Polish intermediate students' reception of storytelling-based games in EFL secondary school instructed speaking practice: An action research study

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Abstract

Over the last decades EFL students have been confronted with a variety of speaking tasks which were to develop their oral proficiency. Nevertheless, problems with improving learners' ability to speak revealed that the acquisition of the productive oral skill in instructed settings is a complex issue. With insights from psychology and SLA becoming more influential in FLT, theoreticians and practitioners started to appreciate the significance of interaction and positive emotions in FL learning. Storytelling and games, which combine the two, have recently attracted more attention in the field, proving effective in vocabulary and grammar learning and, more importantly, reducing language anxiety, increasing motivation and facilitating speaking. Having considered the results of research into storytelling- and game-based EFL instruction, we designed and conducted an action research study with a group of intermediate students to investigate their reception of speaking-oriented storytelling games. The findings we obtained were in line with the results of the previous research, supporting the educational potential of storytelling and games with regard to intensifying the students' oral participation in speaking tasks and provoking positive emotions in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: games; storytelling; speaking; oral proficiency; action research

1. Introduction

In the *lingua franca* era of English, the outer and expanding circles have made repeated attempts to find yet innovative and effective teaching techniques to be implemented into EFL instructed settings with a view to teaching language skills and subsystems. Decades of mostly futile foreign language (FL) education associated with the method era of EFL Pedagogy encouraged scholars to search for more individualized ways of foreign language teaching (FLT) and, as a result, to mark the beginning of the post-method era (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Nunan, 1991). The legacy left by teaching methods combined with insights from the fields of psychology and second language acquisition (SLA) have attached special significance to, among others, the role of positive emotions[1] and interaction[2] in learning the target language (TL), popularizing the use of storytelling[3] (Cockett & Fox, 1999; Klippel, 1984; Underhill, 1987) and games[4] (Cervantes, 2009; Freitas, 2006; Gajewska, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Gaudart, 1999; Jessen, 2011; Macedonia, 2005; Siek-Piskozub, 1994, 1995, 2001; Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006) in EFL instruction.

Game- and storytelling-oriented tasks are particularly promising in the context of teaching speaking which seems to be the most desirable and, at the same time, most problematic language ability (Bailey, 2003; Boonkit, 2010; Brown & Yule, 1983; Byrne, 1976; Chastain, 1971; Dakowska, 2005; Goh & Burns, 2012; Komorowska, 2005; Lazaraton, 2001; Nation, 2011; Nerlicki, 2011; Thornbury,

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[1] According to Birbaumer and Schmid (1989, as cited in Macedonia, 2005), positive emotions facilitate the learning process in contrast to negative feelings which, if experienced by learners, do not allow learning to take place.

[2] Lightbown and Spada (2006) develop *Let's talk* approach, which, based on the concept of classroom interaction, combines two SLA fundamental constructs, input and output. While Krashen (1985) addresses the need for language reception, input, in FLT since it is believed to contribute to language acquisition, Swain (1985) suggests that TL reception is not enough. It is language production, output, that improves learners' fluency with using TL resources since they are "pushed to use alternative means to get across (...) the message (...) precisely, coherently, and appropriately" (Swain, 1985, p. 248-249).

[3] Storytelling can be used not only as a teaching and learning technique due to its entertaining and didactic potential, but it can also be effectively employed to teach the TL since telling stories creates an enjoyable and relaxing atmosphere (Wajnryb, 2003). Nevertheless, Klippel (1984) remarks that storytelling should be introduced during general revision since it requires storytellers to use different lexical and grammatical structures simultaneously.

[4] Cervantes (2009) and many others (Gajewska, 2017, 2019b; Gaudart, 1999; Siek-Piskozub, 1994, 1995, 2001) distinguish a number of advantages of using games in a FL classroom. First, games increase students' level of self-esteem and help them overcome their fear towards schooling. Second, they provide a diversion to students' regular classroom work based on course books. Third, they diversify classroom interaction between students and teachers, allowing the latter to perform the role of educators and promote students' appropriate linguistic and social behaviors.

2006). The greater difficulty in mastering speaking, as compared with its sister skills, lies in the specificity of a speech production process (see Bot, 1992; Bot, & Schreuder, 1993; Green, 1998; Levelt, 1989) requiring a simultaneous application of different types of knowledge and skills.[5] Learners' unwillingness to communicate leading to "unuttered reflections" (Daszkiewicz, Wenzel, & Kusiak-Pisowacka, 2018, p. 123) is a serious challenge for FL instructors since learners cannot learn to speak in their TL unless they practice their ability to produce oral language (Rivers, 1968). Even though the exposure to spoken input is necessary, "students in a foreign-language class will not learn to speak fluently merely by hearing speech" (Rivers, 1968, p. 160).[6]

Having considered the findings of research investigating the usefulness of game- and storytelling-based tasks in FL classrooms and the unique character of the productive oral language skill, we introduce a theoretical background to the game- and storytelling-based EFL instruction and present the action research study that was designed to provide the Polish learners with visual stimuli and encourage their participation in a series of storytelling-based game-like tasks. Therefore, the objectives of the present paper are threefold: (1) to provide a review of the relevant literature in the area of storytelling- and game-based EFL teaching, (2) to describe the action research study carried out with a group of Polish intermediate students of English and, finally, (3) to draw some conclusions with regard to teaching EFL speaking in storytelling and game-like contexts.

2. Literature review

The educational potential of games and storytelling have been extensively researched in different parts of the world with such countries as Indonesia, Iran and Malaysia undertaking most prolific studies in that subject matter (see Table 1).

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[5] Successful oral performance, or the production of a fluent and accurate FL speech that is adjusted to the context and the cultural backgrounds of other interlocutors, depends upon a large number of linguistic (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and non-linguistic (knowledge of strategies, intercultural competence, willingness to communicate, motivation, language anxiety, fear of assessment, knowledge on a given topic) factors (Boonkit, 2010; Brown, 2001; Chastain, 1971; Nation, 2011; Nerlicki, 2011).

