



The Use of Storytelling to Promote Primary Stage Students' Literacy Skills

Names of students: Abdelrahman Hany Ezz El-dien Abo-zaid, Aya Ashraf Mohamed Othman, Hamed Ashraf Hamed Abdelhameed, Mohamed Tarek Abdelraoof Hassan, Mohamed Adel Mohamed Mostafa, Nourhan Hamdy Mohamed Mostafa, Waleed Fathy Said Ahmed, Yasmeen Tarek Mokhtar Ebrahim.

Supervisor: Amira Mahmoud Elsayed, Ph.D., Curriculum and EFL Instruction, Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University.

Ain Shams University, Faculty of Education, English language (Primary Education).

Abstract

The current study aims to find out how the use of storytelling can promote literacy skills for primary stage students. The study adopted the pre-experimental one group pre-post administration design. The study was applied to a voluntary group (N = 30) from primary stage students in Hammamat El-Kobba Governmental school. Literacy skills pre-posttest was used to determine the participants' most needed literacy skills. Accordingly, the sessions of the unit were developed based on the three literacy skills: grammar, punctuation, and writing. The unit was administered to participants in a two-week practicum block. Paired t-test was used to measure the effect of the program on the students' literacy skills. Results revealed that the program was effective in developing students' literacy skills as there were statistically significant differences between the pre and post administrations of the test in favour of the post-administration.

Keywords: *storytelling; literacy skills; EFL classroom; primary stage students.*

1. Introduction

The concept of literacy tends to be misunderstood these days, literacy is thought to be restricted to reading and writing skills. However, and as stated by [Bainbridge, C. \(2022\)](#), literacy skills also include the sounds of language and their relationship to letters. Other literacy skills include vocabulary, spelling, and grammar.

Literacy Skills are crucial to education as they reinforce students' abilities to learn how to discuss and communicate thoughtfully in the foreign language. Teachers have a big role in helping students totally enhance their literacy skills in ways that enable them to become professional, have pathways to socioeconomic mobility and improve themselves ([Smith, R.F., 2023](#)).

There are also other types of literacy such as digital literacy, financial literacy, media literacy, scientific literacy, and art literacy. All of these are pivotal but what is more central to EFL students in their primary stage are other literacy skills such as vocabulary, spelling, and grammar.

As for vocabulary, it's important to develop this skill because students who have larger vocabulary can easily learn to read, comprehend and decode. (El Dorado County Library, 2024). Concerning spelling, it is defined as the order of letters to make a word. Children learn to read earlier through the way words are spelled as well as comprehending concepts of irregular spelling if they are facing new words (Bainbridge,C.,2022).

As for grammar, words hang together without any true sense or meaning when grammar is absent. Language learners need to learn some grammar in order to be able to communicate effectively and speak a language to a reasonable degree of proficiency. In addition to providing our students with the tools to express themselves, teaching grammar also meets their expectations regarding what studying a foreign language might entail (Planning a grammar lesson. (n.d.-b).

Grammar and literacy integrate with each other. It is just impossible to become literate without understanding grammar. Students should comprehend grammar to deal with the written words (Alexamcreavey, 2022).

Thus, grammar helps improve other literacy skills such as reading comprehension. Research over the years has demonstrated a strong correlation between reading comprehension and syntactic or grammatical sophistication, i.e., as students advance in their oral and written language proficiency, so does their capacity to understand what they read (Mbernard & Mbernard, 2018).

Gaining more confidence in speaking is a goal shared by many EFL students. Given the significance of speaking in students' lives today, it merits greater consideration (Bygate, 1987). However, the fear of making grammatical errors, failing at speaking, and being misunderstood made speaking a conscious task and, consequently, a hard-to-master skill (G. Clark, 2020).

Although punctuation is not considered grammar, it is a part of writing mechanics, which is a subset of grammar. Grammar gives language rules structure and uniformity, and punctuation helps by providing readers and writers with symbols and marks that have meaning. In summary, mastering English grammar and punctuation is crucial for proficient written communication, regardless of the type of writing—from social media posts to business proposals and academic writing (Proofed, & Proofed, 2023).

