as the third-person singular verb endings -s and -es in the simple present tense. This study investigated the effectiveness of storytelling in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to learners at level A1 to determine whether improvements in the pronunciation of these morphemes occurred. The main objective is to examine how storytelling can be implemented to improve the pronunciation of A1 students. Twelve students from a public school in Azogues, Ecuador, aged twelve to fourteen, participated in this research. The investigation employed various tools, such as a pronunciation pretest and posttest, an observation checklist, and an online survey to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Students engaged in storytelling activities, emphasizing verbs with the endings -s and -es incorporated into regular classes. Students who exhibited greater pronunciation accuracy and motivation contributed to revealing significant improvements in the precise production of target sounds. Future research should explore how storytelling influences pronunciation retention over extended periods and its relationship to other phonological elements.

*Keywords:* storytelling, mispronunciation, standard level

## RESUMEN

La comunicación clara en inglés depende de una pronunciación estándar precisa; la articulación incorrecta de los sonidos puede dar lugar a interpretaciones erróneas, especialmente en el caso de morfemas gramaticales como las terminaciones verbales de tercera persona del singular -s y -es en presente simple. Este estudio investigó la eficacia de la narración en la enseñanza del Inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) a estudiantes de nivel A1 para determinar si se produjeron mejoras en la pronunciación de estos morfemas. El objetivo principal fue examinar cómo se podría implementar la narración para mejorar la pronunciación de estudiantes de nivel A1. Doce estudiantes de un colegio público en Azogues, Ecuador, con edades comprendidas entre los doce y los catorce años, participaron en esta investigación. La indagación empleó diversas herramientas, como un pretest y un posttest de pronunciación, una lista de verificación de observación y una encuesta en línea, para recopilar datos tanto cualitativos como cuantitativos. Los estudiantes participaron en actividades de narración, haciendo hincapié en los verbos con las terminaciones -s y -es incorporados en las clases regulares. Los estudiantes que mostraron mayor precisión en la pronunciación y motivación contribuyeron a revelar mejoras significativas en la producción precisa de los sonidos objetivo. Las investigaciones futuras deberían explorar cómo la narración influye en la retención de la pronunciación durante periodos prolongados y su relación con otros elementos fonológicos.

*Palabras clave:* narración de cuentos, pronunciación incorrecta, nivel estándar

## INTRODUCTION

Despite being one of the most overlooked aspects of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), pronunciation has long been acknowledged as being crucial (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011). Correctly pronouncing third-person singular morphemes (-s/-es/ies) in the present simple tense is one of the many pronunciation issues that A1-level students frequently encounter. Depending on the phonetic context, these morphemes can be pronounced as /s/, /z/, or /ɪz/ (Roach, 2009). For example, students should be able to differentiate between the pronunciations of "it watches" /'wɒtʃɪz/, "she plays" /pleɪz/, and "he talks" /tɔːks/. However, learners who speak native languages like Spanish frequently mispronounce or omit such segmental features because they do not phonetically mark verb conjugation (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016).

According to Derwing and Munro (2015), mispronouncing these morphemes can cause misunderstandings and have a detrimental impact on how proficient a speaker is perceived to be in the language. However, suprasegmental characteristics like intonation and rhythm are usually given precedence over segmental clarity when teaching pronunciation in EFL classes. This disparity suggests that students require focused, intriguing teaching methods that enable them to internalize these particular sound patterns in relevant contexts.

In this sense, storytelling shows promise as a teaching tool. Students can hear, mimic, and practice pronunciation in a natural and inspiring way by being exposed to verb forms in context. Read-alouds, dramatizations, and narrative retellings are examples of story-based activities that help students express specific morphemes more confidently and clearly while improving their fluency and oral engagement (Wright, 2003; Wray & Medwell, 2021).

This study examines how A1-level students' pronunciation of the third-person singular -s/-es morphemes can be enhanced through storytelling. It attempts to close the gap between pronunciation theory and classroom practice and is based on the ideas of communicative language teaching (CLT).

Twelve A1-level EFL students in the eighth year, which is considered the first level in Superior Basic of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, from Luis Rogelio González School, a public secondary school in Azogues, Ecuador. These pupils have little exposure to English outside of the classroom, are from rural areas, and frequently hesitate to speak. There are few opportunities for pronunciation or communicative practice, and most of their English instruction is focused on grammar and vocabulary (Richards, 2006). They are at the A1 level in the CEFR, which requires students to comprehend well-known expressions and construct simple phrases (Kelly, 2000).