[6] Speakers' limited oral in-class participation is not always caused by their inadequate level of language proficiency and unexpected setbacks experienced during the formulation or articulation stage since the above-mentioned problems can be easily overcome by means of a more intensive FL instruction. The underlying cause of speakers' passiveness can sometimes lie in the conceptualization stage during which speakers are unable to generate ideas their utterances can be based on. Komorowska (2005), however, explains that verbal, visual or auditory stimuli constitute an important source of support for unsuccessful speakers who encounter difficulties in conceptualizing their spoken messages.

The following commonalities characterizing the selected research into the storytelling- and game-oriented FL instruction have been identified. The research questions primarily focused on evaluating the effectiveness of a storytelling technique (including different channels and directions of communication) and games in developing the subjects' linguistic knowledge (most often English grammar and vocabulary), language skills and motivation. A variety of research tools ranging from questionnaires, interviews, observations, note-taking, diary entries, video and audio recordings or tests were implemented with experimental or quasi-experimental studies, action research studies and surveys being the most frequent examples of quantitative and qualitative research methods adopted by the researchers. The results of extensive research (see Table 1) have shown the true educational potential of storytelling and games, revealing that they improved the subjects' TL grammatical and lexical knowledge (see Aslanabadi & Rasouli, 2013; Chalak & Hajian, 2013; Phuong & Nguyen, 2017; Taheri, 2014; Tuan, 2012) as compared with the students' involved in conventional FL practice.

A number of studies, however, have been also undertaken to directly test the effectiveness of storytelling and games in teaching EFL speaking. Their findings were also consistent, pointing to the positive influence of the above-mentioned classroom activities on the subjects' FL speech production. They indicated:

1) the increased level of the speakers' self-confidence and motivation during FL speaking as reported by Bettiol (2001), Dewi, Kultsum and Armadi (2017), Girardelli (2017) and Leon and Cely (2010);
2) the subjects' improved ability to transfer information as illustrated in Mokhtar, Halim and Kamarulzaman (2011);
3) the decreased level of the participants' language anxiety as presented by Valipour and Aidinlou (2014), Fung and Ming (2016) and Gozcu and Caganaga (2016);
4) the more successful oral performance of experimental groups in comparison to control groups (see As, 2016; Marzuki, Prayogo, & Wahyudi, 2016; Zare-Behtash, Saed, & Sajjadi, 2016);
5) the speakers' more fluent and accurate EFL speech production as reported by Sharma (2018) and Zuhriya (2017).

By no means exhaustive, Table 1 lists selected examples of research into the storytelling- and game-oriented EFL instruction.

Table 1 Studies investigating the use of storytelling and games in EFL classroom practice (2001-2018)

STUDY	Country	Objectives	Subjects	Key findings
Bettiol (2001)	Brazil	o to assess the effect of games on the students' motivation.	10	Class motivation increased, whereas more positive feelings, including happiness, relaxation and enthusiasm, were reported.
Leon and Cely (2010)	Colombia	o to encourage the students to speak with the help of games, including storytelling, guessing and speculation games.	40	A good atmosphere was observed, which allowed the students to „speak and perform in a freer and more confident way" (Leon & Cely, 2010, p. 22). It was established that those learners who were unwilling to speak in English participated in the games.
Mokhtar et al. (2011)	Malaysia	o to evaluate the influence of storytelling on FL speakers' communication skills.	30	The students made progress in vocabulary, comprehension and story recall with each storytelling. Their ability to transfer information and use non-verbal language also developed.
Atta-Alla (2012)	USA	o to indicate the effectiveness of storytelling in integrating four language skills; o to improve the proficiency level of adult EFL learners.	40	The model of storytelling suggested by Atta-Alla (2012) proved effective in increasing the subjects' language proficiency and integrating their language skills, leading the author to state that „the results of the present study provide empirical support for the importance of using storytelling in the language curriculum" (Atta-Alla, 2012, p. 5).
Tuan (2012)	Vietnam	o to investigate how the use of games affects young learners' vocabulary recall.	121	The experimental group outperformed the control group in vocabulary recall during the immediate and the delayed retention stage.
Aslanabadi and Rasouli (2013)	Iran	o to find out how language games influence vocabulary learning by kindergarten EFL learners.	60	The experimental group performed better than the control group in which conventional teaching of vocabulary was implemented.
Chalak and Hajian (2013)	Iran	o to define the role of the students' oral storytelling in developing their accuracy.	45	The group in which the teacher's and students' (teacher-student group) storytelling was introduced outperformed the group in which the participants were exposed to receptive storytelling (teacher group) with regard to accuracy. Nevertheless, the teacher group scored better than the control group in which deductive and inductive ways of grammar teaching were introduced.
Taheri (2014)	Iran	o to investigate the effect of language games on the primary students' vocabulary retention.	32	The students from the experimental group recalled more vocabulary than the control group, which means that using language games may contribute to improved vocabulary recall.
Valipour and Aidinlou (2014)	Iran	o to examine the influence of language games on preschool learners' abilities to listen and speak in English.	38	The learners performed better with regard to their listening and speaking after than before the study. Games enabled them to increase their motivation and lower the level of language anxiety, making a FL classroom an attractive place to learn.
As (2016)	Indonesia	o to establish if storytelling is more effective than speaking tasks; o to describe the participants' attitude towards storytelling-based ESL speaking practice.	two groups of the 8th grade students[7]	The experimental group improved their ESL speaking as compared with the subjects from the control group. They also welcomed the introduction of storytelling with the aim of practicing speaking. It was reflected in the survey results, according to which the majority of the students, 80%, positively evaluated this technique.

[7] The exact number of the participants has not been included in the description of the study.