Punctuation marks have an important role when writing, simply because they are one of the basic elements of communication and for children to learn to speak, write, and listen. They also make sentences coherent and easy to understand. They help children use the appropriate language to express their feelings. Punctuation marks are used with capital letters. Spaces help clarify and understand the context of the speech, as the speech may indicate an idea, a question, or the end of the speech.

The importance of punctuation marks becomes apparent if someone tries to read any paragraph that does not contain any punctuation marks, hence the importance of this skill for students.

As for writing, the ability to effectively compose text for a variety of audiences and purposes is known as writing. Writing is a communication and educational tool that enables us to record, gather, and disseminate comprehensive information widely. It offers an additional channel for self-expression and persuasion. But writing is more than just a means of expression and communication. According to studies, developing one's writing abilities enhances one's capacity for learning, much like reading does ([Key literacy component: writing, n.d.](#)).

In the same vein, reading skills reinforce and are reinforced by many writing skills, such as grammar and spelling. Teachers who can help struggling teenage readers write better should therefore have a positive impact on the literacy levels of these students ([Key literacy component: writing, n.d.](#)).

The fields of writing and literacy are closely related to the point where mastery of one requires mastery of the other. Without the ability to read and understand the purpose of writing, a child cannot write. Because of this, a child's writing and literacy skills typically develop at the same rate during their early to middle childhood, which is typically between the ages of 6 and 11. Strong writing skills are essentially directly correlated with strong reading skills, though, surprisingly, the opposite is not always true ([Admin-Travis, 2019](#)).

For most children, the development of writing and literacy skills occurs concurrently during the first or second grade. Because reading and writing are closely related, a child cannot start writing intentionally until they comprehend what words mean. The awareness of print is the first step towards that understanding. Understanding the written word is crucial because it enables kids to investigate the different uses for writing. For

instance, a child learns to recognize that printed text can have multiple meanings the more they are exposed to text in the real world, such as menus in restaurants, billboard advertisements, to-do lists on the fridge. Having students exposed to entertaining stories also impacts their reading and writing skills ([Admin-Travis, 2019](#)).

Storytelling is crucial in enhancing students' literacy skills in their primary stage effectively. Once teachers tell a story to students, they consequently need to retell this story back, by asking them about the main ideas, the story's beginning, middle and end. While telling a story, students should be able to predict what will occur aftermath. ([McIlroy, 2022](#)).

A vital component of literacy for all young children in early childhood settings is stories. Narratives are multifaceted and culturally embedded; they encompass oral, written, and embodied modes of meaning-making and communication. In early childhood settings, teachers can share stories with children through two methods: reading books aloud and telling stories orally. Youngsters are actors and storytellers as well, so it's critical to give them the chance to start and carry on conversations and play about the stories that interest them ([Howley-Rouse, 2023](#)).

Stories are a great teaching tool that can help students improve their language skills in addition to providing them with entertainment. Stories leverage key memory mechanisms like emotion, movement, exaggeration, personal connections, and visualization, making them excellent tools for helping people learn new words and phrases. You become fully engaged in a story while you listen to it, which makes it easier for you to take in new information. Context is provided by stories. Your brain cannot make sense of lengthy lists of

unfamiliar vocabulary, so if you have tried memorizing words out of context, you have most likely reached a dead end. You can always learn new words with the vivid context that stories provide ([Englishcollege, n.d.](#)).

When kids hear stories, they react by picturing the people and places the storytellers describe. Imagination is the process of creating meaning and images inside oneself in response to spoken words. The rationale behind children's insistence on hearing the same story repeatedly is that reading stories to them builds and strengthens neural pathways within the brain, which makes it easier for the child to assimilate new information ([Developing literacy skills through storytelling, n.d.](#)).

Youngsters who hear stories are exposed to a wide variety of new vocabulary. Even though they might not understand every word, hearing or reading a story can help them understand meaning through context. By creating vocabulary lists based on the story, teachers can capitalize on kids' innate curiosity to learn the vocabulary and increase their motivation to look up new words in dictionaries or create their own stories using the words ([Developing literacy skills through storytelling, n.d.](#)).

