

The Effect of Using Storytelling on Developing Saudi EFL University Students' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the effect of using storytelling on developing Saudi EFL university students' reading comprehension. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher changed the units of New Head Way Plus (Elementary Student's Book) of the first semester into storytelling texts instead of the passages that were found in the student's book. The sample of the study consisted of 40 male first year science university students, who were chosen purposefully, at the university college of Taymaa at Tabuk University. Each group consists of 20 participants. The participants were assigned into two groups, the students of the experimental group, who study Biology, was taught according to the method assigned by the researcher; whereas the students of the control group, who study Maths in the same college, was taught according to the method supposed by the textbook. A quantitative method was used to analyze the participants' responses in the pre and post reading comprehension tests. The findings of the study showed that there were significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the mean scores of the control group in favor of the participants in the experimental group. This indicated that using the storytelling as a technique had a positive effect on developing the participants' reading comprehension.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, storytelling, technique, EFL learners.

1. Introduction

English as a foreign language, in most of the Arab countries, is still the most important language that students as well as people seek to learn and master. In mastering such a universal language, people can benefit from it in getting better education and good jobs with well-paid salaries.

Ramelan (1992) and Agamdzanova supported this idea when they asserted that English language is the language of science, trade and technology. Moreover, they also added that it is used to strengthen the social as well as economic relations among the countries in the world.

One should admit that the language is an interactive process between its users. This interaction determines the level understanding among its learners and users. To teach a foreign language, learners should be in an interactive process to learn the language. They should be in interactive communicative authentic contexts to learn the language effectively.

Consequently, teachers should focus on developing their learners' reading ability through using multi activities as applying these activities play a vital role in developing the learners' linguistic abilities. Certain useful workable activities should be taken by the teachers' consideration to develop and improve their learners' linguistic competence especially teachers in the Arab world where the Arab EFL students face many difficulties to learn English.

To master English, students should be able to learn the four language skills in an appropriate way. Reading as one of these skills, requires adopting the most useful appropriate activities that help students to master it.

To develop students' linguistic competence, teachers may use pictures, storytelling, and story completion to develop their students' different skills. For example, the interview, picture describing, find the differences, and role-play could be used to develop the students' speaking skill. On the other hand, storytelling and story completion could be used to develop the students' reading comprehension (Beach, 1993; Trelease, 1994; and Rog, 2001).

In this paper, the researcher used the storytelling as a technique that was expected to help in developing the Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension. Storytelling technique was defined by Pederson (1995) as the original form of teaching. As it could be used in different contexts to teach students English. It is an interesting technique that students are fond of them as they like telling and reading stories. Haven & Ducey (2007) supported this idea, when they asserted that storytelling could be used as an effective working technique for increasing the early literacy as well as promoting reading comprehension skills.

Wallace (2000, p.436) looked at storytelling as a facilitator of language when he said that "The phenomenon of storytelling actually becomes a common language that facilitates meaningful communication; we can hear and understand each other's stories because we can usually recognize ourselves in the stories of others-no matter how varied our cultural backgrounds". Students as well as people like to share their knowledge through telling stories. Remenyi (2005) asserted this idea when he reported that storytelling is a fundamental important technique for sharing knowledge among people and students as it helps learners to transport themselves into

another setting in time and place.

The British Council asserts that there are many ways that storytelling can help in developing both understanding and communication as stories can:

- 1-"allow children to explore their own cultural roots
- 2-allow children to experience diverse cultures
- 3-enable children to empathize with unfamiliar people/places/situations
- 4-offer insights into different traditions and values
- 5-help children understand how wisdom is common to all peoples/all cultures
- 6-offer insights into universal life experiences
- 7-help children consider new ideas
- 8-reveal differences and commonalities of cultures around the world"

Moreover, the British Council suggests that in using storytelling in the classroom, teachers and learners can benefit a lot from stories to:

- 1-"Promote a feeling of well-being and relaxation
- 2-Increase children's willingness to communicate thoughts and feelings
- 3-Encourage active participation
- 4-Increase verbal proficiency
- 5-Encourage use of imagination and creativity
- 6-Encourage cooperation between students
- 7-Enhance listening skills".