Fung and Ming (2016)	Malaysia	o to assess the effect of board games on the students' EFL speaking.	60	Board games reduced the learners' anxiety in the classroom, allowing them to present their ability to speak in a more confident manner. Furthermore, having played the games, the subjects felt motivated to speak and perform other speaking tasks.
Gozcu and Caganaga (2016)	Cyprus	o to describe the effectiveness of games in EFL instructed settings.	2	The participants interviewed for the purpose of the study reported a number of issues promoting the use of games in the classroom (motivation, fun, satisfaction, lower levels of stress and anxiety, alternative to memorization).
Marzuki et al. (2016)	Indonesia	o to assess the usefulness of Interactive Storytelling Strategy in developing the students' EFL ability to speak.	22	There were two aspects of the learners' performance that were subject to improvement, that is the completion of classroom activities and FL speaking.
Zare-Behtash et al. (2016)	Iran	o to investigate the effect of storytelling on the intermediate learners' ability to speak in English.	40	The storytelling-based instruction improved learners` EFL speaking.
Dewi, Kultsum and Armadi (2017)	Indonesia	o to evaluate the effectiveness of communicative games in teaching speaking to junior high school students.	36	Communicative games exerted a positive influence on the teaching and learning of EFL speaking, leading to the situation in which „students enjoyed their lesson and got more motivation, interest and confidence through their learning" (Dewi et al., 2017, p. 69).
Girardelli (2017)	China	o to evaluate the effectiveness of a storytelling game in developing the participants' EFL speaking.	81	The study helped the subjects increase their confidence while giving a short speech in English and organize their presentation in a more effective way.
Phuong and Nguyen (2017)	Vietnam	o to identify the effect of board games on the learners' grammar retention; o to investigate the subjects' attitudes towards the use of board games in EFL grammar teaching.	50	The games facilitated learners' acquisition and retention of EFL grammar. The subjects agreed on the usefulness of board games in grammar learning since the majority of participants expressed positive attitudes towards their use.
Zuhriya (2017)	Indonesia	o to find out whether storytelling improves the students' EFL speaking.	23	The students performed better with regard to their ability to speak English having participated in storytelling-based tasks. The results of speaking test revealed that storytelling improved the subjects' comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.
Sharma (2018)	Nepal	o to state whether storytelling facilitates the subjects' EFL speaking.	25	Storytelling strategy helped the speakers improve their speaking proficiency. Progress was observed in the participants' vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

Even though a vast number of investigations have focused on the analysis of storytelling and games in ESL/EFL classrooms with an intention of improving the students' oral performance, there is still a dearth of empirical research directed at storytelling and game-like tasks done with Polish EFL secondary school students. The majority of the publications have been either of a theoretical nature, predominantly providing the rationale for using games in FL education, (e.g., Pawlak, Zawodniak, & Kruk, 2019; Siek-Piskozub, 1994, 1995, 2001), or of

a practical character, describing instructions how to introduce game-like tasks in FL classrooms (e.g., Karolczuk & Śmigiel, 2018; Wajda, 2015). None of them, however, have attempted to empirically examine the potential of storytelling games in Polish secondary school instructed speaking practice. Therefore, having identified an important gap and considered the significance of written and oral secondary school exit exam in English, or Matura,[8] as well as the guidelines issued by the Council of Europe (2001) and presented in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), we would like to stress the need for investigating the effectiveness of storytelling games in a Polish EFL classroom.

3. The action research study

Below there is a description of the goals, participants and procedure adopted in the study.

3.1. Goals

Considering the scarcity of research into storytelling- and game-oriented Polish EFL classroom environment, we designed an action research study which examined the subjects' performance during speaking-oriented storytelling-based tasks in a game-like environment of an EFL classroom. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How did the students assess the techniques introduced in the study?
2. What were the subjects' attitudes towards EFL speaking before and after the study?
3. How accurate and fluent were the participants' stories told by them during different storytelling and game-like tasks?

3.2. Participants

Since the aim of the study was to investigate the use of storytelling games with Polish EFL speakers preparing for their oral Matura exam, 12 Polish EFL intermediate second-grade students from Maria and Jerzy Kuncewiczowie Secondary School in Lublin, Poland were selected. Seven girls and five boys participated in the four-lesson action research study. The group met six times a week to participate in forty-five minute lessons of English as they followed an extended program in English. The participants

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[8] The oral Matura exam consists of two parts. First, students are asked a couple of warm-up questions. Second, they perform three tasks: (1) holding a dialogue with an examiner; (2) describing a picture and answering questions connected with it, and (3) giving a short speech in which they justify their opinion on a given subject, providing arguments for and against their choices.

used the Pupil's Book and the Activity Book *New Matura Success Upper-Intermediate* by Comyns, Parsons and Moran (2016) published by Pearson Education.

Table 2 The characteristics of the subjects of the study

Criteria	Participants
Age	17 years old
Level of TL proficiency	intermediate
Amount of exposure to spoken English	six English lessons a week
Type of exposure	one English teacher provides a speaking model
Amount of speaking practice	four language skills are practiced during one class
Amount of phonetic instruction and training	limited to occasional practice

3.3. Instruments

In order to learn what the subjects' views on their EFL speaking skill and storytelling games were, both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted. The participants met twice a week for the period of three weeks to participate in a series of four lessons designed by the current author and presented to the students in the form of a worksheet[9] containing a range of classroom tasks (cf. Table 2). The learners' oral participation in the study was recorded during the speaking tasks. The subjects told 12 stories of different lengths and degrees of complexity, all of which were later transcribed. For the purpose of the current discussion, however, three recordings differing with regard to their level of spontaneity, from the least to most spontaneous, were selected and examined with reference to their duration, the diversity of lexical and grammatical structures as well as the occurrence of errors.[10]

The participants were requested to complete a set of questionnaires. There were two main questionnaires, the pre-study and post-study questionnaire, as well as four short questionnaires, written in the first language of the respondents, that is Polish. The goal of the pre-study questionnaire was to gather some information about the students' EFL learning-to-speak experiences and to examine their attitudes towards games. There were seven closed-item and two open-ended questions to be filled in by the subjects. The post-study questionnaire was administered after four lessons had taken place. Not only was it designed to find out what the students' speaking abilities as reported by the subjects were, but also to define their attitudes to speaking-oriented tasks used during the study. It consisted of five questions, three of which were open-ended ones. The four short questionnaires allowed the participants to express their opinions about the lessons just after they had

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[9] The worksheets and lesson plans can be found in Gąsior (2019a).
[10] More examples of the recordings which were analyzed from the perspective of classroom interaction can be found in Gąsior (2019b).

drawn to an end. They consisted of three or four closed-item questions, therefore it took the students approximately three minutes to complete them.