Telling stories to others can also help them become more accepting and understanding of those from different cultures. The listener can safely examine the similarities and differences among all people through the medium of storytelling. Stories have the ability to temporarily transport the listener to a different time and place while gently removing the child from his or her everyday reality. By means of imagination, a child can transcend the confines of their personal experience and gain an understanding of what

it's like to accompany someone else on their journey or experience their joy or sorrow. Nobody could leave an imaginative trip to a different culture without coming away with a deeper respect for the distinct knowledge and experiences of its people ([Developing literacy skills through storytelling, n.d.](#)).

Young Learners have a remarkably diverse range of shared values, life experiences, and cognitive styles. They use the language they learn in school as a tool to mold their emotions and ideas. It serves as their method of outreach and interpersonal connection, serving as more than just a platform for knowledge sharing and idea expansion. Narratives have the power to connect not just the home and classroom environments, but also the classroom itself. Narratives offer a shared element that can foster cultural harmony and serve as a conduit across cultural divides ([Storytelling - benefits and tips, n.d.](#)).

Storytelling can promote literacy skills in many ways. Storytelling is a powerful tool for enhancing literacy skills, as it develops children's language through new vocabulary and concepts, helping them expand their use of language. It also enhances children's narrative skills and teaches them the structure of stories: beginning, middle, end. This is important and necessary for understanding reading and writing, as interacting with stories improves the ability to listen and concentrate. It also stimulates imagination and encourages children to be creative and make up their own stories through creative writing. It also enhances children's emotional intelligence, increases their ability to read and write, and increases their social development.

A large number of researchers, educators, and storytellers support the idea that early literacy

development can be greatly aided by storytelling. Literacy programs that actively use storytelling to bridge students' newly acquired literacy skills with their existing oracy skills should be embraced by early childhood education. Children will come across a wide variety of language in this way: new words, old-fashioned expressions, puns, phrases, rhymes, metaphors, and more. In doing so, a broad oral language foundation is established, strengthening literacy abilities like word recognition, spelling, grammar, literary conventions, and comprehension. The children's social and cultural experiences must be taken into consideration when selecting stories and when choosing and utilizing text, as it is crucial to provide storytelling and literacy experiences that are meaningful to them. Teachers ought to foster the growth of their students' development. ([research gate, n.d.](#)).

Storytelling to kids is a magical activity that sparks their interest in letters and captures their imagination. The best way to instill in children an appreciation of literary complexities, nuances, and subtleties is to read aloud to them from an open book while pointing to words as they are read. This helps kids develop their vocabulary, listening comprehension, and love of books. Bright, colorful books are the easiest to draw children's attention to because they are easy to understand and stimulating in the previously mentioned ways ([Superadmin, 2023](#)).

Children's writing abilities can also be developed through storytelling. Children practice using various parts of speech and stringing words together to form sentences when they narrate stories. In order to enhance the interest level of their writing, they also

learn how to employ storytelling strategies like character development and setting description ([Ingov, P., 2022](#)).

Without having knowledge of stories at various language proficiency levels and having categorized them based on the grammatical points they lend themselves to, teachers cannot effectively teach grammar through storytelling. If they do not consistently incorporate stories into their core teaching materials, they will also be unable to effectively teach grammar through storytelling. If these requirements are satisfied, educators can schedule storytelling events. The focus of the lessons will be on brief, age-and language-appropriate stories—preferably well-known ones—that naturally fit the targeted grammar structures and ideas ([ELT News., 2023](#)).

To conclude, Children's language and literacy development can benefit greatly from storytelling, which is an engaging and dynamic method of instruction. It aids in the development of their writing, grammar and punctuation abilities. Children can learn about cause and effect, how language is used to communicate motivation and feelings, and how to talk about topics other than the present moment through the telling and listening of stories. The development of storytelling skills is crucial for effective communication, scholastic achievement, and wholesome relationships. Every day, we employ storytelling techniques in a variety of contexts.