2. Literature Review

Belet & Dal (2010) conducted a study to investigate the importance of using storytelling in developing the primary school students' critical reading skill. 53 participants were used as a sample of the study. The collected data was analyzed through descriptive analysis. The results of the study showed that the pre-service teachers had positive opinions about the necessity of using the storytelling in developing the students' critical reading skill.

The findings of a study that was carried out by Mokhtar, Abdul Halim, and Kamarulzaman (2011) on the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing communicative skills, showed that storytelling had great beneficial effects on developing the students reading skill as it helped them to capture the meanings and the emotions intended with words. Moreover, the findings pointed out that students were able to develop their vocabulary in positive ways that helped them to determine when and where to use certain words and phrases in their communication.

Ghiabi (2014) investigated the effects of story retelling technique as a closed task in comparison to story-completion as an open task on developing EFL learners' speaking. The researcher prepared a group of activities for the students that could be used in everyday meetings. They were asked to talk about their ideas and opinions freely. All the activities were oral to help the students in feeling relax, and happy while doing them. The results of the study showed that the students were able to develop their speaking skill. Moreover, they also pointed out that using story retelling and story-completion techniques helped in increasing the students' motivation and self-confident.

To show the importance of using the technique of retelling stories in developing English speaking ability of Grade 9 Thai students, Praneetponkrang & Phaiboonnugulkij (2014) carried out a study where Morrow's theory (1981) and other scholars in retelling stories technique were used to carry out the study. The researchers chose a group of short stories that were related to their students' daily life. The researchers asked their students to work in groups using different techniques such as using story's mind map, illustrations, and role-playing in the classroom. The results of the study showed that using the technique of retelling stories had a great positive effect in developing the Thai students' speaking skill.

Ninsuwan (2015) conducted a study to measure the effectiveness of using reading aloud in teaching English for EFL Thai beginners. The sample of the study consisted of twenty who studied English Intensive Course. The researcher used pre-test and post-test as well as self-directed learning while teaching to collect the data. The results of the study pointed out the importance of learning English by using reading aloud technique towards EFL Thai learners. Moreover, the researcher asserted that in joining the ASEAN Community by Thailand is essential in term of communication. Consequently, Thai students should be prepared and trained for meeting the requirements of the upcoming future.

Rahimi& Yadollahi (2017) investigated the effects of offline vs. online digital storytelling on the development of EFL learners' literacy skills in both reading and writing skills. The sample of the study consisted of 42 lower intermediate language students who were set into two groups the control group and the experimental ones, where 21 students were assigned in each group. The researchers presented a reading-writing test for both groups at the beginning of the study. The participants in the experimental group were trained to do the process of writing and reading using an online platform, whereas the participants in the control group benefited of an

offline content .Another post-test was presented for both groups. The results of the study showed that the students, who were trained using the online, achieved better scores compared with the results of the participants in the control group who worked with the offline programme.

The above studies show that using storytelling as a teaching technique may play an important role in developing the students' linguistic competence as it helps in improving their four English skills if it used in an appropriate way. What makes this study different from other previous studies is that it concentrates on developing the Saudi EFL students reading comprehension skill as the studies that were conducted on Saudi students are still below the expected level especially at the university level. Moreover, this study is going to examine the effect of storytelling in developing the students' reading comprehension whereas the other studies were conducted to examine the effect of storytelling in developing the students speaking skill (Gihabi, 2014; Praneetponkrang & Phaiboonnugulkij, 2014; and Samantaray, 2014).

3. Statement of the Problem

The researcher as well as his colleagues in the same college, and through their academic university experiences, have noticed that a good number of students get poor marks in their reading comprehension exams. Moreover, they have felt that the students face serious problems while reading English. Saudi as well as other Arab EFL students do not achieve good marks when they set for international exams such as TOEFL, ESL and IELTS. Consequently, it is expected to be poor learners of English language as a foreign language.

Studies conducted by Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman (2011); Miller and Pennycuff (2014); and Rahimi and Yadollahi (2017) support this fact about the students' poor achievement in the reading skill.

4. Objective of the Study

This paper intended to achieve the following objective:

1) Find if there are significant differences in the participants' achievement in the reading test between the control group and the experimental group due to the teaching technique (Storytelling and the conventional way).