Table 3 The design of the study

THE PRE-STUDY	
THE STUDY PROPER	
Lesson One – *Introduction to the idea of storytelling*	
Activity 1:	- the students introduce themselves in English and talk about their hobbies.
Activity 2:	- the students work in groups and create the definitions of a *story* and *storytelling* by putting the phrases from the box in the right order.
Activity 3:	- the students work in groups and discuss the stages of the story; - they fill in the graphic organizer with the information from the diagram.
Activity 4:	- the students watch the tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears"[11] and analyze it with regard to the stages of the story, tenses, setting and characters.
Activity 5:	- the students fill in the graphic organizer with the information from the story.
Activity 6:	- the students match the expressions and linking words with their functions in the story, at the same time revising the information concerning past tenses and selected linking words.
Activity 7:	- the students work as a whole group and play "One word at a time" game (Cockett & Fox, 1999, p. 50); - they tell a story by adding a word to the story in turns.
Short questionnaire I	
Lesson Two - *Pictures as the basis for storytelling*	
Activity 1:	- the students match the types of stimuli with the right category.
Activity 2:	- the students write down associations with five icons presented in the worksheet.
Activity 3:	- the students work in groups and provide associations to the concepts of *everyday life, traveling* and *actions.*
Activity 4:	- the students work in groups; - they tell a story on the basis of the concepts they have provided in Activity 3 and fill in the graphic organizer with the information from their stories.
Activity 5:	- the students work as a whole group and play "One sentence at a time" game (Cockett & Fox, 1999, p. 50); - they tell a story by adding a sentence to the story in turns.
Short questionnaire II	
Lesson Three – *"Story Cubes" game, or telling a story on the basis of pictures*	
Activity 1:	- the students work in groups and tell a story on the basis of five pictures from the worksheet.
Activity 2:	- the students work in groups and analyze the pictures from each of the dice from "Story Cubes" sets; - they fill in the table with the names of these pictures.
Activity 3:	- the students match the halves of the sentences to create the hints for playing "Story Cubes".
Activity 4:	- the students work in groups of four and play "Story Cubes"[12] games; - they fill in the scoresheets, providing information about the team's participants, the words used, the correctness of stories, the time scored as well as the number of points.
Short questionnaire III	
Lesson Four – *"Story Cubes" game*	
Activity 1:	- the students play "Deduction Puzzle"[13] and speculate about the content of the photograph;
Activity 2:	- the students work in pairs and tell their partner a story describing one of their mornings; - they retell the story of their partner in their own words.
Activity 3:	See Lesson Three, Activity 4
Short questionnaire IV	
THE POST-STUDY	

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KndSVsY5HWM

[12] The presentation of the game modified for the purpose of an EFL classroom use is discussed in Gąsior (2018, 2019a).

[13] https://teachinggamesefl.com/2016/03/01/picture-puzzle/

3.4. Results

The following sections discuss the participants' answers provided in the questionnaires and present the transcripts of the selected recordings made during the four lessons.

3.4.1. The pre-study

The findings were based on the answers of 12 seventeen-year-old secondary school students. The majority of the subjects ($N = 11$) expressed a positive attitude towards learning English with six subjects stating that they definitely liked the TL. The respondents' answers concerning the length of learning English varied from ten to twelve years with the period of ten years being the most popular choice ($N = 8$). EFL speech production was judged problematic since half of the students ($N = 6$) admitted that they definitely had problems with their productive oral performance during EFL classes. The analysis of their answers revealed that the knowledge of TL vocabulary and the fear of other people's assessment were deemed crucial factors in EFL speaking with nine and six respondents selecting each option respectively. As illustrated in Figure 1, the Polish intermediate speakers utterly disregarded the significance of pronunciation skills ($N = 6$) or time pressure ($N = 5$) in their FL speech production.
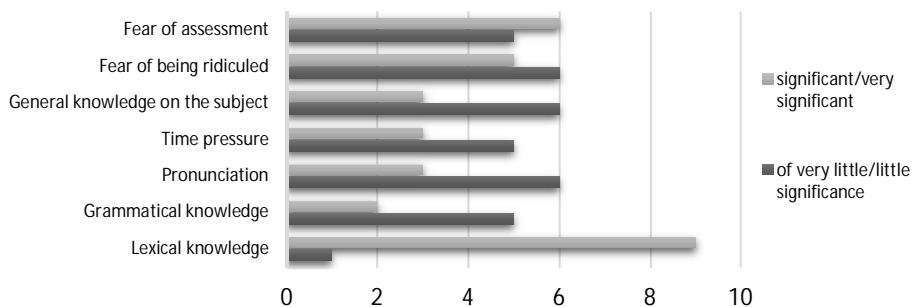

Figure 1 The significance of selected factors in EFL speaking as reported by the subjects ($N = 12$)

The students' self-assessment of their ability to speak in English showed that six subjects positively evaluated their EFL speaking using grades 5 ($N = 3$) and 4 ($N = 3$). Grade 3 proved to be the most popular answer since almost half of the students ($N = 5$) referred to it. Out of 12 learners only one respondent described his EFL oral performance using grade 2, that is disappointing.