2. The Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism theory is the basis of the current study. The theory stems from the works of Vygotsky who sees social interaction as the factor to which all cognitive functions must be attributed. For him, learning cannot be a mere process of assimilation and accommodation of the new knowledge; rather it results from the successful integration of the learner in the learning community ("Social Constructivism | GSI Teaching & Resource Center", 2017). The social constructivism theory entails some principles that are closely related to the procedures of the current study.

a. Social Interaction

Storytelling encourages classroom discussions and conversations, allowing students to express their thoughts and ideas. Group work and debates help students explore the story and its themes together. Teachers guide students in relating the story to their own experiences making learning more engaging.

Role-playing based on stories improves students' communication skills. These interactions help students learn from each other and better grasp the material. Storytelling provides opportunities for students to build relationships and develop social skills as they engage with their peers and teachers. These interactions also help students practice listening and responding thoughtfully, contributing to a positive classroom environment.

b. Cultural Context

Stories from various cultures introduce students to different perspectives and ways of life. Culturally relevant stories make students feel included and engaged in class. Discussions about cultural differences and similarities promote

respect for others. Stories teach about history and society, offering a broader worldview. Seeing their own culture in stories helps students feel a sense of belonging. Incorporating stories from various cultures can increase students' awareness of global issues and promote inclusivity. This approach can also inspire students to share their own cultural stories, enriching the learning experience for everyone.

c. Subjectivity

Stories let students interpret and understand the material in their own way. Teachers encourage students to share their views, fostering critical thinking. Students learn there can be multiple perspectives and solutions. Open-ended questions deepen students' engagement with the story. Subjectivity empowers students to form their own understanding of the material. Teachers can use students' unique interpretations as teaching moments, highlighting different ways of thinking and analyzing texts. This diversity of thought helps students develop empathy by understanding different perspectives.

d. Negotiation

Storytelling creates opportunities for students to discuss and negotiate meanings with peers and teachers. This helps students improve communication and collaboration skills. Teachers guide debates on the story, teaching students to support their arguments with evidence. Students learn to respect differing opinions and be open to changing perspectives. Negotiation allows students to actively engage in their own learning. Negotiation encourages students to build their reasoning and persuasion skills as they discuss different views on the story. It also helps students learn the importance of compromise and reaching consensus during group discussions.

e. Mutual Influence

Storytelling creates a learning environment where teachers and students influence one another. Teachers can adjust stories and lessons based on students' feedback. Students learn from the teacher's storytelling techniques and style. This mutual influence creates a respectful collaborative classroom atmosphere. Students and teachers work together to achieve shared learning goals. Teachers can observe students responses to stories and use this feedback to enhance future lessons and storytelling approaches. The collaborative dynamic created by mutual influence helps foster a supportive and adaptive learning environment ([Study.com. n.d.](#)).

3. Methods of Research and Instruments

3.1. Participants and instruments

A total of 30 English as Foreign Language (EFL) primary stage students participated in this study. The participants were Egyptian mixed-gender group of elementary EFL learners with an age range of 8 to 11. The participation was voluntary and they had already enrolled in the practicum school (Hammamat El-Koba Primary School). Participants shared the same language and social level. The first language of the students was Arabic.

The hypothesis of the study is that *“there would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre and post administration of the test in literacy skills in favor of the post administration”*. To investigate the hypothesis, The UK national curriculum test, 2018 was used as a guide to select the pre-posttest questions of the current study. The original test comprised 50 questions to

test students on a wide range of literacy skills. The current study adopted 10 questions that represent nine literacy skills related to grammar, punctuation, and writing.

3.2. Design and procedures

The study followed the pre-experimental one group pre-post administration design. The same test that comprised 10 questions was used before and after the intervention with the same group of students.

A short intervention of three sessions was administered for 6 days to the 30 students. Three stories were selected for the intervention, and they covered the following literacy skills:

- Using comma with dependent and independent clauses
- Differentiating between questions, commands, and statements
- Using comma to list items/actions
- Using exclamation mark correctly
- Using the colon correctly
- Identifying nouns, verbs, adjectives
- Using subject and object pronouns correctly
- Using capitalization correctly

The pre-posttest scores indicated that students progressed in the previously mentioned skills.

4. Results of the study

Results of the current study are reported based on the study hypothesis. The hypothesis of this study is that *“there would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre and post administration of the test in literacy skills in favor of the post administration”*. To test the validity of this

hypothesis, a paired t-test was used to compare the participants' total mean scores on the pre-post administration of the test".

