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Integrating the Four Strands, Narrative Pedagogy, and AI Tools in Culturally Responsive EFL Speaking Instruction: A Classroom Observation Study

Aldha Williyan [1]
Nur Ifadloh [2]
Elisa Rosiana [3]
Raudhatul Haura [4]
Zahra Nufus [5]

[1] Universitas Siliwangi, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia;
[2] Corresponding author, STAI Rasyidiyah Khalidiyah (Rakha) Amuntai, Indonesia;
nurifadloh@gmail.com
[3] Akademi Maritim Nusantara Banjarmasin, Indonesia;
[4] Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al Banjari, Indonesia ;
[5] STAI Rasyidiyah Khalidiyah (Rakha) Amuntai, Indonesia.

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Abstract

This study investigates how Newton and Nation's Four Strands framework can be enacted in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking instruction through the integration of narrative pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Adopting a qualitative single-case study design, the research examined one undergraduate EFL speaking class taught by one teacher at a university in West Java, Indonesia. The case comprised 25 undergraduate students with CEFR B1 English proficiency and was bounded by a four-session instructional unit, with each session focusing on one strand of the Four Strands framework: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. Data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students chosen at random, subsequently analyzed employing a combined deductive and inductive thematic methodology. The findings demonstrate that the Four Strands were implemented through Sundanese folktales, explicit narrative instruction, scaffolded oral retellings, and storytelling presentations. Observations indicate that teachers transitioned from merely delivering content to adopting roles as facilitators and coaches, whereas students progressed from passive recipients to active participants and engaged in reflective storytelling. AI tools, including ChatGPT, ElevenLabs, Mentimeter, Yoodli, and Padlet, supported multimodal input, individualized feedback, and collaborative reflection throughout the instructional process. Interview data revealed that students perceived culturally familiar

narratives and AI-supported learning as enhancing engagement, confidence, cultural connectedness, and speaking practice. This study demonstrates how narrative pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and AI tools can be integrated into the Four Strands framework to enhance EFL speaking development within a particular classroom context, rather than assessing instructional effectiveness.

Keywords: Four Strands, culturally responsive pedagogy, narrative pedagogy, AI in EFL, speaking instruction

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1. Introduction

Speaking is generally regarded as one of the most difficult skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially regarding fluency, confidence, and expressing oneself meaningfully. Frequently, language instruction centers predominantly on accuracy or mechanical drills, which may limit students' opportunities to employ language authentically for communication (Crowther & Loewen, 2025; Nandagopal & Philip, 2023). Recent research highlights the importance of using balanced teaching strategies that address not just language form but also meaning, fluency, and student engagement (Al-wossabi, 2023). Within this discourse, Newton and Nation's (2021) The Four Strands framework has emerged as a significant model, underscoring the necessity to systematically incorporate meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development.

Simultaneously, narrative pedagogy offers significant opportunities to enhance oral instruction. Storytelling, a ubiquitous modality of human communication, assists learners in organizing their ideas, engaging audiences, and fostering comprehension. Fisher (1989) argues that Narrative serves as a fundamental method for comprehending the world, particularly within the EFL context, where it aids learners in structuring their discourse and articulating their voices. When storytelling is grounded in students' cultural traditions, it aligns with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018), which emphasizes the validation of learners' identities, values, and community knowledge in the classroom. For students in Indonesia, drawing upon local folktales not only enriches language learning but also affirms cultural identity in global communication.

In parallel, the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has begun to transform the landscape of language learning. Tools such as ChatGPT for content generation (Quintans-Júnior et al., 2023), ElevenLabs for voice narration (Mogali et al., 2024), Yoodli AI for speech feedback (Dennis, 2024), and collaborative platforms like Padlet and Mentimeter have shown potential to augment instruction in innovative ways (Deshmukh et al., 2025; Rybin Koob et al., 2022). AI can provide personalized, real-time feedback, generate authentic and engaging materials, and facilitate multimodal learning experiences. However, the integration

of AI in EFL speaking instruction remains underexplored (Wang et al., 2025), particularly in relation to established pedagogical frameworks and culturally responsive practices.

Against this backdrop, there is a pressing need to investigate how the Four Strands framework, narrative pedagogy, and AI tools can be integrated to support culturally responsive EFL speaking instruction. While each of these elements has been studied independently, few studies have attempted to bring them together in a coherent pedagogical design. This study addresses this gap by observing how one EFL teacher implemented a four-week unit where each strand was foregrounded in turn, integrating storytelling, local cultural content, and AI-mediated tools to enhance student engagement and performance.