On being asked about their previous EFL speaking classroom practice, seven respondents maintained that their English teachers had rather devoted some time to developing the students' productive oral skills. The participants'

answers showed that *ex aequo* dialogues in pairs (*N* = 9) and picture descriptions (*N* = 9) as well as group work (*N* = 7) were three classroom techniques most frequently employed by their former EFL instructors (see Figure 2).
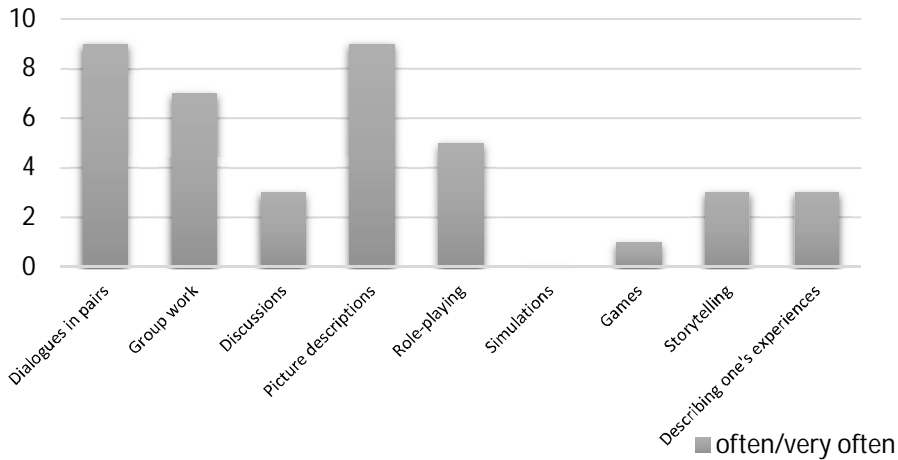

Figure 2 The most popular EFL speaking tasks as reported by the subjects (*N* = 12)

The participants were also asked to express their attitudes towards playing games. The majority of them decided that computer (*N* = 10) and card games (*N* = 10) were most attractive to them (see Figure 3), owing to the subjects' strong association with fun and entertainment (*N* = 9). Most importantly, the game used in the study, "Story Cubes," had a great novelty value to the students since none of the participants had played it before.
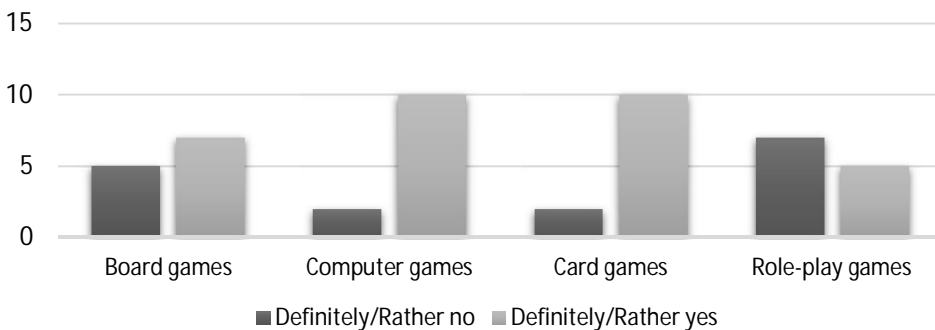

Figure 3 The students' willingness to play different kinds of games as perceived by the subjects' (*N* = 12)

3.4.2. The study proper

In the study proper the participants performed a set of speaking-oriented classroom tasks, during which they were recorded and their utterances were transcribed. At the end of each of the lessons, the subjects completed one short questionnaire. The analyses of the selected transcripts and the findings of the four short questionnaires are presented below.

3.4.2.1. Transcripts

Transcript 1 presents the two stories told by the representatives of the two groups, Student 1 and Student 2. The participants were working in groups of three to tell their story, relying on a set of five pictures. The words bolded in the transcript below are the names of the pictures that the students inserted in their stories.

Lesson Three – Story One (0 min 28 sec)

> *Student 1: One person had birthday and […] (a moment of hesitation) she got a present (1). It was the late (2) present […](a moment of hesitation)*
> *Teacher: Okay.*
> *Student 1: And she got the dog (3) and a book (4) and was very sad (5) because she wanted something […] (a moment of hesitation)*
> *Teacher: Else?*
> *Student 1: Yes.*

Lesson Three – Story Two (0 min 19 sec)

> *Student 2: The student was studying (1) all the time (2) and he was unhappy (3) about that so his friends bought him a dog (4) as a present (5).*
> *Teacher: A dog as a present, yeah. Is that all?*
> *Student 2: Yes.*

Transcript 1 The students' stories told on the basis of five pictures (a present, a clock, a dog, a book, a sad face)

Since the students were not required to produce a spontaneous speech and, instead, they were given time to plan their stories, neither long pauses nor grammatical errors were recorded. However, having considered the fact that the students had been learning English for a decade or more, they should have told more elaborate stories.

During Lesson Four the learners worked in pairs and gave an account of how they had spent one of their mornings, elaborating on such ideas as the mood, weather, family and food. To make the speaking task more challenging, a student from a pair was picked up by the teacher and encouraged to retell not his or her story, but the story of their partner. Transcript 2 shows how the students

from two random pairs selected by the teacher reformulated the stories of their classmates. The phrases underlined in the transcript below point to the lexical and grammatical errors made by the Polish speakers.

<div align="right">*Pair One (0 min 58 sec)*</div>

Student 1: When she woke up yesterday, she <u>had a terrible humor</u> [...] (a moment of hesitation)
Teacher: Yeah, she had a terrible mood.
Student 1: Because the <u>weather is terrible</u>
Teacher: Yeah, the weather was terrible.
Student 1: It was raining but [...] (a moment of hesitation) and <u>she hates weather</u> like that. And when <u>he</u> [...] (a moment of hesitation) and when she was walking to the kitchen, she <u>had argument with</u> her younger brother because <u>he was slobbing her</u> [...] (a moment of hesitation) <u>talerz</u>
Teacher: Plate.
Student 1: Her plate with her breakfast and she was hungry all day because she didn't eat her breakfast.
Teacher: Oh, what a poor girl! (laugh)

<div align="right">*Pair Two (0 min 34 sec)*</div>

Student 1: He woke up <u>at Saturday morning</u> at eleven o'clock. The <u>weather is beautiful</u> and <u>the sun is shining</u>.
Teacher: Yeah, the sun was shining. We stick to the past.
Student 1: And <u>ordered a sushi</u> for breakfast (laugh).
Student 2<u>: Dlaczego nie?</u> (laugh)
Student 1: And he was watching TV.
Teacher: Okay, a very lazy morning!