5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this paper stems from the fact that it tries to show the importance of storytelling in developing the Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension for teachers, researchers, and decision makers as well as students. Moreover, it presents practical and theoretical evidences for those who are working in the field of education about the importance of such techniques (Storytelling, story completion) in helping and in developing the EFL learners' English skills. In addition, this paper helps in proving that using such techniques may help in developing the students' linguistic competence in English as using and reading stories to students is a highly recommended technique in the educational context (Snow, 1983; Rubin & Wilson, 1995; and Kaderavek & Justice, 2002). In this context, Farrell & Nessel (1982) stressed that using the storytelling in the classroom and in front of the students play a vital role in developing their linguistic competence.

6. Methodology and Scope of the Study

6.1. The Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 40 male EFL Saudi students at the University College of Taymma, in the academic year 2017/2018. The participants were in their first academic year who were chosen purposefully to participate in the study as the researcher has been teaching there for four years. They were studying Maths and Biology. The researcher divided the participants into two groups; the number of the students in the experimental group as well as the control group was 20. Both groups received a pre-test. Then the researcher started implementing the study which lasted for 3 months. In this period, the experimental group was taught using the storytelling technique whereas the control group was taught according to the way of teaching as it was described in the Student's Book.

6.2. Design of the Study

The present study adopted the quasi-experimental design as the researcher used two groups; an experimental group and another control group. Both groups were selected purposefully as the researcher is a teaching member staff at the college where the study took place.

6.3. Variables of the Study

This paper included the following variables:

1. The independent variable was the storytelling technique and the traditional way of teaching.
2. The dependent variables were the participants' mean scores in the reading comprehension test.

6.4. Instrument

To conduct the study, the following instrument was used:

I- The reading comprehension test. It was divided into three parts. The first part consisted of 5 WH/ questions. Each question was given two marks. As for the second part, it consisted of 5 True / False questions. The third part was 5 multiple choices (MC) statements. Each question in the second and the third groups was given one mark. The total marks of the test was 20 marks.

The reading comprehension passage, which was used in the test, was taken from Excellent ESL 4U (English for excellent communication) site (see Appendix A). The researcher kept the five multiple choices as they came in the passage and from their source. On the other hand, the researcher prepared and added 5 W/H questions and 5 True/ False statements. The reading passage was modified to suit the purpose of the study.

6.5. Validity and Reliability of the Reading Comprehension Test

To get the validity of the reading comprehension test, a jury of six TEFL specialists in the curriculum and instruction in some of the Jordanian universities as well as Saudi universities, and other four experienced EFL teachers who have been teaching English for more than ten years were asked politely to participate in the process of validity. As for the test's reliability, it was computed on a pilot study of 20 students using the test-retest method. The reliability coefficient was computed using Cronbach's Alpha formula.

6.6. Data Collection

To analyze the data obtained from the reading comprehension test, a quantitative methodology was used. Several statistical procedures, such as means, standard error and standard deviations were used to analyze the data obtained from the students' pre and post reading comprehension test.

6.7. Procedures

The researcher examined the fourteen units that were found in the student's book of New Headway Plus (Elementary) which was published by John and Liz Soars (2017). The researcher chose six texts out of fourteen ones, as they were the most appropriate ones to be changed into storytelling passages. Moreover, their titles were attractive and suitable to be changed into stories. The units that were chosen were the following:

Table 1: The Unit's Number, Page, and Title

Unit Number	Title	Page Number
Two	Meeting People	12
Three	The World of work	20
Five	Where do you live?	36
Six	Can you speak English?	44
Eight	How long ago?	60
Twelve	Life is an adventure!	90

These texts, and after changing them into storytelling passages, were taught to the students in the experimental group.

The researcher taught the storytelling twice a week for the experimental group. Students were asked to:

1. The researcher asked the students to read the story silently.
2. The researcher asked the students general questions about the story (Theme, characters, setting, dates and actions).
3. The researcher said the beginning of the story orally, then he asked a good number of students to complete the story individually.
4. Finally, the researcher distributed different reading worksheets among the students.
5. Students were asked to read the worksheets and answer the questions.
6. Different questions were used in the worksheet to examine students' general understanding to the story.
7. Students were asked to tell the story using their own words.

As for the control group, it was taught according to the traditional way and as it was described in the student's book.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. Findings related to the research question

The question of the study was: *Are there any significant differences in the students' achievement in the reading comprehension test due to the teaching technique (storytelling and the traditional way)?*

To answer the question of the study, means, standard deviations, and standard error mean of the students' achievement in the pre-post reading comprehension test were calculated for the two groups before and after starting implementing the study.

