A Story-Telling Approach to Teaching English to Young EFL Iranian Learners

Farzaneh Kalantari[1] & Mahmood Hashemian[1]

[1] Department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

Correspondence: Mahmood Hashemian, Department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran. Tel: 98-913-266-3269. E-mail: m72h@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the effects of the storytelling approach on improving of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge. To this end, 30 upper-beginner EFL learners (out of a population of 134) were selected by means of an OPT test and were assigned to 2 groups: 1 experimental and 1 group. The participants were selected from among young EFL learners who were between 8 and 14 years old. They had already registered for English classes in Paya Language Center, Isfahan, Iran. As for the materials, they were mainly prepared by the teacher/researcher. Based on the units of *Backpack* books—taught in Paya Language Center—some stories were prepared and adopted by the teacher/researcher along with a visual presentation using the PowerPoint software. In carrying out the study, the participants were taught the key vocabulary via pictures and gestures. Once the participants had identified the new words, the teacher started telling and introducing the stories. While reading the stories, the teacher directed the participants' attention to the PowerPoint presentation that included the visual representation of the story to facilitate the comprehension process. After the treatment, there was a posttest to assess the participants' improvement. Results of data analysis revealed that the storytelling approach to teaching vocabulary proved effective for the experimental group. All the experimental group participants experienced a significantly meaningful increase in their vocabulary knowledge, compared to the control group. Finally, there was a boost in the interest rate of the experimental group participants in terms of motivation.

Keywords: language teaching, motivation rate, storytelling approach, vocabulary knowledge

1. Introduction

The educational value of using stories and the technique of storytelling have always been undisputed throughout the world. Nowadays, more and more EFL teachers of young learners are using carefully selected stories from the world of children's literature because stories provide appealing materials for young learners linguistically, psychologically, cognitively, socially, and culturally (Celce-Murcia, 2001). EFL teachers use stories to supplement their core materials or to create self-contained units of work that constitute mini-syllabuses (Brown, 2007). In this way, a story provides the starting point and rich context to develop a wide variety of related language and learning activities involving children creatively and actively in an all-round whole curriculum approach (Ellis & Brewster, 2002).

Besides, the analysis of the stories can be a potential tool to improve more critical awareness towards social relation in the society (Faircloth, 2009). Most notably, using a story-telling approach in Iran may help EFL learners use their imaginations and learn the participants being taught more enthusiastically. This can, in turn, lead to a better learning outcome on the part of EFL learners—in this case, young EFL learners.

Children are considered natural language learners; according to the natural approach (Krashen, 1982), they can learn faster and with much less difficulty than adults, but they should be exposed to natural learning environments, and to special teaching practices that make learning a meaningful, enjoyable, and lifelong process. Teaching should be focused on children and on the development of their communicative skills that will enable them to communicate meanings and messages in real social contexts (Faircloth, 2009).

Some outstanding methods such as the total physical response and the natural approach help children learn the language in such a way (Roof & Kreutter, 2010). The natural approach which is more comprehensive is based on the following five hypotheses: the input hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the acquisition-learning

hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

For the present study, the input hypothesis takes great importance because beginner- level students develop receptive skills before starting to produce the language. The quantity and quality of the input children receive during their first learning stage are really important because they help them lay the foundation for their future learning (Ray & Seely, 2004). This is the reason why EFL teachers should give the learners a number of qualitative input, which means that children should be surrounded by lots of listening and reading materials that will allow them to get familiar with the new language. This input should be comprehensible, natural, and meaningful and should be introduced little by little (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Two main sources from which EFL learners receive input are listening and reading. As a result, storytelling becomes a powerful strategy in the early stages of language development, because it provides EFL learners with a lot of interesting and enriching input. Essig (2005) and Katsuhiko (2002) have reported that the sharing of personal stories can have a positive impact on language learning.

2. Literature Review

The literature on a storytelling approach majorly stems from teaching literacy in the first language. For L1, several studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of the use of storytelling as a pedagogical strategy.

In a study by Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, and Lowrance (2004), the researchers studied the impact of storytelling and reading stories on the development of language and comprehension of children, aged 3-5. The participants were divided into two groups, but the same 24 stories were heard by all the students. The first group had the stories told to them. The second group listened to the stories as they were read from a book. The results showed that both groups benefited from their instruction. The group who heard the stories told experienced greater comprehension as demonstrated in their retelling of the stories. The storytelling group was more able to identify the setting, the moral of the story, and the characters from the stories. They concluded that storytellers tend to use more repetition, sounds, and gestures than a person merely reading a story.