Transcript 2 The students' stories retold by their classmates

Having compared the utterances from Transcript 1 and Transcript 2, it is evident that they differed not only with reference to their length and the complexity of the syntactical structures, but also with regard to a number of grammatical errors. The main culprit responsible for a more faulty oral performance evident in the second transcript was spontaneity. In contrast to the speaking task presented in Transcript 1, in which the students were expected to present a pre-planned story, in the case of activity illustrated in Transcript 2 they were surprised by the fact that they were to talk about their partner's story, not their own one (the latter scenario would have probably ensured a more successful presentation). The most frequent and, at the same time, most serious errors concerned an incorrect use of past forms of verbs. The students clearly were not in control of their utterances and the instances of the Polish language being introduced into their stories were recorded.

The next transcript, Transcript 3, presents the oral language samples produced by the students while playing "Story Cubes. Voyages" game for the second time. On the basis of the set of nine pictures from the dice, a group of four students

took turns to build a story, adding a sentence by sentence, each of which contained the name of one picture from the dice. The words bolded in the transcript below are the names of the pictures from the dice, whereas the phrases underlined point to the grammatical inconsistencies found in the students' stories.

"Story Cubes. Voyages" (1 min 58 sec)

Student 1: It was raining (1) and I was very angry and confused.
Student 2: I played on computer games (2).
Student 3: I lost my necklace (3) while playing the computer game.
Teacher: You lost your necklace while playing the game?
Student 3: No tak! (laugh)
Teacher: Oh, I see! You were so engaged in playing the game! (laugh) Great!
Student 4: And I lost my crown (4) too! (laugh)
Student 1: Because of weather I am angry too because I was ... nie. I wanted slept on the ...
Teacher: I wanted to sleep.
Student 1: Yeah. I wanted to sleep in the tent (5).
Student 2: I was eating from my sack (6).
Student 3: Suddenly, while eating from my sack, I saw a big snake (7).
Student 4: I stopped eating and throwed a phone (8).
Teacher: Yes. You threw the phone. What happened next?
Student 1: I started crying (9).
Teacher: That's it. Good!

Transcript 3 The students' story built on the basis of nine pictures from "Story Cubes. Voyages"

The story was characterized by the highest level of spontaneity since the students' could see the pictures just before they started telling a story and there was no order according to which they were expected to build their narrative (see Gąsior, 2018). Therefore, similarly to Transcript 2, the storytellers made a number of mistakes which mainly concerned the provision of present forms of the verbs instead of their past counterparts.

3.4.2.2. Four short questionnaires

The learners' responses reflected a steady trend (see Table 4). It can be observed that the students enthusiastically welcomed the idea of picture-based game-like storytelling introduced with an intention of practicing their ability to speak in English. To sum up, the data obtained from the short questionnaires I-III, pertaining to the students' answers, were summarized in Table 4.

Since some of the questions in short questionnaire IV could not be compiled in the table, they are discussed separately. The participants' answers to the last short questionnaire revealed that six subjects did not report any influence of "Story

Cubes" on their attitude to speaking which had been and still was positive. Only one student defined his or her approach to speaking English as negative both before and after the four lessons. However, five students changed their opinion from negative to positive after playing "Story Cubes" games twice (see Table 4).

Table 4 The number of the students' responses to questions from short questionnaires I, II and III ($N = 12$)

Number of question			Number of the students' responses							
Short questionnaire I	1	Did Lesson One help you understand what a *story* and *storytelling* are?	Definitely no		Rather no		Rather yes		Definitely yes	
			1		1		6		4	
	2	Did the tasks help you understand the structure of a story?	-		1		6		5	
	3	How would you assess "One word at a time" game in the context of practicing speaking??	1	2		3		4		5[14]
			-	1		2		7		1
Short questionnaire II	1	How useful was Lesson Two in developing EFL speaking?	1	2		3		4		5
			-	1		2		4		5
	3	How would you assess "One word at a sentence" game in the context of practicing speaking?	-	0		2		7		3
	2	Did the visuals assist you in EFL speaking?	Definitely no		Rather no		Rather yes		Definitely yes	
			-		2		7		3	
Short questionnaire III	1	How would you assess Lesson Three in the context of practicing speaking?	1	2		3		4		5
			-	-		2		5		5
	2	Did the warm-up activity prove to be useful in speaking during the lesson?	Definitely no		Rather no		Rather yes		Definitely yes	
			-		-		7		5	
	3	Were the hints prepared by the teacher of any help for you while playing "Story Cubes"?	-		1		6		5	
	4	Can "Story Cubes" game be used as a technique for practicing EFL speaking in the classroom?	-		1		6		5	

Table 5 The students' attitude to speaking English after playing "Story Cubes" ($N = 12$)

Type of response	*Number of responses*
My attitude towards speaking English is the same. It is still positive.	6
My attitude towards speaking English is the same. It is still negative.	1
My attitude towards speaking English has changed from negative to positive.	5
My attitude towards speaking English has changed from positive to negative.	-

The students were also asked to evaluate the influence of the features of the game, that is competition, pictures, constant assessment, grammatical correctness, time pressure and group work, on their EFL speaking. As seen in Figure 4, group work ($N = 9$) proved helpful for the students, so did the pictures ($N = 8$)

