



Storytelling and reading comprehension: a case study

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of storytelling on the development of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Accordingly, sixty out of one hundred and thirty EFL learners based on their scores in the proficiency test were selected as the subject of this study and randomly classified into experimental and control group. Each group in each level consisted of thirty learners. All the conditions especially teaching materials were kept equal and fixed at each level, except for the EG the subjects reading was thought through story telling. At the end of the experiment both groups, experimental and control, were given a reading comprehension posttest. The post scores of both groups in were compared using a t-test to discover if there was any significant difference in reading comprehension between two groups. The results of the study showed that due to story telling a significant difference was found in reading comprehension development between the experimental and control groups at the level of .05.

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Introduction

One of the major problem of Iranian learners in learning a foreign language is their low reading comprehension. The main reason behind this shortcoming is that they have not been taught how they should read. when they are required to read a text they kill the time and stick to the word by word translation and they miss the comprehension of the whole text. Mostly, they focus on structure and the meaning of the words. when they are asked to answer comprehension question they have to return to the text ,read it again and then answer the question. In paraphrasing the text, they just memorize a text or are unable to do the task. Story telling is one of the most studied formats for increasing reading comprehension ability among learners.. When a story is read, the primary reference for the communication event is the text, as fixed upon the page. In a storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are recreated through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and interaction. In the oral tradition, storytelling includes the teller and the audience. The storyteller creates the experience, while the audience perceives the message and creates personal mental images from the words heard and the gestures seen. Storytelling is increasingly recognized as having important theoretical and practical implications (Kim, 1999). Storytelling serves many purposes including increased vocabulary and concentration. Malo and Bullard (2000) said that storytelling might be more powerful than other mediums at developing skills that prepare children for reading.

It promotes reading comprehension in ways that build the capacity of all learners to academically succeed. This teaching approach promotes a vision of diversity as a resource, by encouraging learners to make selections of narrative form based on the anticipated audience, rather than reducing all experiences to the school-story format that educators so often use. Engaging in storytelling activities is a way to motivate even the most reluctant reader or writer. Storytelling is defined as, "relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture" (National Council of Teachers of English, 1992). Because

storytelling relies on both the listener and the teller, this strategy utilizes the social element of language. Researchers have found that literacy instruction is most effective when developed through social interaction and collaboration with others (Dugan, 1997). This pedagogical strategy capitalizes on students' desire to talk and interact with others. In fact, some researchers have found that the weakest readers and writers are often the most adept at storytelling (NCTE, 1992).

Review of Literature

Story telling is a process in which the teller using vocalization, narrative structure, and mental imagery communicates with the audience who also uses mental imagery and, in turn, communicates back to the teller primarily via body language and facial expression. The communication cycle is ongoing, and in the process, a "story" is created (Roney, 1996). Nessel (1985) states there is nothing quite like hearing a captivating story, told simply and effectively, without a book in evidence. Stories capture the imagination, engaging the emotions and opening the minds of listeners. According to Sawyer (1962), storytelling began to emerge as a conscious literary form. Storytellers gave attention to the effects of presentations upon the listener. Sawyer (1962) notes that storytelling is currently at the exact spot where it was at its inception--every man his own storyteller. Nessel (1985) notes that during storytelling, students are more attentive and relaxed, yet highly focused. Eye contact between the students and teller is a constant when there is no text to read. Gere (2002) notes that storytelling involves imagination combined with the use of language and gestures to create scenes in the listener's mind. Through visualization, the teller and the listener come together to create the scenes of the tale. Storytelling can be used as an effective means to increase early literacy and promote reading comprehension skills (Haven & Ducey, 2007). Through active engagement, storytelling as a pedagogical strategy can strengthen reading comprehension by helping students develop of a sense of story (Phillips, 1999). Students learn the social aspects of language through observation and participation in

storytelling (Craig et al, 2001). Eder (2007) describes using the oral tradition of storytelling as a powerful strategy for setting patterns of meaning. She found that events which tend to be most memorable and engaging are those associated with heightened emotion. Through participation in storytelling experiences, students learn to build a sense of story by anticipating features of the genre, including how a story may begin and end (Craig et al, 2001).

Methodology

Subject

A sample of 60 students from different majors including chemistry, computer engineering, power engineering and accounting who had taken English as a general course at Sama Technical and Vocational Training College, Islamic Azad University, Mahshahr Branch, Mahshahr, Iran was selected as the participant of this study. They were chosen among from 130 students. They were studying in the second year of their undergraduate program in academic year of 2011. In the selection of them Farhady's TOEFL test (Farhady, 2006) was administered. Then, they were assigned in to two groups: experimental and control. Each of which was comprised of 30 students.