The present study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) How were the Four Strands implemented in a culturally responsive EFL classroom with AI support? (2) What roles did the teacher, students, and digital tools play in each strand? (3) How did students respond to this instructional design? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to growing conversations on how technology-enhanced, culturally grounded pedagogy can foster more confident, fluent, and meaningful speaking performances among EFL learners.

1.1. Theoretical framework

1.1.1. Newton and Nation's Four Strands framework for balanced language learning

Newton and Nation's (2021) Four Strands framework proposes that effective language instruction should maintain a balanced distribution of learning opportunities across four complementary strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Instead of functioning as isolated components, the four strands operate synergistically to foster the development of receptive and productive language skills, while simultaneously balancing communicative competence with explicit language knowledge.

The initial strand, which centers on meaning-focused input, underscores language acquisition through listening and reading activities, whereby learners predominantly concentrate on comprehending meaningful messages rather than analyzing linguistic structures. To support acquisition, learners should be provided with ample comprehensible input that contains only a minimal proportion of unfamiliar language (Yeo & Newton, 2025). Activities such as extensive listening, reading for enjoyment, and engagement with authentic materials foster incidental vocabulary and grammar acquisition while also enhancing motivation and enjoyment (Yoshinobu et al., 2023). As newly acquired language knowledge remains delicate, repeated exposure to similar input is crucial for ensuring long-term retention.

The second strand, meaning-focused output, concentrates on learning through speaking and writing. Producing language prompts learners to articulate meaningful ideas, identify gaps in their linguistic knowledge, test hypotheses regarding language use, and engage in metalinguistic reflection during communication (Huong Lan, 2024). Tasks such as discussions, presentations, role plays, and writing activities thus complement input by converting receptive knowledge into productive competence.

The third strand, language-focused learning, offers deliberate emphasis on linguistic forms, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse features, and learning strategies.

Through explicit instruction, corrective feedback, and focused practice, learners acquire the conscious knowledge necessary to enhance communicative performance (Yeo & Newton, 2025). It is recommended that this strand constitute approximately twenty-five percent of instructional time, thereby ensuring that explicit learning complements rather than overwhelms communicative language use.

The fourth strand, fluency development, aims to enhance learners' speed, ease, and confidence in using language they are already familiar with. Unlike language-focused learning, fluency development prioritizes meaning over form and necessitates repeated practice with familiar language in environments that promote quicker, more fluid communication (Newton & Nation, 2021). Activities such as repeated speaking, repeated listening, and timed performance assessments facilitate learners in consolidating previously acquired knowledge into more automatic language use.

A central principle of the Four Strands framework is that each strand should receive approximately 25% of instructional time, thereby establishing a balanced language program that integrates communication, explicit learning, and fluency development (Newton & Nation, 2021). Instead of perceiving these strands as separate instructional phases, the framework advocates for teachers to reinforce similar content across strands, enabling learners to encounter language repetitively from various perspectives. Such repetition enhances retention and facilitates the progression of learners from comprehension to production, explicit understanding, and fluent application. Consequently, the Four Strands framework offers a versatile pedagogical foundation that can be adapted to diverse instructional settings while preserving an effective equilibrium between meaning-focused communication and targeted language acquisition.

1.1.2. Gay's culturally responsive teaching framework

Gay's (2018) Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) framework positions learners' cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and language practices as valuable resources for teaching and learning. Rather than viewing culture as peripheral to instruction, CRT recognizes it as fundamental to how learners think, communicate, and construct meaning, making culturally neutral teaching neither possible nor desirable (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Consequently, effective instruction connects academic content with students' home and community experiences, validating their cultural identities while making learning more relevant and meaningful (Halliday, 2024). A central principle of CRT is that culture should be embedded throughout the learning process, including curriculum content, classroom interaction, instructional strategies, assessment, and the overall learning environment (Gupta et al., 2024). Such integration extends beyond improving academic achievement to fostering learners' sense of belonging, cultural pride, and active participation in the classroom (Koo et al., 2024). By drawing on familiar cultural references and encouraging meaningful participation, CRT creates learning environments where students are more willing to engage, communicate, and connect new knowledge with their existing experiences.

CRT also emphasizes the teacher's role as a cultural mediator who designs learning experiences aligned with students' cultural frames of reference (Parkhouse et al., 2023). Teachers demonstrate culturally responsive care by maintaining high expectations while

providing appropriate support that enables all learners to succeed. Through this process, CRT promotes equity, affirms learners' identities, and encourages confidence and agency alongside academic development (Flory et al., 2024). Overall, the framework advocates for the systematic integration of learners' cultural experiences into every aspect of instruction so that culture becomes both the context and the resource for learning. This perspective provides a valuable foundation for the present study, where local folktales serve not only as instructional materials but also as culturally meaningful resources that support English speaking development while strengthening learners' cultural identities.