Table (4.1): t-test results comparing the obtained data for overall pre-posttest of the study participants:

(N = 30), Degree of Freedom (df= 29)

performance	Mean		Std. Deviation		t- test value	Sig.	Effect size (η^2)
	pre	post	pre	post			
Overall score of literacy skills	2.03	11.9	1.75	2.9	18.067	0.000	0.918

Table (4.1) above indicates that the total mean scores of the study participants on the post-administration of the test (*M.*2,03, *SD.* 1.75) is higher than their total mean scores on the pre-administration of the test (*M.* 1.75, *SD.* 2.9).

Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the study participants' mean scores on the pre-posttest administration of the literacy skills test in favour of the post administration. Thus, the study hypothesis is proven statistically valid.

The following chart clarifies the difference between the total mean scores of the study participants on the pre and post-administration of the reading comprehension test.

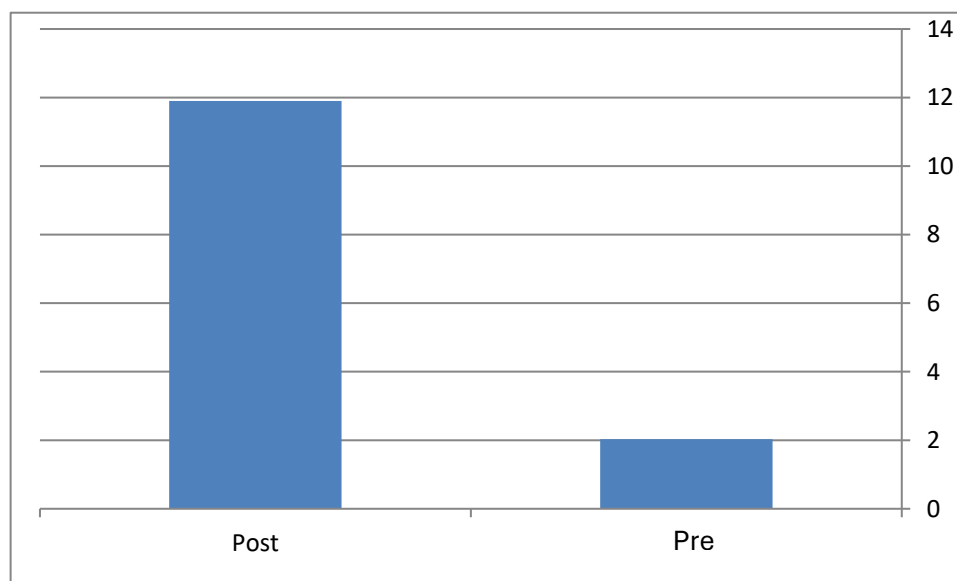


Figure (4.1.) the difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre and post-administration of the literacy skills test

To measure the total effect size of the story telling unit on developing the overall literacy skills, Eta square (η^2) value was calculated. The following equation was used:

$$\text{Effect size } (\eta^2) = t^2 / (t^2 + df)$$

As clarified in the previous table, Eta square (η^2) = 0.918 > 0.232. The value of (η^2) indicates that the suggested storytelling unit has a large effect on developing the overall literacy skills of the primary stage students.

5. Interpretation of Results

The current study was conducted to investigate the effect of a unit based on storytelling on developing some of the literacy skills of the primary stage students.

Results of the study indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre and post administration of the test in overall literacy skills in favour of the post administration. Thus, the storytelling unit helped to develop the participants' literacy skills. This might be attributed to the fun learning environment, the social interactions in the class, and the engaging activities used in the intervention.

6. Recommendations

- Investigating the effect of using reading aloud on promoting literacy skills for primary stage students.

- Investigating the effect of using AI-based activities to promote primary stage students' literacy skills.
- Investigating the use of digital stories to promote primary stage students' reading and writing skills.

7. Conclusion

The current study targeted investigating the effectiveness of using storytelling on developing primary stage students' literacy skills. As results indicated, the implemented unit was proven to be effective in developing primary stage students' literacy skills. Consequently, it can be concluded that storytelling is proved effective in developing primary stage students' literacy skills.