The primary research examined how storytelling can be implemented to improve the pronunciation of A1 students. Three specific objectives were set to achieve the general one: (a) To measure how storytelling affects students' pronunciation component at A1 level standards in

spoken language. The instruments used were a pretest and a posttest pronunciation test scored using an analytical pronunciation rubric focused on segmental accuracy (clarity of consonant vowel sounds, articulation of minimal pairs, etc.). (b) To identify the advantages of implementing storytelling for the development of pronunciation at A1 level standards. The instrument used was a checklist to collect qualitative evidence of student improvement related to pronunciation development and confidence. c) To explore students' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of storytelling to improve their English pronunciation. The instrument was an online survey (10 positive statements) conducted after the intervention to gather qualitative insights into students' attitudes, motivation, and perceived progress.

The study has two well-stipulated categories. The first one is the independent variable, which is the use of storytelling activities aimed at engaging students in the use of spoken narratives, read-alouds, and dramatized story performances designed to provide repeated and contextualized exposure to target sounds (Derakhshan and Shakki, 2021). By using stories to learn English, learners can practice and reduce interference from their first language (Chen & Mora, 2021). On the other hand, the dependent variable is how well students speak, are understood, and reduce their first language's influence on individual sounds, as measured by pronunciation guidelines, audio recordings, and teacher observations (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016). Moreover, dramatized storytelling encourages learners to actively experiment with intonation, stress, and segmental features in a communicative context, which improves their comprehensibility and fluency (Eads, 2022).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research, called 'The effect of storytelling on improving pronunciation standards in A1 level students,' implements a mixed-method action research to study how storytelling can help A1-level English students pronounce third-person singular verb endings (-s and -es) better. This section explains the research plan, methods for gathering information, tools used, how everything was checked for accuracy, the way the terms were defined, the group of students who were focused on, how the sample is chosen, how the data is analyzed, ethical issues, and the initial evaluation, all following teaching design practices (Kurt, 2017).

Action research works well in education because it includes repeated steps of planning, doing, observing, and thinking about what happened to make real improvements (Burns, 2010). The quantitative part uses numbers from tests taken before and after to check if storytelling helps students pronounce sounds more accurately. Simultaneously, the qualitative component, consisting of surveys and observations, explores students' perceptions and experiences to understand their motivation and attitudes. By combining different types of data and looking at both measurable results and personal experiences, this mixed-method approach helps create strong conclusions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

To gather thorough data, the research utilizes three main data collection methods: pre- and post-assessment surveys and classroom observations. The pre- and post-assessments evaluate changes in students' pronunciation for -s and -es endings, offering quantitative evidence to gauge the intervention's success.

An online survey collects qualitative data about learners' viewpoints, motivation, and perceived progress after the intervention, providing insightful information about their educational experiences. Classroom observations, methodically recorded using a checklist, track students' engagement, articulation errors, and growth during storytelling exercises, providing instantaneous qualitative data.

The design of data collection instruments focuses on the study applying three carefully designed instruments to collect data: (1) Pronunciation Pre-Test and Post-Test: Students read aloud a story excerpt containing 10 sentences with third-person singular verbs (e.g., “She walks,” “He watches”). The task is administered before and after the five-week storytelling intervention. An analytical pronunciation rubric evaluates how well someone pronounces sounds, paying special attention to the clarity of -s and -es sounds, how they transition between consonants and vowels, and how well they distinguish similar-sounding words.

The evaluation rubric used to grade the pre- and post-test on the pronunciation of third-person singular verbs with -s, -es, and -ies endings. It includes the criteria and descriptors for each part of the test, with a scoring scale out of 5. The purpose is to quantify improvements in pronunciation accuracy. (2) Online Survey: A 10 positive sentence survey, administered post-intervention via Google Forms, includes closed questions (e.g., “How did storytelling help your pronunciation?”). The questions are written in simple English to ensure accessibility for A1 learners. The survey takes 10–15 minutes to complete. The purpose is to gather qualitative insights into students’ perceptions and motivation. (3) Observation Checklist: A structured checklist records students’ participation, pronunciation errors, and progress during storytelling activities (e.g., read-alouds, dramatized performances). The checklist includes categories such as “Frequency of -s/-es errors,” “Engagement level,” and “Use of target sounds in context,” with space for qualitative notes. The motive is to monitor real-time progress and inform instructional adjustments.