1.1.3. Fisher's narrative paradigm

Fisher's (1989) Narrative Paradigm conceptualizes storytelling as the fundamental mode of human communication, arguing that people naturally make sense of the world through stories rather than through abstract logic alone. From this perspective, communication is understood as a process of constructing and interpreting narratives shaped by culture, history, and lived experience. Consequently, storytelling functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a process through which individuals create meaning and establish connections with others. A central concept within the narrative paradigm is narrative rationality, which explicates how individuals evaluate stories according to two complementary criteria: coherence and fidelity. Coherence pertains to the internal consistency and organization of a story, while fidelity concerns the extent to which the story resonates with audiences' experiences, values, and beliefs (Fisher, 1989). Instead of relying solely on formal argumentation, narratives become persuasive because they are meaningful, credible, and personally relevant (Flowerree, 2023). As a consequence, audiences actively interpret stories, drawing upon their own cultural and social backgrounds to construct understanding.

Within educational contexts, the narrative paradigm emphasizes storytelling as a significant pedagogical resource for structuring ideas, conveying experiences, and actively engaging learners in genuine meaning-making. Stories offer meaningful contexts where language, culture, and personal experience converge, thereby enabling learners to enhance their communicative competence while expressing their identities. As OBJ argue, narrative functions as a universal mode of human communication that fosters both understanding and participation across various contexts. For the current study, Fisher's (1989) narrative paradigm underpins the theoretical foundation for utilizing local folktales as the primary learning medium. Consequently, storytelling is regarded not solely as instructional content but also as a communicative practice through which learners construct meaning, interact with culturally familiar experiences, and develop English speaking skills in authentic and personally significant manners.

1.1.4. Previous studies and research novelty

Previous research has independently demonstrated the value of the theoretical components adopted in this study. Studies applying Newton and Nation's (2021) Four Strands framework have shown its effectiveness across diverse language-learning contexts. For example, Yeo and Newton (2025) highlighted its contribution to balancing content and language learning in CLIL classrooms, while Huong Lan (2024) and Razman et al. (2022) reported positive outcomes for vocabulary learning in legal English and Arabic instruction, respectively. Although these

studies confirm the flexibility of the Four Strands framework, its application has primarily emphasized vocabulary or content learning rather than culturally responsive speaking instruction. Similarly, research on narrative pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has consistently highlighted their educational benefits. Narrative pedagogy has been shown to promote meaningful learning by connecting learners' experiences with instructional content Dvir (2024), whereas CRT enhances learner engagement, intercultural competence, participation, and identity affirmation in language classrooms (Idrus et al., 2023; Lau & Shea, 2024; Liao & Li, 2023; Matiso, 2024; Yoon, 2023). Despite these contributions, existing studies have predominantly investigated narrative pedagogy and CRT as separate methodologies rather than synthesizing them within a cohesive language-learning framework.

Research on AI-mediated language learning has also documented considerable advantages for speaking instruction. AI technologies have been found to improve speaking fluency, pronunciation, willingness to communicate, self-regulation, learner engagement, and feedback quality (Fathi et al., 2024; Liu & Wang, 2024; Madhavi et al., 2023; Qiao & Zhao, 2023; Yeh, 2025; Zou et al., 2023). Nevertheless, artificial intelligence is often regarded as the primary innovation, with comparatively limited attention paid to its potential role in supporting established pedagogical frameworks or culturally grounded instructional practices. Collectively, these studies expose a significant research gap. Although the Four Strands framework, culturally responsive teaching, narrative pedagogy, and AI-enhanced language learning have each demonstrated considerable promise, they have predominantly been explored independently. Limited research exists on how these complementary approaches can be integrated into a coherent pedagogical model for EFL speaking instruction that simultaneously fosters communicative competence, cultural identity, and the meaningful application of technology.

Accordingly, the present study contributes to the literature by integrating the Four Strands framework, culturally responsive teaching, narrative pedagogy, and AI tools into a unified instructional design for EFL speaking. Unlike previous studies that primarily applied the Four Strands to vocabulary or content learning, this study operationalizes the framework to develop speaking performance through culturally familiar storytelling. It further demonstrates how local folktales can function as meaningful communicative resources while AI serves as a pedagogical support for multimodal input, individualized feedback, and collaborative reflection rather than as an end in itself. By positioning AI within an established pedagogical framework, this study offers a replicable model for designing culturally grounded, technology-enhanced speaking instruction in EFL classrooms.