Mello (2001) also conducted a meta-analysis of eight studies regarding the use of storytelling as a pedagogical strategy. Her analysis included information from postinterviews along with the data taken from student retellings, measures of fluency, and writing samples. The study (Mello) demonstrated that the literacy of the participants was enhanced in the academic areas of fluency, vocabulary acquisition, writing, and recall. Additionally, she found that storytelling served to improve self-awareness, visual imagery, and cultural knowledge.

The literacy studies affected by storytelling were extended to EFL learning, too, and some scholars tried to use a story telling approach in teaching an EFL. Among these, Hemenover (2003) used stories to enhance the proficiency of EFL learners, and he found that the learners' psychological stress can be decreased and their resilient self-image also can be fostered by sharing personal stories in a safe and trusting environment in the classroom.

Cortazzi and Jin (2007) also tracked the progress of a group of young EFL learners who were using keywords and story maps to tell and retell simple stories, both in their L1 and in English. They concluded that the EFL learners benefited from telling their personal stories.

Moreover, Martinez (2007) used some stories to arouse interest and increase motivation among EFL learners. At the end of the study, favorable results were observed. The students were motivated throughout the study, participating in exercises and fulfilling all assigned expectations. Not only did they like the idea of working through a story, but their attitude towards the course book also changed as activities were presented in different and creative ways. He concluded that when following a story-based approach, unit topics must be meaningful, as this approach provides students with a link between their experiences and interests and the English language.

In addition, Gonzalez (2010) carried out a study in a Colombian public elementary school in Bucaramanga, Colombia. During the research, the student-teachers were required to plan the course syllabus, create their own stories according to the children's interests and likes, plan the lessons, and collect and analyze data. Although the student-teachers worked in different grade levels, the results of the study presented similarities such as the children's motivation when the stories were told or read, increased participation in the different activities, comprehension of the stories, and acquisition of the new vocabulary.

Finally, Nguyen, Stanley, and Stanley (2014) explored how storytelling was used in teaching Chinese as a second/foreign language (CSL/FL) in China. The participants took a teacher or student survey about their interests, the practice, benefits, and challenges of doing storytelling in the CSL/FL classroom. The results of the

survey indicated that the participants were interested in storytelling because of the perceived benefits of language learning, comprehension, community building, and multicultural understanding.

3. Statement of the Problem

Teaching EFL does not simply consist of giving instruction to EFL learners in the development of linguistic elements, but also helping them understand sociocultural aspects, enabling them to engage in real and effective communication. One way to expose students to sociocultural differences is through the use of literature. According to Duff and Maley (1990), the use of literature in the classroom offers advantages of (a) offering a wide range of styles, and vocabulary, (b) dealing with matters that concern children and are related to their personal experiences, and (c) being familiar with multiple interpretations and opinions, bringing about genuine interaction and participation in the classroom.

Castro (2002) reports on a study carried out in Colombia and stresses that "listening to stories develops children's listening and concentration skills and their ability to receive and understand information expressed in words. Besides, with the stories children develop learning strategies such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning and hypothesizing" (p. 52).

However to the researcher's best knowledge, teaching English to kids through stories in language schools in Iran is a job that has been haphazard. English in many institutes can be taught by people with low English language proficiency and little language teaching background. This situation is affecting the quality of the English programs. In order to make this situation a little better for private language centers, the researcher decided to implement a pedagogical proposal for teaching English to young language learners to bridge this gap. Hence, the fundamental purpose of the proposal is focused on teaching English in a fun and meaningful way for EFL learners. Based on the literature, few studies (e.g., Gonzalez, 2010) have put a storytelling approach into practice which highlights the urge for the implementation of story reading and storytelling as a teaching tool for teaching English to young learners. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to use story storytelling to teach English to young learners in a fun and meaningful way.

Unfortunately, there are few studies (if any) on teaching EFL via a storytelling approach in the context of Iran. Consequently, in this study, the effectiveness of a storytelling approach along with the participants' feelings and wishes about storytelling in class were investigated.

3.1 Research Questions

In line with the above discussion and for the purpose of this study, the following questions are formulated to be pursued:

1) Does a storytelling approach help improve young Iranian EFL learners' English vocabulary knowledge?

2) Can the storytelling approach make young EFL learners more interested in learning the L2?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The participants were selected from among young EFL learners who had registered for English classes in Paya Language Center, Isfahan, Iran. Sixty upper-beginner level learners were selected based on the institute's placement test. They were all low-intermediate learners of English between 10 and 14 years old. This proficiency level was chosen as a majority of young language learners in Isfahan and, specifically in Paya Language Center, are young upper- beginner learners. This study intended to help improve young language learners' proficiency level and to enhance their learning quality. To this end, two groups were formed: one experimental and one control group, each with 30 participant. However, the learners were divided into four groups: two experimental and two control groups.