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[14] 1 – not useful; 5 – very useful

as well as the peer and teacher assessment (N = 8). However, what was assessed by the students as the least favorable condition was the time pressure (N = 4).
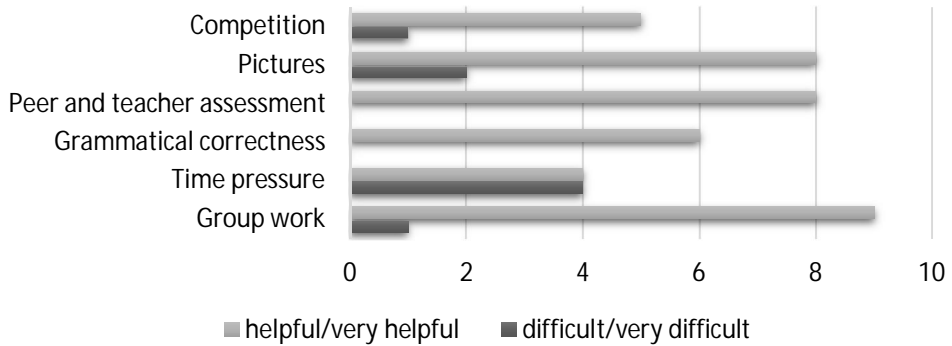

Figure 4 The influence of "Story Cubes" games-related factors on playing the game as reported by the students (N = 12)

3.4.3. The post-study

Having participated in the study, the Polish students' self-perception of their difficulties in speaking English was subject to change, as observed in Figure 5, with six and two affirmative responses to question "Do you have problems with speaking English?" reported in the pre- and post-study questionnaire respectively.
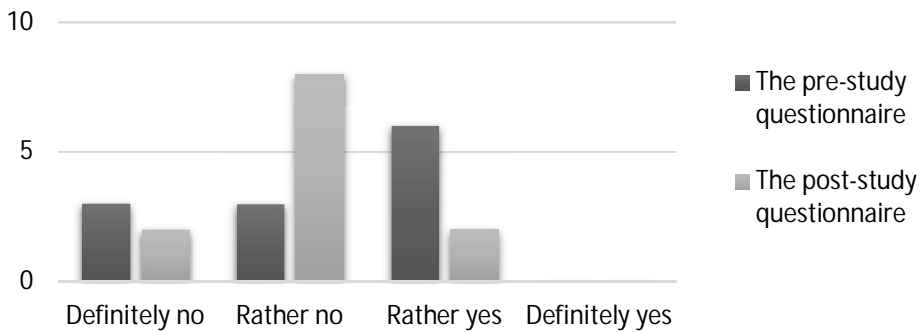

Figure 5 The students' perception of their difficulties in EFL: Comparison of the results of the pre-study and the post-study (N = 12)

To investigate whether the storytelling-based activities positively affected the students' self-assessment of their productive oral performance, the participants re-evaluated their EFL speaking, using the school grades again. The findings

indicated that there were more positive grades after than before the study. There were nine students who selected grades 4 and 5, while the number of participants judging their oral performance as 3 diminished (five students in the pre- versus two in the post-study). Furthermore, none of the students assessed his or her speaking as 2 (see Figure 6).
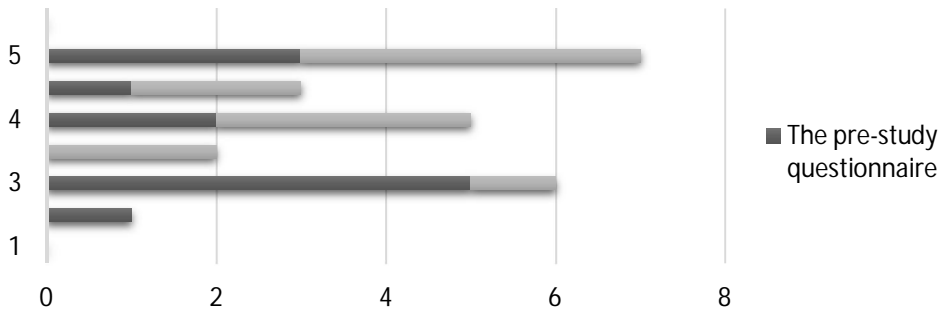

Figure 6 The subjects' self-assessment of their EFL: Comparison of the results of the pre-study and the post-study (*N* = 12)

On being asked what their most preferable learning-to-speak techniques were, the participants chose picture descriptions (*N* = 10), games (*N* = 9), storytelling (*N* = 9) and the speaking task in which they talked about their experiences (*N* = 9). All of the above-mentioned activities were used in the study.

Next, the students assessed "Story Cubes" game with regard to its features that they found appealing and discouraging. Their answers showed that entertainment (*N* = 10) and the presence of other players (*N* = 8) made the games an attractive speaking task. The students opined, however, that the competitive aspect (*N* = 3) of playing games as well as the suspense (*N* = 1) were the least compelling reasons for playing "Story Cubes."
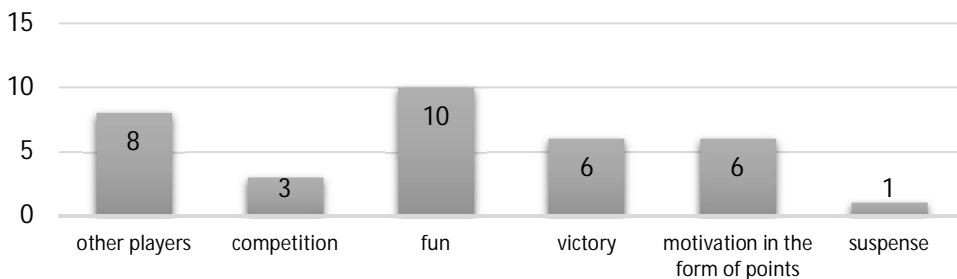

Figure 7 The reasons for the students' willingness to play "Story Cubes" (*N* = 12)

Most importantly, the students were asked if storytelling-based games could be used in the classroom with a view to practicing EFL speaking. The vast majority of the students ($N = 10$) were in favor of this technique, pointing to the acquisition of new vocabulary, the necessity to speak in English, the entertainment and fun accompanying the games, cooperation and interaction with other group-mates. Others asserted that playing "Story Cubes" games offered a more effective and satisfactory alternative to a course book, whereas some stated that telling stories on the basis of pictures was simply interesting to them.