2. Method

2.1. Design

This study adopted a qualitative single-case study design, with classroom observation serving as the primary method of data collection. Similar to Rababah (2022), the study sought to examine how Newton and Nation's (2021) Four Strands framework, narrative pedagogy, and AI tools were enacted within a culturally responsive EFL speaking classroom rather than to evaluate their effectiveness. The case was bounded by one teacher, one undergraduate EFL speaking class, and a four-session instructional unit, with each weekly session focusing on one

strand of the Four Strands framework: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. These clearly defined boundaries facilitated a comprehensive analysis of the instructional design, the pedagogical practices employed by the teacher, and the students' learning experiences, as the four theoretical components were incorporated into classroom practice. Accordingly, the study aims to demonstrate how the integrated instructional design functioned within this particular context, rather than to draw broad conclusions regarding its overall efficacy.

2.2. Context

The study was conducted in an undergraduate EFL speaking class at a university in West Java, Indonesia. The case comprised one teacher and 25 undergraduate students enrolled in the course. The students were identified as having intermediate English proficiency, as determined by CEFR B1 classification. This proficiency level was deemed appropriate due to students possessing adequate linguistic competence to engage in extended speaking activities, while still benefiting from instructional scaffolding. Furthermore, the participants also demonstrated cultural familiarity with local Sundanese folktales, including Sangkuriang, Si Kabayan, and Lutung Kasarung. This shared cultural background offered a suitable context for examining the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in EFL speaking instruction. To facilitate this instructional approach, the instructor designed a four-session learning module that incorporated local storytelling, Newton and Nation's (2021) Four Strands framework, and AI-supported learning activities to scaffold students' spoken language development.

2.3. Instruments

Two primary instruments were employed to collect data in this study: a structured classroom observation protocol and semi-structured student interviews. The classroom observations were conducted across four instructional sessions, each corresponding to one strand of Newton and Nation's (2021) Four Strands framework: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. A structured classroom observation protocol guided data collection throughout the four sessions. The protocol consisted of four predetermined observation categories: (1) lesson focus and learning activities, documenting how each instructional strand was implemented; (2) teacher roles, capturing the teacher's pedagogical actions and facilitation strategies; (3) student roles, documenting learners' participation, interaction, and engagement throughout the instructional process; and (4) digital tools employed, recording how AI technologies supported classroom learning activities (Collins et al., 2024). Using these predefined categories consistently across all observations enabled systematic documentation and comparison of instructional practices throughout the four-session instructional unit. During each observation, the researcher recorded detailed field notes describing classroom activities, teacher-student interactions, student participation, and the integration of AI-supported learning tools. The field notes were expanded immediately after each classroom session to capture contextual details and researcher reflections. Throughout the analysis, the observation records were reviewed repeatedly alongside the interview data to support consistent interpretation of classroom events and strengthen the credibility of the findings. Following the completion of the four instructional sessions, semi-structured student interviews were conducted with randomly selected students to explore their experiences of the

integrated instructional design (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). The interviews focused on students' perceptions of the Four Strands learning sequence, the use of local folktales, narrative-based speaking activities, and AI-supported learning. These interview data complemented the classroom observations by providing learners' perspectives on how the instructional design influenced their engagement and speaking development.

2.4. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using a hybrid thematic analysis that combined deductive and inductive coding (Naeem et al., 2023). The analysis began with four predetermined categories derived from Newton and Nation's (2021) Four Strands framework: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. These initial categories provided the coding framework for organizing classroom observation data and analyzing how each instructional component was implemented during the four-session unit. Within each component, observation notes and student interview transcripts were inductively coded to uncover recurring patterns related to teaching practices, roles of teachers and students, the use of local folktales, and AI tool integration. These codes were then synthesized into broader themes that explained the practical functioning of the instructional design and students' learning experiences. To enhance credibility, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the observation and interview data throughout the coding process to ensure consistent theme development. These data were compared for convergence and divergence, allowing methodological triangulation and offering a deeper insight into how the integrated instructional design was executed.

2.5. Researcher reflexivity

The researcher acted as a non-participant observer in the classroom throughout the study and was not involved in delivering instruction. Acknowledging that qualitative interpretation can be affected by the researcher's perspectives and prior knowledge, reflexive notes were diligently maintained during data collection and analysis to document methodological decisions and emerging interpretations. The findings were derived through ongoing comparisons between observation records and student interview data, thereby ensuring that interpretations remained rooted in participants' accounts rather than the researcher's assumptions.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Implementation of the Four Strands with cultural and AI integration

This study implemented the Four Strands over four weeks, sequencing each strand (meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development) with dedicated focus, as shown in Table 1. Notably, the design viewed the strands not as separate elements but as interconnected stages within a progressive learning cycle (Huong Lan, 2024). Each strand was constructed upon the preceding one, thereby facilitating students' progression from culturally familiar comprehension exercises to structured analytical tasks, followed by practical application and ultimately, confident performance. The incorporation of narrative pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching principles guaranteed that the Four Strands were not only theoretically harmonized but also provided experiential significance for learners.