4.2 Materials and Instruments

The materials were mainly prepared by the teacher/researcher. Based on the units of *Backpack* books taught in this study, some stories were prepared by the teacher/researcher along with a visual presentation using the PowerPoint software. Thus, the data-show hardware was required in the classroom. Moreover, the teacher's notes were used to compare the interest and motivation of the participants in class activities. Finally, a standard posttest for the *Backpack* series was used at the end of the semester.

4.3 Procedure

At the beginning of the study, all of the participants were chosen by Paya Language Center's placement test. After the selection process, the parents of the experimental EFL learners were notified that their children would

be taught by a different approach, and they would sign a consent form prepared by the researcher. For the study itself, the lesson plan for the experimental group had three sections: preteaching, while-teaching, and postteaching stages.

In the prestorytelling stage, the teacher arranged the classroom for storytelling. Before reading the stories, the participants received interesting and comprehensible input through the teacher's talk, games, reading, and listening activities which helped them to become familiar with the new language. These were prepared by the teacher in advance. During this time, the participants learned the key vocabulary via pictures and gestures. Once the participants had identified the new words, the teacher started telling the story.

In the while-storytelling stage, the teacher introduced the stories. While reading them, the teacher directed the participants' attention to the PowerPoint presentation which included the visual representation of the story to facilitate the comprehension process. The teacher introduced the story by making comments, gestures, and asking the participants about it in order to assess their prior knowledge. While telling the story, the teacher asked the participants to point to the words and to show the pictures to make connections between the story and illustrations.

In the poststorytelling stage, the teacher played vocabulary games with the participants and asked them to role-play the story by memorizing the dialogues. According to Curtain and Dahlberg (2004), this can help improve the proficiency level of the students to a great extent, as it can help the acquisition of different grammatical points along with the new words.

4.4 Data Analysis

After administrating the test at the end of the treatment, the raw scores were submitted to the SPSS 16 software for further analysis. Then, a one way-ANOVA was employed in order to analyze the collected data and to find out if the treatment was effective and helpful. For the second research question, the teacher's notes regarding the interest of the participants to participate in class activities were analyzed and compared in all classes to see how they were different.

5. Results

5.1 Phase One

There were 30 upper beginner participants in this study who were chosen from a pool of 134 students who had registered for English classes in Paya Language Center in Isfahan. Prior to launching study, the participants were given the OPT, which contains two sections: Section One was on grammar and vocabulary with 100 multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions, and Section Two was on testing students' listening comprehension with 100 questions. For the present study, the participants were only given the first part which was on grammar and vocabulary. The results then were subjected to statistical analysis, using the SPSS package, version 16, which converts continuous numeric data to a discrete number of categories. The procedure creates new variables containing the categorical data. The data were categorized based on percentile groups, with the groups containing approximately the same number of cases. Based on the results of the OPT, then, two groups were formed: one experimental group and one control group with each containing 15 EFL students. The results of the OPT are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1:

Table 1. OPT Results for Both Groups

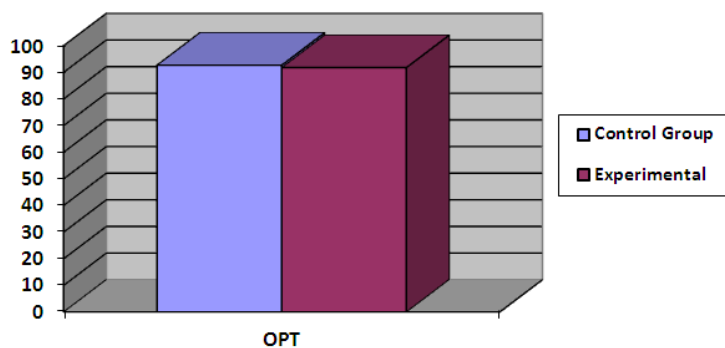| Groups	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental Group	15	92.64	2.01
Control Group	15	91.74	1.94
Total	30	91.53	3.21

Figure 1. Mean scores of two groups on OPT

As seen in Table 1 and Figure 1, both groups had a similar performance rate according to which were randomly assigned to two separate groups in line with the procedure above: The Control group consisted of 15 upper beginner EFL learners, with a mean of 92.64; and the Experimental group also included 15 upper beginner learners, with a mean of 91.74. It should be mentioned that based on OPT associated rating level, the learners who score a mean of 90 to 104 should be assigned to the Elementary Limited User Level or as mentioned in this study the upper beginner level.