4. Discussion and implications

Having taken into consideration the EFL learners' frequent discouragement to-wards speaking,[15] we believe that the results of the study seemed particularly promising. The data produced a concrete proof, 12 recordings of the students' stories, that storytelling games pushed the subjects into producing oral language. The findings highlighted the attractiveness of storytelling games, as reported by the 12 participants who found it an ideal replacement for course book-based work. The analysis of the questionnaires filled in by the students after the four lessons pointed to the fact that most of the students liked the storytelling games and would like to use them more often in the English classroom (RQ1).

The games introduced to the participants of the action research study also changed their beliefs about EFL speaking. The results of the four-lesson action research study confirmed the findings of the previous research into storytelling- and game-oriented EFL speaking practice. They indicated its effectiveness in provoking positive emotions among a group of Polish secondary school students (RQ2), corroborating the ideas of Bettiol (2001), Leon and Cely (2010), Dewi et al. (2017), Fung and Ming (2016), Girardelli (2017), and Gozcu and Caganaga (2016). Even though the students' answers to the short questionnaire IV showed that six respondents retained their positive attitudes to speaking English, it was five respondents whose approach changed from negative to positive having played "Story Cubes." Furthermore, having been involved in a storytelling- and game-based instruction, the speakers were less critical of their ability to speak the TL. While six subjects assessed their EFL speaking 4 and 5 in the pre-study, their number grew to nine in the post-study.

The analysis of the selected transcripts and the subjects' answers given by them to the questionnaires proved that the Polish speakers were not aware of what

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[15] Researchers generally agree on the emotional and stressful character of FL speaking (Bailey, 2003; Goh & Burns, 2012), which often leads to language anxiety (Khan & Khattak, 2011; Nerlicki, 2011; Pawlak, 2011; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2011).

constitutes the most serious problems with their EFL speaking. The emphasis placed on their speech production led to the conflict between what the students believed to be a significant prerequisite for speaking English, lexical knowledge, and an actual challenge that they faced, grammatical knowledge, as reflected in their answers provided to the pre-study questionnaire and compared with the transcripts of their stories. Playing the games revealed that their actual problem with EFL speaking was the knowledge of grammar, and, therefore, encouraged them to pay more attention to revising grammatical structures. Time pressure, which was, just as grammar, evaluated insignificant by the majority of the participants, negatively affected the accuracy of the students' stories (see Transcripts 1, 2 and 3) which, in most of the cases, were ridden with the incorrectly inflected verbs (RQ3).

The action research study had limitations. The first of them was its length. Since the study concerned a group of Polish learners who participated in as few as four lessons devoted to picture-based storytelling games, EFL speaking practice was far from sufficient. The second of them was the sample. There were only 12 Polish learners who participated in the study, therefore such a number was far from adequate, preventing the author from calculating the statistical significance of their answers reported in the pre- and post-study. The third of them concerned "Story Cubes" games. Since the number of the sets of the games determined the number of groups, if more sets had been introduced, the number of the students in each team would have lowered to three (alternatively, storytelling could have been based on pair-work), providing the students with even more opportunities to speak English and the current author with more data to analyze.

Taking into account the design of the action research study, its limitations and the participants' answers provided to the questionnaires, we are certain that the research into storytelling- and game-oriented speaking practice should be pursued in Polish EFL instructed settings. Even though the action research study in question was highly preliminary, its findings revealed that storytelling games seemed to perfectly satisfy the linguistic and non-linguistic needs of 12 Polish EFL students, who were preparing to pass their oral Matura exam, in the secondary school instructed speaking practice. Therefore, the future area of investigation could target a series of two 45-minute sessions per week that would be devoted to storytelling- and game-based speaking practice lasting one school term and conducted with more numerous groups of secondary school students, for whom the ability to spontaneously produce grammatically and lexically correct spoken language is a must-have skill.

5. Conclusion

Since our aim was to present storytelling-based game-like tasks as an alternative technique in teaching speaking to secondary school students in Poland, we addressed a

number of issues in favor of their use in Polish EFL classrooms. Theoretical and empirical considerations that we referred to in the present paper unanimously pointed to the utility of telling stories and playing games in enhancing learners' linguistic competence as well as ensuring their emotional well-being during EFL production and reception.

It is, however, worth realizing here that playing games by the students during EFL classes has not escaped criticism. One of the most frequent accusations has questioned the educational role of games in the learning and teaching process, as a result of which they have been often mistakenly equated with leisure pursuits. Teachers themselves have not always been enthusiastic about using games during their lessons. The choice of a game-like activity to be introduced into a FL classroom is problematic since "games do not automatically qualify as suitable learning materials" (Meij, Albers, & Leemkuil, 2011, p. 656) and, therefore, following Siek-Piskozub (1995), their introduction into EFL instructed settings may increase teachers' labor intensity. Furthermore, games may lead to students' undesirable behaviors (Cervantes, 2009). Some of them, especially the ones which involve elimination of participants are not appropriate for whole-class or group-based work (Siek-Piskozub, 1994, 1995). Other game-like tasks, which require some acting skills, may discourage most shy students' from playing them. Even though competition motivates learners, it negatively affects their interaction, leading to conflicts, cheating or hostility (Siek-Piskozub, 1995).

Certainly the above-mentioned obstacles to using games in EFL classrooms should not be treated as arguments against using them, but rather as areas which still need improvement. With more research into ludic techniques and their conscious implementation into classroom settings, laypeople's awareness about the beneficial influence of storytelling games on FL learners' communicative competence and emotions towards the TL might be increased. Only then can the vicious cycle, under the influence of which negative emotions towards English prevent the students from speaking and learning, be broken with the support of game-like tasks. Since the oral part of the Matura in English requires the students' immediate, accurate and fluent responses to warm-up questions and three speaking tasks, –similarly to the majority of tasks introduced in the study, which the subjects hardly had any time to prepare for –the storytelling games implemented into the study should be particularly instructive in practicing spontaneous production of spoken language, offering both a practical and attractive alternative to EFL instructors.

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