Table 1. Implementation of the Four Strands

Week / Strand	**Focus & Activities**	**Cultural/Narrative Integration**	**AI/Digital Tools**
Meaning-Focused Input	Exploring folktales through narrated slides; class discussions on cultural values	Sundanese folktales as authentic, resonant material	ChatGPT, ElevenLabs, Mentimeter
Language-Focused Learning	Analyzing narrative structures (Hook → Problem → Resolution → Moral) and language	Focus on cultural storytelling discourse markers	ChatGPT
Meaning-Focused Output	Oral retelling of chosen folktales; peer and teacher feedback	Personalized retelling of culturally familiar stories	Yoodli AI, Padlet
Fluency Development	Final storytelling presentations; reflection on feedback and improvement	Sharing cultural knowledge in public presentation style	Padlet

In the meaning-focused input strand, students engaged with Sundanese folktales such as *Sangkuriang* and *Si Kabayan*. These narratives, delivered via AI-generated slides (ChatGPT) and accompanied by expressive audio narration (ElevenLabs), offered comprehensive linguistic input integrated within a familiar cultural framework. Through engaging with language in meaningful, multimodal formats, students were not merely exposed to vocabulary, discourse markers, and intonation patterns, but also encouraged to contemplate values and morals derived from their cultural heritage (Nash et al., 2024). The utilization of Mentimeter to facilitate the sharing of reflections further transformed the input into an interactive process, thereby enabling students to observe how their peers linked the narratives to personal experiences. This phase exemplified how culturally resonant input can augment motivation and emotional engagement in language acquisition.

The language-focused learning strand complemented this by explicitly unpacking the linguistic and structural features of storytelling. Here, the teacher introduced the storytelling framework (Hook → Problem → Resolution → Moral) and highlighted narrative devices such as sequencing phrases, signposting, and emotional language. ChatGPT-generated sample texts served as scaffolds, enabling students to analyze how language choices shape clarity and audience engagement (Williyan et al., 2024). The incorporation of this strand addressed a prevalent limitation in speaking pedagogy, specifically, the lack of explicit instruction on form, while ensuring that cultural narratives continued to play a central role (Yeo & Newton, 2025). Students learned not only *what* to say but *how* to structure and deliver their stories effectively in English.

The meaning-focused output strand shifted the focus to student production (Newton & Nation, 2021). Learners worked in pairs and groups to orally retell chosen folktales, applying the structures and techniques they had analyzed. The teacher facilitated this process by providing a peer feedback rubric and offering formative comments. Importantly, AI played a critical role in this phase: students recorded their retellings and uploaded them to Yoodli AI, which generated individualized feedback on pacing, filler words, and fluency markers. By combining cultural content with immediate, AI-driven feedback, students were able to refine their delivery outside of class before bringing their recordings into a shared Padlet space for peer and teacher reflection. This iterative cycle demonstrated how output, feedback, and reflection can be powerfully reinforced when pedagogy, culture, and technology intersect.

Finally, the fluency development strand culminated in students delivering final presentations of their chosen folktales. Building on teacher comments from Padlet and their own practice, students rehearsed and refined their delivery. Classroom observation notes suggested that many students appeared more confident and expressive during the final presentations than during their earlier storytelling activities, although these observations were based on qualitative classroom evidence rather than formal performance measurement (Rath, 2025). The teacher's role at this stage was less directive and more supportive, allowing students to take ownership of their performances. This culminating task highlighted how fluency development, as stated by Li and Zhang (2023), is not merely a matter of repetition but the outcome of a scaffolded process in which cultural narratives, structured analysis, meaningful practice, and multimodal feedback converge.

The implementation of the Four Strands in this study illustrates how a theoretically principled framework can be enriched through narrative pedagogy, cultural responsiveness, and AI integration. The strands provided the structural backbone (Yeo & Newton, 2025), narrative pedagogy offered a meaningful context (LeBlanc, 2024), culturally responsive teaching anchored learning in identity and heritage (Rahmawati et al., 2023), and AI tools added precision, personalization, and interactivity (Fitriati & Williyan, 2025). Instead of functioning independently, these components interacted synergistically to create a comprehensive learning environment, enabling students to perceive English not merely as a foreign language but also as a conduit for asserting and sharing their cultural identities.