### **Validation of Instruments**

To ensure reliability and validity, the instruments undergo expert validation by two EFL professionals with expertise in pronunciation pedagogy. The process involves review, where two experts evaluate the pronunciation rubric, survey questions, and observation checklist for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Pre-test and Post-test

**Table 1**

*Pre-test*

Student	Part 1 (Grammar Accuracy) /5	Part 2 (Sound Identification) /5	Part 3 (Pronunciation Accuracy) /3	Observations
S1	2	1	1	Confuses verb forms; weak /z/ pronunciation
S2	3	2	1	Difficulty with /ɪz/ sounds
S3	2	1	1	Mispronounces “watches”, “studies”
S4	1	2	1	Lacks awareness of grammar rules
S5	3	1	1	Good grammar, weak in sound discrimination
S6	2	2	2	Slight pronunciation improvement seen
S7	1	1	1	Struggles across all parts
S8	3	2	1	Misses pronunciation of /z/ and /ɪz/
S9	2	1	1	Difficulty with irregular spelling-to-sound rules
S10	1	1	1	Needs full support in present tense formation
S11	2	2	1	Pronounces /s/ well, struggles with /ɪz/
S12	3	2	2	Shows potential, but lacks consistency

The pre-test results reveal that students had considerable difficulties in both grammar accuracy and pronunciation of third-person singular verbs in the present tense. Most students scored between 1 to 3 out of 5 in the first two parts, showing incomplete mastery of subject-verb agreement. Only a few students could correctly identify the pronunciation of verb endings, especially those with /ɪz/, such as watches or studies.

Part 3, which focused on pronunciation through repetition, also showed low performance, with the majority scoring 1 out of 3, indicating a lack of confidence and clarity when producing the "-s" sounds. It is evident that without contextual practice or communicative strategies, students struggled to apply the grammatical rules and to articulate the verb endings accurately.

**Table 2***Post-test*

Student	Part 1 (Grammar Accuracy) /5	Part 2 (Sound Identification) /5	Part 3 (Pronunciation Accuracy) /3	Observations
S1	5	4	3	Significant improvement in grammar and pronunciation
S2	4	4	3	Clear articulation of /ɪz/ in “watches” and “studies”
S3	4	3	2	Good grammar, improved /s/ and /z/ sounds
S4	3	3	2	Stronger grasp of verb endings, still hesitant in speech
S5	5	4	3	Excellent progress; confident pronunciation
S6	4	3	2	Consistent improvement across all tasks
S7	3	2	2	Better awareness, slight progress in pronunciation
S8	5	5	3	Very strong improvement in all areas
S9	4	3	2	Steady progress; some hesitation with /ɪz/
S10	3	2	2	Better grammar, still needs help with fluency
S11	4	4	3	Confident pronunciation of all three sounds
S12	5	5	3	Outstanding performance; shows full understanding

Table 2 portrays the post-test results, which reflect a positive change in all three parts of the assessment. In Part 1, the majority of students scored 4 or 5 out of 5, demonstrating a much clearer understanding of third-person singular grammar rules. The use of storytelling activities seems to have reinforced the correct application of present-tense verb endings in real contexts.

In Part 2, there was a significant improvement in sound identification, especially in the distinction between /s/, /z/, and /ɪz/ endings. Several students who had scored 1 or 2 in the pre-test improved to 4 or 5, showing increased phonological awareness.

Part 3 showed the most evident growth in oral production and confidence. Most students now scored 2 or 3 out of 3, and their repetition of sentences sounded more fluent and accurate. This indicates that repetitive storytelling tasks not only built pronunciation skills but also helped students internalize the patterns through meaningful use.

### Findings of the online survey

This section presents the main findings obtained from the participants' responses to the survey, which explored the perceived effectiveness of storytelling activities in improving the pronunciation of third-person verb endings (-s, -es, -ies) among A1-level of the eighth grade of Upper Basic education. Thus, twelve participants, aged 12 to 13, provided relevant data presented in four figures, each with a specific focus. These figures include descriptive titles and detailed statistical information to support the conclusions of this study.

**Figure 1**

*Pronunciation of third-person verbs during storytelling activities*

1. The storytelling activities help you to participate orally by pronouncing third-person verb endings (e.g., -s, -es, -ies).