5.1.1 Results of Pretest for Both Groups

The results from the pretest exam were statistically analyzed. An independent samples t test was run to investigate the vocabulary knowledge of the participants on the vocabulary test. This t test was intended to compare the obtained mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups. Group statistics and the results of the t test are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively:

Table 2. Results of pretest exam given to both groups

	Storytelling	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental Group	15	11.00	2.45	.63
	Control Group	15	11.06	2.57	.66

Given the information in Table 2, it can clearly be seen that the mean score obtained on the pretest for the control group learners (11.0667) is negligibly higher than the one obtained on the pretest for the experimental group learners (11.000). The mean scores on the pretest for both groups indicate that all participants were almost homogeneous at the outset of the study. However, an independent samples t test was run to ensure that the observed differences were not significant. Table 3 shows if there is any significant difference between the means of the two groups:

Table 3. Independent smples *t* Test for both groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t* Test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	*Sig.*	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal Variances Assumed	.01	.90	-.073	28	.94	-.06	.91	-1.94	1.81
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			-.073	27.92	.94	-.06	.91	-1.94	1.81

As shown in Table 3, the results from the pretest scores show there is no significant difference between the means. Because *p* value is more than *α*, there is no significant difference between the means of the pretest scores.

5.1.2 Results of Posttest for Experimental and Control Groups

The performance of the control and experimental groups on the posttest was also analyzed using an independent samples *t* test statistical procedure. The participants' vocabulary scores were calculated and their improvement on the posttest was compared. The detailed analysis is demonstrated in the following section:

Table 4. Results of posttest exam given to both groups

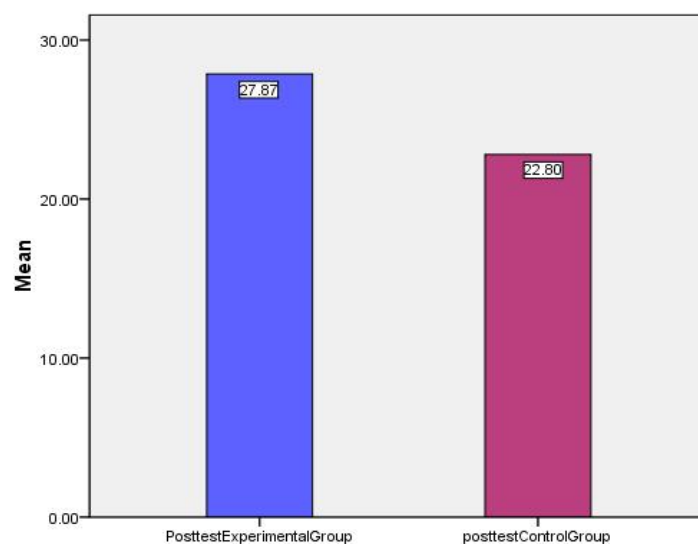|	Storytelling	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Experimental Group	15	27.86	2.03	.52
	Control Group	15	22.80	2.88	.74

Figure 2. Mean scores of two groups on vocabulary test

As demonstrated in Figure 2 and Table 4, the mean score obtained on the vocabulary posttest for the

experimental group learners (27.87) is higher than the one obtained on the pretest for the control group learners (22.80). The mean score on the pretest for both groups indicates that all participants had made some improvements as the result of the treatments at the end of the study. However, an independent samples *t* test was run to establish whether or not the differences between the mean scores are statistically meaningful.

Table 5. Independent samples *t* Test for control and experimental groups

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | *t* Test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
		F	*Sig.*	*t*	*df*	*Sig.* (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal Variances Assumed	2.10	.15	5.56	28	.00	5.06	.91	3.20	6.93
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			5.56	25.14	.00	5.06	.91	3.19	6.94

As can be seen in Table 5, the results from the posttest vocabulary scores indicates that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants in their performances on the posttest ($t = 5.56$, $df = 28$, $\alpha = 0.05$, $p = 0.00$). Because *p* value is less than *α*, there is a significant difference between the means of the posttest scores in favor of the experimental group, and the null hypothesis below is rejected:

There is no relationship between a storytelling approach and the improvement of young Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge.

However in addition to the analyses conducted so far, two matched *t* test statistical analyses were also conducted to see how much the experimental and control group participants improved in the course of time and after the treatment by being compared with their performance on the pretest.

5.1.3 Results of Vocabulary Improvement of Experimental Group

The raw scores from the pretest and the posttest vocabulary exams were statistically analyzed. A matched *t* test was conducted to find out about the improvement of vocabulary knowledge of the participants after the treatment. This *t* test was intended to compare the obtained mean scores of the participants of the experimental group on the pre and posttest. Group statistics and the results of the *t* test are presented in Tables 6 and 7, respectively:

Table 6. Descriptive data for experimental group

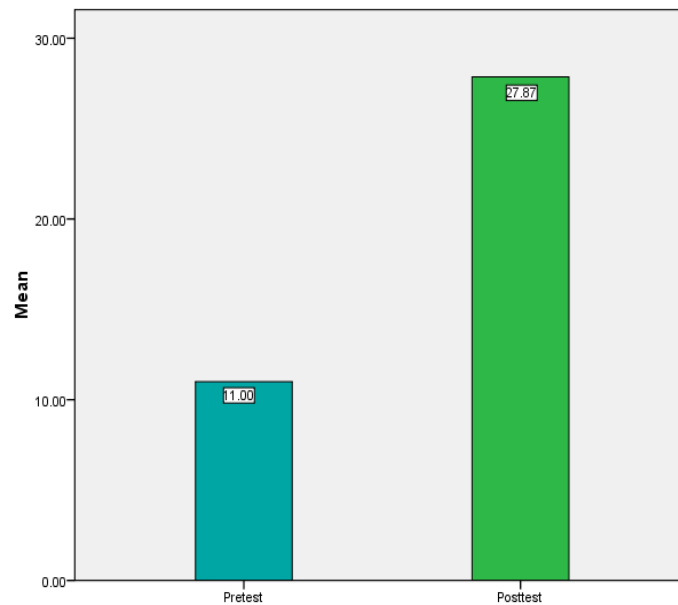|		Mean	*N*	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	11.00	15	2.44	.63
	Posttest	27.86	15	2.03	.52

Figure 3. Mean scores of experimental groups on pre/postvocabulary tests

As illustrated in Figure 3 and Table 6, the mean score achieved on the vocabulary posttest for the experimental group learners (27.87) is much bigger than the one obtained on the pretest (11.000). The mean scores on the pre and posttest indicate that all participants had made some improvements as the result the treatments at the end of the study. However, a matched t test was conducted to investigate if the differences between the mean scores are statistically meaningful.

Table 7. Matched t test for experimental group

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	*Sig.* (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-1.68E1	2.29	.592	-18.13	-15.59	-28.46	14	.00

As can be seen in Table 7, the results from the pre/posttest vocabulary scores indicate that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants in their performances on the test ($t = -28.46$, $df = 14$, $\alpha = 0.05$, $p = 0.00$). Because p value is less than α, there is a significant difference between the means of the pre and posttest scores indicating a meaningful improvement on the part of the experimental group subjects, and the null hypothesis below is therefore rejected:

H_{01}: There is no relationship between a storytelling approach and the improvement of young Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge

5.1.4 Results of Vocabulary Improvement of Control Group

Similar to the previous data analysis for the experimental group, the results from the pre and posttest exams were statistically analyzed. A matched t test was run to investigate the vocabulary knowledge of the participants on the pre and posttests. This t test was meant to compare the obtained mean scores of the participants in the control group. Group statistics and the results of the matched t test are presented in Tables 8 and 9, respectively:

Table 8. Descriptive data for control group

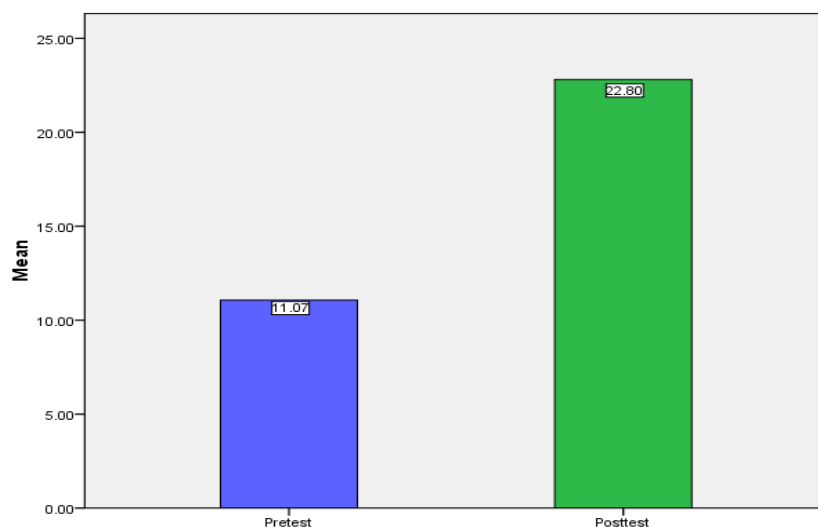|		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	11.06	15	2.57	.66
	Posttest	22.80	15	2.88	.74

Figure 4. Mean scores of control groups on vocabulary test

As demonstrated in Figure 4 and Table 8, the mean score obtained on the vocabulary posttest for the control group learners (22.80) is higher than the one obtained on the pretest (11.07). The mean scores on the pre and posttests for the control group point out that all participants had made some improvements after the study but the improvement was not as big as the one made by the experimental group learners . However, a matched t test was performed to establish whether or not the differences between the mean scores are significant.

Table 9. Matched t test for experimental group

		Paired Differences					t	df	*Sig*. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-1.68E1	2.29	.59	-18.13	-15.59	-36.46	11	.030

As shown in Table 9, the results from the pre and posttest scores demonstrate that there is a significant difference between the means of the performances of the control group learners on pre and posttests (t = -.36.46, df = 14, α = 0.05 and p = 0.03). Because value is less than $α$, there is a significant difference between the means of the pretest scores.