3.2. Roles of teacher, students, and digital tools

The observation data show that roles in the classroom were dynamic and tightly coupled with the instructional focus of each strand: the teacher's position shifted along a continuum from knowledge-provider to facilitator to coach, students' participation moved from receptive engagement to active production and peer assessment, and digital tools took on differentiated functions as content generators, multimodal models, feedback engines, and collaborative repositories, as seen in Table 2. Importantly, these role shifts were not just procedural; they reshaped classroom interactions, redistributed authority, and created new opportunities for learner agency and reflection.

Table 2. Roles of teacher, students, and digital tools

Strand	Teacher Role	Student Role	Digital Tools
Meaning-Focused Input	Introduce theme, present narrated folktales, guide discussion	Listen, reflect, and share cultural insights	ChatGPT, ElevenLabs, Mentimeter
Language-Focused Learning	Teach storytelling structure and features	Analyze texts in pairs, identify narrative elements	ChatGPT
Meaning-Focused Output	Guide oral practice, provide feedback	Retell folktales, give/receive peer feedback, upload recordings	Yoodli AI, Padlet
Fluency Development	Support rehearsal and delivery, review Padlet submissions	Deliver final presentations, reflect on feedback	Padlet

Across the meaning-focused input strand the teacher acted primarily as a curator and cultural mediator. Rather than simply presenting materials, the teacher introduced the unit theme, framed the cultural relevance of the Sundanese folktales, and orchestrated multimodal input (AI-generated slides from ChatGPT and expressive narration from ElevenLabs). In doing so the teacher performed two linked pedagogical tasks, as presented by Cherbow and McNeill (2022): (1) curating AI-produced content to ensure cultural authenticity and linguistic appropriateness, and (2) scaffolding student sense-making by prompting reflective questions through Mentimeter. This curatorial role was central because AI outputs required contextualization. Teachers selected, adapted, and framed what the students saw and heard so the folktales functioned as meaningful linguistic input rather than neutral texts (Wiysahnyuy & Valentine, 2023). The teacher's mediation therefore preserved cultural fidelity and modeled how language and culture interlock in storytelling.

During the language-focused learning strand the teacher's role became more explicitly instructional (Daly et al., 2023). Observation notes show the teacher taught the Hook–Problem–Resolution–Moral framework, modeled discourse markers and signposting, and used ChatGPT examples to demonstrate how wording choices influence clarity and audience impact. Here the teacher's expertise in form was necessary to translate students' culturally grounded understanding into analyzable language features students could reuse. The teacher also acted as an interpretive guide (Hopewell et al., 2022), pointing out where AI-generated samples were pedagogically useful and where they required correction or adaptation, thus maintaining pedagogical control while leveraging AI as a resource.

In the meaning-focused output and fluency development strands the teacher shifted toward facilitation and coaching (Keller & Raemy, 2025). Rather than simply presenting content, teachers organize storytelling activities in pairs or groups, provide peer feedback rubrics, offer formative comments, and use Padlet to collect recordings and feedback from teachers. Equally important, teachers teach students how to use feedback from AI (Naz & Robertson, 2024): for example, guiding them to interpret Yoodli's automated reports on pacing and filler words and

to integrate those findings with peer and teacher comments. This instructional approach ensures that feedback from AI enhances human assessment rather than replacing it. The presence of teachers, particularly in providing culturally sensitive feedback on both content and form, remains a key factor in students' development.

Students' roles evolved in tandem with teacher shifts. In the input stage they were active listeners and cultural commentators: they engaged with narrated folktales and used Mentimeter to surface personal reflections, connecting the stories to lived experience. During language-focused learning they assumed analytical roles, working in pairs to identify narrative structure, discourse markers, and rhetorical devices, and critically comparing these features in ChatGPT-generated samples. Moving into output, students became producers and reflective apprentices (Drajati et al., 2023): they orally retold folktales, used the peer feedback rubric, uploaded recordings to Yoodli, and consulted AI output alongside teacher comments to revise their performances. In the final stage they assumed performer and assessor roles, delivering presentations and providing peer feedback on Padlet (K. Li & Su, 2025). These progressive shifts suggest increasing learner agency. By the end of the instructional unit, many students were using AI feedback proactively to guide their practice and to self-monitor aspects of their fluency and expressiveness, as reflected in both classroom observations and interview responses.