12 respuestas

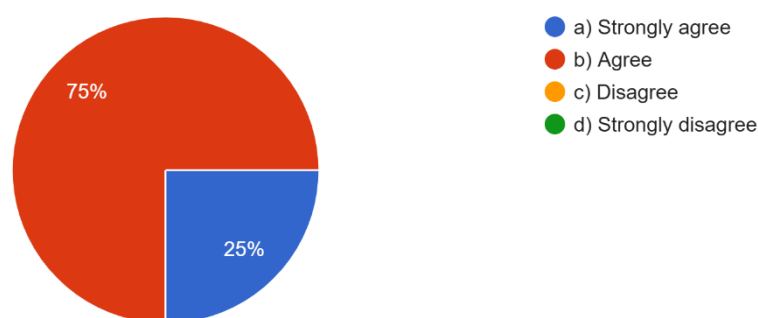


Figure 1 shows that most students felt that storytelling activities supported their oral participation by helping them pronounce third-person verb endings such as -s, -es, and -ies. Out of twelve respondents, nine students (75%) agreed, and three students (25%) strongly agreed. No students selected the negative options (disagree or strongly disagree). Notably, none of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thus, this result suggests that students felt positively about the role of storytelling in practicing third-person verb endings, indicating that this method encouraged them to participate actively in oral tasks.



**Figure 2**

*Improvement in pronunciation of third-person verbs in storytelling activities*

2. You notice improvement in your pronunciation of third-person verbs during storytelling activities.

12 respuestas

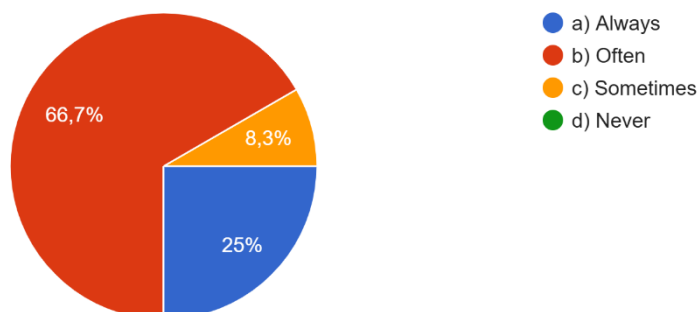


Figure 2 demonstrates that students were asked whether they noticed improvement in their pronunciation while engaging in storytelling activities. The majority, eight students (66.7%), responded often, while three (25%) selected always, and one (8.3%) chose sometimes. No learners selected never. These results show that almost all students perceived a noticeable improvement in their pronunciation skills, which highlights the effectiveness of storytelling as a practice tool for enhancing the accurate pronunciation of third-person verb forms.

**Figure 3**

*Storytelling activities*

4. The storytelling activities encourage you to keep in mind the correct pronunciation of third person verb endings.

12 respuestas

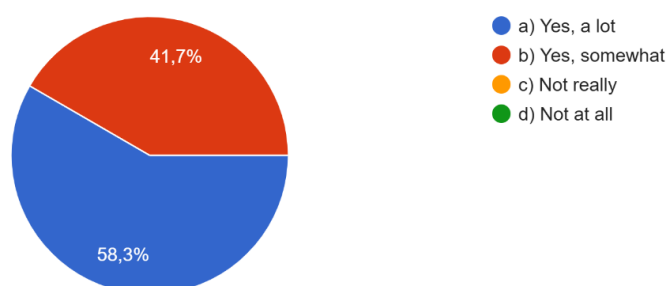


Figure 3 explores how much storytelling activities encouraged students to focus on the correct pronunciation of third-person verb endings. Seven students (58.3%) answered yes, a lot, and five (41.7%) answered yes, somewhat. No participants chose the negative options (not really or not at all). These responses show that all students felt that storytelling helped raise their awareness of how third-person verbs should be pronounced, with the majority experiencing a

strong influence. This suggests that storytelling is a helpful method for promoting form-focused pronunciation in a meaningful context.

**Figure 4**

*Storytelling activities increase pronunciation confidence compared to traditional methods*

6. Practicing pronunciation through storytelling makes you to feel more confident than traditional methods (e.g., repeating words or drills)?