Groups = Control, pre and post
 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the Students' Achievement in the Pre and Post Tests in the Control Group

		Group Statistics ^a			
Pre and post		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
score	Pre	20	11.3000	1.86660	0.41739
	Post	20	12.7500	1.44641	0.32343

a. groups = Control

Table 1 shows the means, the standard deviations, and the standard error mean of the students' achievement in the pre and posttests for the students in the control group.

The mean of the control group in the pre-test is 11.3000 (SD 1.86660), whereas the mean of the posttest for the same group is 12.7500 (SD 1.44641). The difference in the means between the pre and the posttest tests shows that there is a little progress in the students' achievement in the post-test, which can be attributed to the teacher's efforts through the period of teaching as the students in this group were taught according to the traditional way as it is described in the student's book. It is normally for the students to achieve a little progress throughout the period of teaching.

Groups = Experimental, pre and post
 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of the Students' Achievement in the Pre and Post Tests in the Experimental Group

		Group Statistics ^a			
Pre and post		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
score	Pre	20	11.0000	1.21395	0.27145
	Post	20	14.8500	1.13671	0.25418

a. groups = Experimental

The above table points out that the mean of the students in the experimental group and in their pre-test is 11.0000 (SD 1.21395), whereas the mean of the students in their post-test is 14.8500 (SD 1.13671).

The two tables, for the two groups in the reading comprehension pre-tests, show that the means of the two groups are somehow close to each other as the mean of the students in the control group is (11.3000) and the mean of the students in the experimental group is (11.0000). This indicates that the level of the students' linguistic competence in the two groups was close to each other as the above tables show and before starting the study.

Table 2 and 3 show that there is a clear difference between the students' achievement in their post-tests, as the mean of the students in the control group is 12.7500 (SD 1.44641) whereas the students' achievement in the experimental group, and as Table 4 shows that the mean in their post-test is 14.8500 (SD 1.13671).

The independent sample t-Test was applied to examine the differences in the mean values between the pre and posttests for the control group. Table 4 shows the t-Test for the students' pre and post reading comprehension test in the control group.

Table 4. The t-Test for the Students' Pre and Post Reading Comprehension Test in the Control Group

	t-value	Std. Error Difference	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)	pdf
Equal variances assumed	-2.746	0.52803	-1.45000	0.009	38
Equal variances not assumed	-2.746	0.52803	-1.45000	0.009	35.771

The table shows that there was a significant difference in the means between the pre and post reading comprehension test in the control group ($t = -2.746$, $p = 0.009$).

Moreover, the independent sample t-Test was calculated to examine the differences in the mean values between the pre and posttests for the students in the experimental group. Table 5 shows the t-Test for the students' pre and post reading comprehension test in the experimental group.

Table 5: The t-Test for the Students' Pre and Post Reading Comprehension Test in the Experimental Group.

	t-value	Std. Error Difference	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)	df
Equal variances assumed	-10.353	0.37187	-3.85000	0.000	38
Equal variances not assumed	-10.353	0.37187	-3.85000	0.000	37.837

The table shows that there was a significant difference in the means between the pre and post reading comprehension test in the experimental group ($t = -10.353$, $p = 0.000$).

The above tables show that the students' post-test achievement in the experimental group was better than the students' posttest achievement in the control group due to the use of storytelling technique that was used in the experimental group rather than the control group that was taught following the traditional way of teaching. The results of the study showed that the storytelling technique is a useful workable technique that could be used by teachers to develop their EFL students' reading comprehension as well as other English language skills such as speaking and writing. The results of the current paper goes in complete harmony with other studies conducted by Belet & Dal ,2010; Kamarulzaman ,2011; Ghiabi ,2014; Praneetponkrang & Phaiboonnugulkij ,2014; Ninsuwan ,2015; and Rahimi & Yadollahi ,2017.

8. Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to examine the effect of storytelling technique in developing Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension skill. As it was presented, storytelling was found to be an effective teaching technique that could be used by teachers to develop their students' different language skills. Actually, using storytelling, as a teaching activity, attracted the students as using stories in the teaching process facilitates the learning process. It is said that students are fond of reading or telling stories particularly those that are close to their real life contexts.