Digital tools performed distinct but complementary pedagogical functions. ChatGPT primarily served as a content generator and model writer, producing story-adapted texts and sample scripts that students analyzed and adapted (Črček & Patekar, 2023). ElevenLabs functioned as a multimodal model, offering spoken renditions that exemplified prosody, rhythm, and emphasis for learners to imitate (Mogali et al., 2024). Mentimeter operated as a sociocognitive engagement tool, enabling every student to contribute reflections in real time and thus democratizing voice in whole-class discussion (Deshmukh et al., 2025; Rybin Koob et al., 2022). Yoodli provided automated, individualized fluency diagnostics (pauses, fillers, pacing) that students described as "non-judgmental" and thus motivating for repeated practice; observation notes indicate Yoodli reports nudged students to focus on concrete, measurable aspects of delivery (Dennis, 2024). Finally, Padlet served as a collective repository and reflective space, where recordings, AI outputs, peer comments, and teacher feedback converged (Rath, 2025), creating an iterative cycle of practice, evidence, and revision.

The interplay among teacher, students, and tools produced both affordances and tensions that are pedagogically meaningful. Affordances included: (a) scalability of practice (students could rehearse with AI outside class time), (b) multimodal modeling (ElevenLabs + ChatGPT provided consistent exemplars), and (c) transparent feedback cycles (Padlet aggregated multiple feedback sources). Tensions observed were instructive: teachers had to constantly evaluate AI outputs for cultural accuracy and appropriateness (e.g., adapting ChatGPT content to local sensibilities), students needed guidance to interpret sometimes-technical AI metrics, and there were occasional signs of over-reliance on automated feedback for affective features (nuance of emotion, cultural depth) that AI poorly captures. Observations also note practical constraints, connectivity and varying levels of digital literacy among students, that affected equitable participation in asynchronous AI practice.

The pedagogical significance was also evident in the manner in which the instructor utilized technology to redistribute cognitive load: by assigning repetitive fluency assessments to Yoodli, the teacher liberated classroom time for higher-order coaching, targeted feedback on cultural interpretation, rhetorical choices, and audience engagement. Nevertheless, the instructor remained the essential arbiter of meaning and cultural authenticity; AI outputs were valuable only to the extent that the instructor curated, critiqued, and contextualized them. Excerpts from student interviews support this: learners indicated that AI feedback fostered independent practice ("Yoodli helped me find my filler words"), yet they continued to appreciate teacher commentary for cultural nuance and rhetorical effectiveness. One student concisely reflected, "Telling a story I grew up with made me more confident to speak English," while another observed, "I never thought I could share something from my culture in English so clearly." These responses demonstrate that technology enhanced student voice but did not replace the teacher's cultural and pedagogical mediation.

The analysis of roles highlights a hybrid ecology in which human and machine contributions are complementary: AI supplies scalable, precise, and multimodal affordances while the teacher supplies cultural mediation, interpretive judgment, and ethical stewardship. For practice, this implies (a) the need for teacher professional development in AI literacy and curation, (b) explicit instruction for students in interpreting automated feedback, and (c) attention to digital equity and data-privacy considerations when adopting third-party platforms.

3.3. Student responses to the instructional design

The students' responses over the four weeks of the unit highlighted strong engagement with the instructional design, particularly the interplay between cultural content, narrative pedagogy, and AI-mediated feedback. Data from interviews and classroom observations indicate that students viewed the lessons as both familiar and new: familiar because they drew on well-known Sundanese folktales, and new because these stories were transformed into English-language performances with the support of AI tools. This duality fostered heightened motivation, a sense of cultural pride, and an inclination to experiment with speaking English in unprecedented ways.

The cultural dimension of the unit was consistently cited as a source of confidence and enjoyment. Students noted that using folktales they had grown up with allowed them to connect emotionally to the material, reducing the anxiety often associated with public speaking in English. One student reflected, *"Telling a story I grew up with made me more confident to speak English,"* suggesting that cultural familiarity lowered the cognitive and affective barriers to oral production. The integration of narrative pedagogy thus validated learners' cultural knowledge and identities, transforming them into assets rather than obstacles in EFL learning. This aligns with Gay's (2018) principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which stress that learners' cultural backgrounds should be leveraged as a foundation for engagement and achievement.

Students also responded positively to the role of AI in supporting practice and feedback. Many highlighted Yoodli as especially valuable, describing it as a safe, "non-judgmental" tool

that allowed them to practice repeatedly without fear of embarrassment. Automated feedback on pauses, pacing, and filler words provided concrete targets for improvement, which students could act on before receiving teacher or peer feedback. This iterative loop fostered a sense of learner autonomy: rather than waiting for the teacher's evaluation, students could self-monitor and adjust their delivery in real time. As one student explained, practicing with Yoodli helped them "speak more smoothly and with fewer 'uhs' and 'ums.'" Such comments illustrate how AI facilitated both fluency development and self-regulation, two key outcomes often difficult to achieve in limited classroom contact hours.