12 respuestas

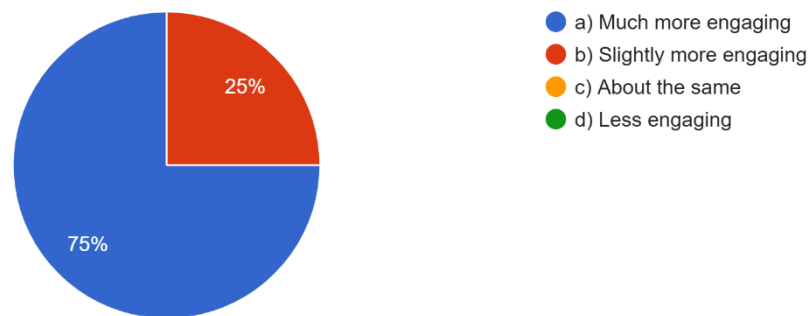


Figure 4 shows that participants compared their confidence in pronunciation through storytelling versus traditional techniques like drills or word repetition. Hence, nine students (75%) reported that storytelling was much more engaging, and three (25%) said it was slightly more engaging. No one selected about the same or less engaging. This reflects that storytelling not only improves pronunciation, but also creates a more confident and motivated environment when practicing pronunciation through storytelling, making it a preferred and more effective strategy than traditional approaches.

The results of this study suggest that storytelling can be a valuable and engaging instructional strategy to support pronunciation development in A1-level learners, particularly with the pronunciation of third-person verb endings. Additionally, this study highlights the positive impact of storytelling on students' pronunciation of third-person verb endings. The participants' answers clearly show that they felt engaged, confident, and aware of correct verb pronunciation when involved in storytelling activities. These findings are consistent with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasize meaningful communication and learner engagement where learning occurs in meaningful, engaging contexts (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

One important observation is the total absence of negative responses in all figures. This indicates a strong general agreement among students regarding the usefulness of storytelling in improving their pronunciation. Moreover, the combination of grammar and speaking practice within storytelling appears to provide a more natural and memorable learning experience than isolated drills. Another relevant aspect is the emotional factor. Moreover, the integration of form and communication through storytelling gives the impression of enhancing both pronunciation

accuracy and learner motivation. Students not only recognized improvement in their skills but also expressed higher confidence and motivation. This suggests that storytelling can support affective learning by reducing anxiety and making pronunciation practice more enjoyable and contextualized.

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports the idea that language learning is most effective when learners are active participants in meaningful tasks (Richards, 2006). Storytelling creates a space for integrating form and fluency, which is essential for long-term acquisition. The data also point to a potential shift in learner perception, from pronunciation being a mechanical task to a communicative and enjoyable experience. This change is especially relevant in early language development stages, where affective factors like confidence and motivation are critical in sustaining long-term engagement with the language. From a practical view, teachers can use storytelling as an accessible and flexible technique that supports both linguistic development and classroom engagement.

Finally, this study contributes to the educational area since it supports storytelling as a effective instructional strategy. Its impact on pronunciation, confidence, and motivation highlights its relevance in modern language classrooms, especially when teaching challenging grammatical aspects such as third-person verb endings. Future research could explore its effects on other pronunciation features or with learners of different proficiency levels.

## CONCLUSION

Given the findings of the research discussed, storytelling is evident as an effective pedagogical tool and a successful strategy for improving segmental pronunciation in A1-level learners, particularly in the pronunciation of third-person singular endings in the present tense. Pre- and post-test assessments showed improved segmental accuracy after implementing storytelling activities, reducing errors like dropped or mispronounced final /s/. Repetitive structures and contextual vocabulary within stories fostered familiarity and measurable progress in pronunciation.

This experience stresses the need for pronunciation-oriented strategies to go beyond mechanical drills and accept context-rich, student-centered approaches supporting ongoing improvement. This study facilitates our recognition that carefully applying storytelling can help overcome pronunciation difficulties and create a more engaging and efficient EFL classroom. It offers several advantages for A1-level pronunciation development. Qualitative data indicates increased student engagement and motivation through enjoyable narratives. Natural repetition within stories supported internalization and automaticity in a non-mechanical manner.

In addition to their higher motivation and participation, the advancement in students' pronunciation precision responds to the implementation of storytelling inside a communicative framework at this public school. Hence, it assists students in developing oral confidence and

linguistic awareness by placing them in real-world, low stress speaking situations, two vital skills for the early stages of language development to be understood. Learners perceived storytelling positively, reporting that it made pronunciation practice more enjoyable and less stressful. They better understand and remembered word endings in meaningful contexts and found that acting out stories enhanced their focus on sounds and emphasis. Overall, students viewed this tool as a charming and supportive method for gaining greater awareness and control of their English pronunciation.

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