However, as presented in the previous sections (see 4.1.2), although a significant improvement for the control group was recorded, this group was outperformed by the performance of the experimental group which had enjoyed a storytelling approach as their teaching method; hence, the null hypothesis below is rejected:

H_{02}: There is no relationship between a storytelling approach and the improvement of young Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge.

5.2 Phase Two

5.2.1 Results of Improvement of Interest Rate Boost Among Experimental Group Learners

After collecting the data on the interest rate of the participants in the current study, to answer the second research question being "Can the storytelling approach make young EFL learners more interested in learning the EFL", the researcher analyzed the notes taken regarding the interest rate of the EFL learners and the record of the participants' possible improvement in their attitudes and interest rates during the treatments. The results are reported in Table 10. All of the changes regarding the interest rate of the participants were documented by the researcher. Each participant had a different entry in the teacher's notebook. Besides, the improvements which were made during the treatment were recorded and a pattern was worked out of them which can be seen in Table 10:

Table 10. Experimental group learners' interest rate improvement

Students' Names	Before Treatment	After Treatment
Mahana Shojae	a lot	a lot
Parisa Shafie	average	a lot
Melika Rezai	average	a lot
Raha Rezai	a lot	a lot
Mahtab Hosseini	average	a lot
Aida Jafari	average	a lot
Aida Mohamadi	average	a lot
Hedie Bakhshi	average	a lot
Samin Soleimani	average	a lot
Samane Rezai	average	a lot
Fatemeh Hasomian	average	a lot
Kimia Moeini	average	a lot
Fatemeh Dehghan	a lot	a lot
Sogol Digari	average	a lot
Hasti Khabazi	average	a lot

Based on the information observed in Table 10, almost all of the students had recorded a boost in their interest rate except three whose names are Mahana, Raha, and Fatemeh. These EFL learners were already motivated and interested enough for learning an EFL. The interest rates were recorded based on parents' comments and the participants' enthusiasm in the class. However, the remaining EFL participants who had an average interest rate, documented a jump in their interest rate via a storytelling approach to teaching an EFL.

Most of the participants' parents reported that their children were very eager to participate in English classed after being taught through the storytelling approach. Therefore, based on the data documentation and analyses, it can be concluded that the null hypothesis below was rejected:

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between using a storytelling approach and the boost in the interest rate of young EFL learners

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Storytelling is an approach that is worth pursuing in teaching English as an EFL in classes in the Iranian context. EFL learners' ability to get the gist, to recognize characters, and to summarize what they listen to through the storytelling technique is important. By applying the storytelling technique, class environment changes from a dry, boring one to a warm environment full of student concentration, participation and production. In this study, the researcher tried to investigate the use of the storytelling approach. By reviewing the previous empirical studies which had investigated the effect of storytelling on the learning/teaching process, Yang (2011)came up with a few points related to storytelling which are as follow: (a) having superiority over the traditional method in

teaching listening comprehension, (b) providing EFL learners with a better learning environment which was reflected on their scores, (c) being very effective in motivating the learners towards participation and interaction, (d) providing EFL learners with the enjoyment and pleasure that affects their achievement positively, (e) being an excellent teaching technique because it evokes students' interest, help students create vivid mental images and stories activating the thinking process, and (f) making connections in events and concepts that help EFL students better understand and later recall information.

Following what Martinez (2007) mentioned, opening a lesson with a story may also put EFL students at ease and allow them to understand something concrete before going on to the related abstract concept. Depending on the age of EFL students, storytelling can be used in almost any subject area such as English and history. Traditional storytelling has always been used to share traditions and entertainment in different generations through which EFL learners can get involved and can even participate in class stories. According to Krashen (2011), storytelling is an excellent means of introducing children to the wonderful world of books and building positive attitudes for reading. The exposure to oral language patterns helps developing children's listening sub skills. Moreover, storytelling allows the child to create images in his or her imagination, evoking their imagination as well as empowering EFL students to consider new ideas as a result of which self-confidence and personal motivation is built (Krashen, 2011). Storytelling can also change the difficult ideas into easy ones and make the abstract language teachable. Hence, storytelling is an effective strategy that incorporates the aesthetic ways of knowing into instruction. In addition to improving the academic performance of EFL students in all areas, storytelling also has the ability to enhance the arts in education and motivate children to connect with their learning (Yang, 2011).

As such, the present study put in efforts to see if the comprehension of a story is positively pertinent to the ability of learning new words in relation with EFL learners' proficiency level. Therefore, the followings were the research questions of this study:

1) Does the storytelling approach help improve young Iranian EFL learners' English vocabulary knowledge?