Beyond Yoodli, students appreciated how other digital tools amplified collaboration and reflection. Mentimeter allowed even quieter students to contribute personal reflections on folktales without the pressure of speaking in front of peers. Padlet, meanwhile, served as a collective portfolio where students could upload their recordings, read AI-generated feedback, and review teacher and peer comments. This multimodal space fostered peer learning: several students reported revising their own work after listening to classmates' retellings or reading their reflections. These interactions extended the classroom into an asynchronous, digital community, enhancing opportunities for feedback and social learning.

Importantly, many students reported feeling more fluent, expressive, and confident by the final presentations. Consistent with these perceptions, classroom observation notes suggested that several students appeared to speak with greater ease, more varied intonation, and increased expressiveness during the final storytelling activities than during their earlier oral retellings. Because these observations were derived from qualitative field notes rather than standardized speaking assessments, they should be interpreted as perceived and observed changes rather than objective measures of improvement. Students themselves attributed these perceived changes to the layered feedback process involving AI-generated feedback, peer comments, and teacher guidance, which enabled them to reflect on and refine successive versions of their performances. One learner noted, *"I never thought I could share something from my culture in English so clearly."* This highlights not only linguistic development but also identity affirmation: learners began to see themselves as capable of presenting their cultural heritage in English, a significant step toward communicative empowerment.

At the same time, the responses revealed several challenges and limitations. Some students reported initial difficulties in interpreting the AI-generated feedback, particularly the technical aspects of fluency metrics. Others expressed concerns about overreliance on automated tools and valued the cultural and linguistic insights of instructors as irreplaceable. These reflections highlight the importance of teacher mediation in helping students critically interpret AI feedback and apply it meaningfully.

Overall, student responses indicate that the instructional design successfully integrated the Four Elements with cultural authenticity and AI support in a way that enhanced engagement, confidence, and learning outcomes. Students not only acquired speaking skills; they also developed a greater sense of autonomy, using both cultural resources and digital tools to take ownership of their oral performances (Scanlon & Connolly, 2021). This combination of cultural grounding and AI-enhanced practice fostered not only measurable improvements in

fluency but also affective gains in motivation, identity affirmation, and confidence, critical dimensions of successful EFL speaking instruction.

4. Conclusion

This study examined how the Four Strands framework can be implemented in EFL speaking instruction when integrated with narrative pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and AI tools. The findings show that the strands worked as interconnected phases, enabling students to move from cultural comprehension to structured analysis, oral practice, and oral presentation. The teacher, students, and digital tools assumed evolving roles across this cycle: the teacher shifted from content provider to facilitator and coach, students progressed from receptive listeners to active producers, and AI tools served as generators of multimodal input, providers of individualized feedback, and platforms for collaboration. Together, these roles established a dynamic learning environment in which cultural narratives and digital technologies complemented each other. Student responses indicated that this instructional design facilitated positive learning experiences, particularly in enhancing confidence and engagement during speaking activities. Learners reported increased self-assurance, attributing their progress to the familiar cultural context of Sundanese folktales and the supportive feedback loop fostered through AI and peer interaction. Notably, the employment of local stories reinforced students' identities while enabling them to articulate their culture in English, thereby illustrating that culturally responsive pedagogy can be significantly enriched by technological integration rather than diminished by it. This study offers a representative instructional design that may inform similar English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts seeking to incorporate the Four Strands framework, culturally responsive pedagogy, narrative-based learning, and AI tools into speaking instruction.

This investigation encompasses several limitations. It was carried out within a solitary classroom, overseen by a single instructor at one university. The results were derived from classroom observations conducted by a lone observer and student interview data, which may be subject to researcher interpretation, as well as self-reporting and social desirability biases. Furthermore, the study did not include pre- and post-intervention assessments of speaking performance; consequently, the findings should be regarded as evidence of observed instructional practices and students' perceptions rather than definitive measurements of learning improvement. Future research could enhance the validity of the evidence by incorporating multiple classrooms, larger sample sizes, several observers, and objective evaluations of speaking proficiency.

Declaration of AI Assistance

This work is the sole intellectual contribution of the authors. AI assistance (ChatGPT) was used exclusively for language editing and stylistic refinement, without any influence on the conceptual content, analytical framework, or scholarly arguments presented herein.

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