Instruments

The first instrument was is a TOEFL test as an EFL proficiency test developed and validated by Farhady (2006). The aim behind this test was to recognize the homogeneity of learners. The second was a posttest. A pretest and a post test were administered to identify the impact of storytelling model on learners' reading comprehension. The third material for the current study was five texts taken from an English book titled as : General English through Reading (2010).

Procedure

The procedure of this study was as follow: at the first step students were asked to take the TOEFL test. The goal was to examine the proficiency level of the learners and confirm the homogeneity of them. After that, 60 students with same proficiency level were selected and randomly divided into two experimental and control groups. Then, a pretest was administered and the entire of subjects participated in it. With commence of the experiment, instructor talked about the story telling model for the experimental groups while the control group was taught in a traditional way. To this end; he stood in front of class and addressed the students about the merits of this model and its impact of reading comprehension progress. He talked about five 'wh questions' that contribute learners to remind the information of the texts. To make this task easier, the clue cards which was contained 'wh question' was given to learners. It was in the following format:

1. Who is the main character of the text?
2. Where did the story happen?
3. What did the main character do? And,
4. How did the main character feel?

This was a short term study and students were none English major since the researcher preferred to start with this question. They can be expanded as the students reading g comprehension develops. After this, the instructor talked about these questions and said ' the character can be a person or animal and he is the main person who is involved in the most of actions. In addition, he explained the other questions. Then, he started to model this strategy by reading one of the texts. After finishing the text, the instructor began to ask students if they know the main character of the story, its setting, what the main character do, and the

character feeling. Learners began to answer the question. According to their statements, by the use of this strategy reading became interesting for them. They went through the other texts in other sessions. This is while control group received no instruction regarding the story telling model. After nine sessions of treatment, students in the experimental group remembered the five 'wh questions'. At the termination of the study, a reading comprehension posttest was administered for both experimental and control groups to see if there was any difference between these two groups' scores after utilizing this model. To determine the effect of storytelling strategy instruction on the learners' reading comprehension, the researcher used a statistical t-test to identify differences in the performance of the control and experimental groups in pre and post-tests.

Result and discussion

In order to investigate the effect of storytelling model on reading comprehension regarding the treatment, the means of the two experimental and control groups were compared and this had been done through t-test. The aim was to assess the null hypothesis to see if there is any difference between the reading comprehension ability of the experimental group who received the story telling instruction and the control group who received no treatment. Then, the scores obtain from post and pretests were compared to see if there was any significant improvement in learners' reading comprehension in the experimental group. Therefore, the result of the study is shown and discussed in following tables:

Table 1: The Results of t-test between the Experimental and Control Groups' Pretest Scores

Groups	Stage	N	Mean	SD	SEM	df	t-value	p
Experimental	Pretest	30	14.93	2.959	.54	58	1.97	.054
Control		30	13.50	3.069	.56			

*nonsignificance p=0.01 t-critical=2.390

As Table 1 demonstrates, the result was promising since the difference between the experimental and control group scores was insignificant at the pre-test stage. In other words, the t-value was found insignificant, meaning that in terms of their reading comprehension, the two groups were homogeneous at the start. The reason is that the t-critical is higher than the t-value at the level of 0.01.

Table 2: The Results of t-test between the Experimental and Control Groups' Posttest Scores

Groups	Stage	N	Mean	SD	SEM	df	t-value	P
Experimental	posttest	30	15.57	2.345	.428	58	2.709	.009
Control		30	13.67	2.783	.508			

*P=0.009<.01 t-critical=2.390

At the termination of the study, as it is shown in Table 2, to support or reject the null hypothesis, another t-test was conducted on the post test scores of both experimental and control groups and it was found that the t-value (2.709) in this stage, exceeds critical t-value (2.390), at the significance level of $p = 0.01$. The difference of mean scores of two groups in the post test administration is 1.90 and it indicates that the experimental group performed better than the control group. It can be concluded that story telling model had impact on the improvement of experimental group's reading comprehension. Thus, it is quite safe to reject the null hypothesis that assumes "there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups' reading comprehension ability even after instruction of storytelling model to the experimental group" and to conclude that the difference between the two mean scores reflects that the experimental improvement is due to storytelling

model. Hence, it can be claimed that subjects' reading comprehension improved through story telling model.

Conclusion

Story telling is an effective way to enlarge learners' reading comprehension. In addition to improving the academic performance of students in the areas of reading and writing, it also has the ability to enhance learners motivation to connect with their learning. The story telling group also performed better in providing a setting and remembering characters in the story. Based on the results of the study, it was determined that the story telling group, experimental group, performed better when compared to the control group.

The inclusion of storytelling would help learners to enhance their comprehension and recognize the elements of a story. Combining this approach into language teaching could provide powerful way to influence the comprehension of learners.

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