2) Can the storytelling approach make young EFL learners more interested in learning the EFL?

To answer the first two questions, the researchers analyzed the data taken from the participants who were 30 male and female EFL learners (out of a population of 129) selected by means of the OPT test and were assigned to one experimental and one control group. The participants were selected from among young EFL learners who were between the age range of 8 and 14. The participants were, then, taught the key vocabulary of some stories via pictures and gestures. Afterwards, their vocabulary knowledge was put to test by some teacher-made tests as the pretest and the posttest. Therefore, the objective of the research was to gain a better insight into finding the achievement of EFL learners via the storytelling approach to teaching new embedded in the reading texts.

Hence, the presence of the storytelling approach helped improved the vocabulary knowledge of the experimental group participants more compared to the control group participants because they had developed a steadier and more dynamic interaction with the stories and new words to derive the intended message. At this age, young EFL learners are assumed to have the capability of picking up new words unconsciously as a byproduct of doing something else, in this case, listening to a story (Krashen, 2011). This attractive process of listening to a storyline and comprehending the idea of the story is what keeps young EFL learners focused and, therefore, superior to those who have to learns new words via traditional methods of learning.

Based on the analysis of the data from the vocabulary posttest, it was revealed that the use of children's stories to develop vocabulary among the experimental group participants was effective and was perceived positively by them. To some extent, this result reflects the effectiveness of storytelling to develop EFL students' vocabulary, which is claimed to be the most important element in EFL learning.

The above finding is consistent with an earlier study conducted by Abrashid (2011) and Soleimani and Akbari (2013) who reported that children's storytelling approach had a positive effect on the vocabulary learning of less proficient young adults. Moreover, Mohamed Rafik (2005), who had investigated the effects of storytelling on elementary EFL students, reported that storytelling enhanced the vocabulary learning of the elementary students. Besides, the findings accord with Joyce (2011) who had studied the effects of song picture books on the vocabulary acquisition of kindergarten children and, as a result, mentioned that using song picture books, which most of times narrates a story, helps the vocabulary acquisition of kindergarten students.

In line with Eisner (1985), in the pursuit of lifelong literacy, we must remember that, "the enduring outcomes of education are found in…the joy of the ride, not merely arriving at the destination" (p. 35). Hopefully, Eisner's vision will be embraced as teachers find ways to implement storytelling in the classroom and researchers continue to study the benefits of this pedagogical approach. As EFL students listen to stories, they experience the

authentic use of English because they have to use the kind of language appropriate for their stories and audience to relate to the theme of their stories.

In an agreement with Richards (2006), it is clear that the storytelling approach fosters natural communication in the English language classroom by allowing EFL students to experience and experiment with the authentic use of English language, a basic concept that communicative language teaching emphasizes. With storytelling, students are surrounded by the English language in the classroom and that makes it easy to learn new words.

Moreover, another justification for the superiority of the storytelling approach may be attributed to the fact that EFL students were given the opportunity to listen to stories orally and via visual supports (i.e., PowerPoint) which gave them the advantage of developing a deeper understanding of the words.

Apropos of question # 2, the experimental group participants demonstrated a remarkably meaningful improvement in terms of their interest rate. In the analysis of the data, it was revealed that almost all of the participants had recorded a boost in their interest rate except for three of them.

A possible explanation for the results achieved above can be the fact that the three participants who did not show an increase were already motivated and interested enough for learning an EFL. However, the remaining EFL participants who had an average interest rate documented a jump in their motivation via a storytelling approach to teaching EFL.

The results are in concord with Brown (2007) who points outs that, as we look for ways to bring communicative teaching onto our English language classrooms, we must remember the goals that true education is not simply learning specific knowledge, but rather occurs when EFL students' learning ability is developed. EFL students should be provided with set of tools for thinking and creating. So, EFL teachers should take advantage of a storytelling approach (Ross, 2000) and use storytelling to develop our students' competence to think clearly and creatively and express their understanding in diverse ways.

Storytelling also promoted learning taking place in a more natural, meaningful, and interactive context, motivating students to connect with their learning and creating the opportunity for them to use English in the classroom to express themselves appropriately according to the situation. Above all, storytelling boosts EFL students' confidence to face challenges and bring their inner imaginative and creativity to the forefront (González, 2010).

The outcomes of the study also support the assertions of Haven (2000) that storytelling motivates EFL students to be active learners, for they are engaged in a meaningful activity in the class. However, the study does not claim that storytelling and story writing are the only teaching strategies that enhance the potential of learning new words, nor does it claim to have found the single solution to changing the current dearth of an effective vocabulary approach in English classes in Iran.