Bibliography

- Bainbridge, C. (2022, November 2). Top 5 skills needed for Childhood Literacy. Verywell Family. <https://www.verywellfamily.com/literacy-skills-1449194>
- Smith, R. F. (2023, September 20). The importance of literacy in education and life. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/importance-literacy-education-life-robert-f-smith>
- El Dorado County Library. (n.d.). <https://eldoradolibrary.org/>
- Planning a grammar lesson. (n.d.). <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/planning-lessons-and-courses/articles/planning-grammar-lesson#:~:text=By%20teaching%20grammar%20>

[we%20not,learning%20a%20foreign%20language%20involves.](#)

Alexamcreavey. (2022, July 19).

<https://ourfuturereads.com/2022/03/07/grammar-and-literacy/#:~:text=Grammar%20and%20literacy%20go%20hand,high%20emphasis%20on%20developing%20literacy>

Mbernard, & Mbernard. (2018).

<https://ortongillinghamonlinetutor.com/the-importance-of-grammar-in-reading-comprehension/>

Early Literacy Skills: Vocabulary – El Dorado County Library. (n.d.).

<https://eldoradolibrary.org/early-literacy-skills-vocabulary/>

What is literacy? (n.d.). National Literacy Trust.

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/#:~:text=Literacy%20is%20the%20ability%20to,make%20sense%20of%20the%20world>

Study.com. (n.d.).

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-relationship-between-writing-literacy.html>

Proofed, & Proofed. (2023).

<https://proofed.com/writing-tips/does-grammar-include-punctuation/#:~:text=While%20punctuation%20is%20not%20grammar,meaning%20to%20readers%20and%20writers.>

Key literacy component: writing. (n.d.). AdLit.

<https://www.adlit.org/topics/writing/key-literacy-component-writing>

Admin-Travis. (2019, June 21).

<https://literacyproj.org/2019/06/21/the-relationship-between-writing-literacy/>

McIlroy, T. (2022).

<https://empoweredparents.co/early-literacy-skills/>

Howley-Rouse, A. (2023).

<https://theeducationhub.org.nz/the-role-of-stories-in-literacy-development/>

Englishcollege. (n.d.).

<https://www.englishcollege.com/what-is-storytelling-promote-language-learning-development#:~:text=Stories%20always%20give%20you%20some,the%20entire%20language%20acquisition%20process>

Developing literacy skills through storytelling. (n.d.).

<https://thetoymakerscottage.school.nz/developing-literacy-skills-through-storytelling/>

Storytelling - benefits and tips. (n.d.).

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/managing-resources/articles/storytelling-benefits-and-tips>

"Social Constructivism | GSI Teaching & Resource Center", 2017.

Study.com. (n.d.).

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/social-constructivism-and-the-mediated-learning-experience.html>

Walden University. (2024).

<https://www.waldenu.edu/online-masters-programs/ms-in-education/resource/six-principles-of-constructivist-learning>

Research gate. (n.d.).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234561370_The_Role_of_Storytelling_in_Early_Literacy_Development

Superadmin. (2023). Promoting Early Literacy Skills Through Storytelling, Reading, Phonics And Experiences. - Robyn Taylor Child Development & Education Centres. Robyn Taylor Child Development & Education Centres.
<https://www.robryntaylor.com.au/promoting-early-literacy-skills-through-storytelling-reading-phonics-and-experiences/>

Ingov, P. (2022). Storytelling Development:

Language and literacy for kids. ingoStudio.

<https://ingostudio.com/storytelling/storytelling-development/>

ELT News. (2023). HOW GRAMMAR AND STORYTELLING MEET – ELT NEWS.

[https://eltnews.gr/post/how-grammar-and-storytelling-](https://eltnews.gr/post/how-grammar-and-storytelling-meet/#:~:text=Story%20based%20grammar%20description%20throws,helps%20explain%20the%20language%20system.-)

[meet/#:~:text=Story%20based%20grammar%20description%20throws,helps%20explain%20the%20language%20system.-](https://eltnews.gr/post/how-grammar-and-storytelling-meet/#:~:text=Story%20based%20grammar%20description%20throws,helps%20explain%20the%20language%20system.-)