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommended using storytelling by the EFL teachers as it helps as an effective teaching technique in developing the students' reading comprehension. Moreover, the researcher recommends other researchers to carry out future experimental studies to include other techniques such as story completion to examine its effect in developing students' other language skills such as speaking and listening.

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Appendix A
Reading Comprehension Test

(How to Choose the Right University?) (20 Marks) Time: 1 Hour

Name: Group: (E / C) No. (.....)

I-Read the following passage, and then answer the questions below.

Choosing which university fits your interests and academic background is an important decision that will greatly influence the success of your university study. In the UK alone, there are hundreds of choices and therefore you need to be strategic in making a shortlist of universities and narrowing down your choices into second and first choice. This involves weighing some factors such as your motivation and aspiration, your personality, your location, and your budget.

People attend university for different reasons, so ask yourself what you want from your target university and what you want to do after you graduate. Many people attend top universities because of the prestige without considering their choice of future career. If you have interest in a particular career, you should find universities with a better reputation for your career choice than others. With a degree from a university that is most respected in the profession you want to enter, it will be easy for you to get your dream job and you will be able to climb the career ladder fast.

Your personality types also play an important role in your success as a university student. A scholarly type student usually has self-motivation to work hard in order to ace exams and achieve high grades. This type of person will find comfort in a highly academic environment offered by top world universities such as Oxford or Cambridge. On the contrary, if you are not a type of person who can study for hours and getting top grades is not your main priority, you better go to a university with a more laid-back academic environment so that you will not be stressful all the time and can enjoy your life at university.

Coming home could be a good escape during your hard time at university, so think about the distance between your home and the target university. If you get homesick easily, you should not consider choosing a university outside your hometown or which takes more than a day to travel by land or water. However, if distance is not a problem for you, you might want to consider studying abroad, especially at a university whose reputation is better than the universities in your home country.

Last but not least, calculate your financial ability, which should cover tuition fees and cost of living. Both vary across the country and different universities, so do your homework by doing some research in order to find out which one fits your bills. If you cannot afford to go to the university of your choice, you can search for financial aid in the forms of student loans, grant, or scholarship. Do remember that if you decide to obtain a loan, you have to pay for it after you finish your study.

(Source: ESL University Reading Comprehension
<http://www.excellentesl4u.com/esl-university-reading.html>).

I-Answer the following questions: (10 Marks)

- 1) Mention two factors that narrow your choices to attend the university ?
A-.....
B-.....
- 2) Why do people attend the university?.....
- 3) What does a scholarly type of students usually have?
- 4) How can you know if you are able to pay the fees and cost of living?
- 5) What is the best solution for students who get homesick easily?

II-Choose the most correct answer from a, b, c, or d in the following: (5 Marks)

- 1) Why do you need to choose the right university?
 - A) Because it will make you happy.
 - B) Because it has an impact on your success at university.
 - C) Because life at university is difficult.
 - D) Because the right university is difficult to find.
- 2) Which university should you go to if you already have a career choice?
 - A) One with the lowest tuition fees.
 - B) One that offers you a scholarship.
 - C) One that has the highest prestige.
 - D) One that has a good reputation in your future profession.
- 3) What type of student will enjoy a highly academic environment?
 - A) A student who has self-motivation to work hard.
 - B) A smart student who does not need to study hard for exams.
 - C) A student who puts the highest priority on student societies.
 - D) A student who does not have a part-time job.
- 4) Where should you study if you are prone to homesickness?
 - A) Abroad.
 - B) Outside your hometown.
 - C) At your local university.
 - D) At home.
- 5) What can you do if you do not have enough money to fund your study?
 - A) Wait for a year to collect money.
 - B) Find a full-time job.
 - C) Choose to study online.
 - D) Find a student loan or scholarship.

III-Read the following statements and decide whether they are true (✓) or false (×):(5 Marks)

- 1) In UK, few choices are available for students who plan to join the university. ()
- 2) Some students attend top universities because of prestige. ()
- 3) If you are a student who can not study for long hours, it advised to join a highly academic environment. ()
- 4) Students who consider distance from home a problem for them can study abroad. ()
- 5) Students who take a loan from a university are not going to pay for it after graduating. ()

The End
Good Luck for All.