References

Abrashid, R. (2012). Vocabulary learning among less proficient young adults using children's Stories. *Mextesol Journal, 35*(1), 15-28.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Burling. (1982). *Literature in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Castro, M. (2002). The magic world of storytelling: Some points for reflection. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 3*, 52-54.

Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Language teaching approaches: Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. US: Heinle & Heinle.

Cooper, P. J., Collins, R., & Saxby, M. (1992). *The power of story*. Melbourne: MacMillan.

Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (2007). Narrative learning, EAL and metacognitive development. *Early Child Development and Care*, 645-660. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430701379074

Curtain, H., & Dahlberg, C. A. (2004). *Languages and children: Making the match*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Duff, A., & Maley, A. (1990). *Literature: Resource books for teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eisner, E. (1985). Aesthetic modes of knowing. In E. Eisner (Ed.), *Learning and teaching the ways of knowing: Eighty-fourth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ellis, R. (2002). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, N., & Beaton, A. (1995). Psycholinguistic determinants of foreign language vocabulary learning. In B. Harley (Ed.), *Lexical issues in language learning* (pp. 107-165). Amsterdam: Language Learning Publishing Co.

Ellis, G., & Brewster, J. (2002). *The storytelling handbook for primary English language teachers.*

Essig, W. (2005). Storytelling: Effects of planning, repetition and context. In C. Edwards & J. Willis (Eds.), *Teachers exploring tasks in English language teaching* (pp. 201-213). Houndmills, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Faircloth, G. (2009). *A qualitative study/counter-story telling: A counter-narrative of literacy education for African-American males*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Miami University.

Gonzalez, N. I. P. (2010). Teaching English through stories: A meaningful and fun way for children to learn the language. *Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 12*(1) 95-106.

Haven, K. F. (2000). *Super simple storytelling: A can-do guide for every classroom, every day*. Englewood, Colo: Teacher Ideas Press.

Hemenover, S. H. (2003b). The good, the bad, and the healthy: Impacts of emotional disclosure of trauma on resilient self-concept and psychological distress. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29*, 1236-1244. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167203255228

Hill, M. (1994). A word in your ear: To what extent does hearing a new word help learners to remember it? In N. Bird, P. Falvey, A. B. M. Tsui, D. M. Allison, & A. McNeill (Eds.), *Language and learning* (pp. 447-462). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Department.

Isbell, R., Sobol, J., Lindauer, L., & Lowrance, A. (2004). The effects of storytelling and story reading on the oral language complexity and story comprehension of young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 3*(3), 63-157. http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/b:ecej.0000048967.94189.a3

Katsuhiko, S. (2002). One Japanese SHS teacher's story of storytelling. *The Language Teacher, 26*(2), 67-178.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Krashen, S. (2011). The Goodman-Smith hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the comprehension hypothesis and the (even stronger) case for free voluntary reading. In P. Anders (Ed.), *Defying convention, inventing the future in literacy research and practice: Essays in tribute to Ken and Yetta Goodman* (pp. 56-99). New York: Routledge.

Krashen, S. (2002). The great phonemic awareness debate. *WSRA Journal, 44*(2), 51-55.

Krashen, S. D., & Terrell, T. (1983). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom.* Hayward, CA: Alemany Press.

Martinez, B. I. (2007). A story-based approach to teaching English. *Encuentro, 17*, 52-56.

Mello, R. (2001). Building bridges: How storytelling influences teacher and student relationships. *The Journal of Higher Education, 17*(6), 301-307.

Mohamed, R. F. (2005). Storytelling and vocabulary acquisition at the elementary level. *Educational Journal, 28*(2), 37-51.

Nguyen, K., Stanley, N., & Stanley, L. (2014). Storytelling in teaching Chinese as second/foreign languages. *Linguistics and Literature Studies, 2*(1), 29-38.

Ray, B., & Seely, C. (2004). *Fluency through TPR storytelling: Achieving real language acquisition in school* (2nd ed.). U.S.: Command Performance Language Institute, Blaine Ray Workshops.

Ray, B., & Seely, C. (2008). An interactive storytelling puzzle: Building a positive environment in a second language classroom. Networks*: An Online Journal for Teacher Research, 12*(1), 1-10.

Richards, J. C. (2006). Materials development and research-Making the connection. *RELC Journal, 37(*1), 5-26. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688206063470

Roof, L. M., & Kreutter, C. A. (2010). An interactive storytelling puzzle: Building a positive environment in a second language classroom. Networks*: An Online Journal for Teacher Research, 12*(1), 1-10.

Soleimani, H., & Akbari, M. (2013). The Effect of Storytelling on Children's Learning English Vocabulary: A Case in Iran. *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences, 4(*11), 4005-4014.

Yang, J. (2011). Storytelling as a teaching method in ESL classrooms. *Applied Linguistics, 2*, 159-169.

Copyrights