

Vol. 12, No. 3
pp. 25-49
August &
September
2021

Using Story Retelling to Improve Young Learners' L2 Reading Comprehension

Nguyen Ngoc Vu^{1*} , Pham Thi Ngoc Lan² , & Nguyen Thi Hong Lien³ 

Abstract

Contemporary literature in English language teaching shows some impacts of oral narrations on learners' speaking competence and phonological processing. However, little research has explored the relationship between this methodological practice and young learners' L2 reading comprehension. This paper investigates the effect which story retelling has on young English learners' comprehension of reading. The researchers employed quantitative and qualitative approaches. Forty children were chosen from two different classes of a comparable level of proficiency and assigned into two groups for a two-month treatment. The results show that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the reading comprehension posttest. The questionnaire and observation data also indicated that the children responded positively to story retelling and that story retelling brought about excitement in the reading class, motivated young learners to read as well as shaped young learners' behaviours and attitudes. This study suggests using story retelling more often in L2 language programs for young learners.

Keywords: oral narration, reading comprehension, second language acquisition, story retelling, young learners

1. Corresponding author, Associate Professor of Linguistics, Hoa Sen University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Email: vu.nguyennhoc@hoasen.edu.vn;

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3592-7813>

2. Lecturer of English, University of Finance-Marketing, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam;

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6976-467X>

3. Lecturer of English, Hoa Sen University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam;

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4635-8927>

1. Introduction

Reading has long been an important skill to master for any actively productive member of society. The widespread availability of information made available by the Internet has made reading comprehension more important than ever, and schools all over the world are trying to upgrade their curriculum with more focus on reading skills. In this context, Vietnamese language schools and institutions are trying to innovate their teaching approaches to build language competency more effectively for their learners (Vu et al., 2020). A lot of language teachers are finding ways to help their young learners build motivation and develop language ability more effectively. To meet this challenge, storytelling is proposed as an approach to the teaching of mainstream reading. Among the many reasons why stories can promote reading fluency, Wright et al. (2008) emphasize that fluency is based on positive attitudes and even children who do not understand everything become experts at “searching for meaning, predicting, and guessing”. Therefore, it is essential for successful lessons to depend on the stories. Wright et al. (2008) also suggest that the right story could engage children to help them understand well, provide a rich experience including values, perceptions, behaviors and serve the teacher’s language-teaching purpose. In the same view, Pellowski (1990, p. 23) claims that storytelling is an art form which exists along with our history, and its storytellers breathed life into human culture: “Storytelling is the art or craft of narration of stories in verse and/or prose, as performed or led by one person before a live audience; the stories narrated may be spoken, chanted, or sung, with or without musical, pictorial, and/or other accompaniment and may be learned from oral, printed, or mechanically recorded sources; one of its purposes may be that of entertainment.” In addition, stories can help preserve human heritage, traditions, skills and develop the imagination that is at the heart of human experience (Pellowski, 1990).

Recognizing the above benefits, during the past seven years, teacher training centers in Vietnam have been delivering many training workshops for storytelling to young learners of English. Storytelling together with games and songs are also important parts of the pre-service teacher training curriculums. The increasingly widespread practice of storytelling in language classes for young learners demands stronger research-based guidelines. However, the research area of storytelling, especially the impact of storytelling on reading comprehension is still left underexplored in the Vietnamese context. To fill this gap, this research aims

to investigate how storytelling helps young language learners with their reading comprehension by raising two questions:

1. To what extent is storytelling effective in improving young English learners' reading comprehension?
2. What are the young English learners' perceptions towards storytelling?

It is hoped that the study's findings enrich our understanding of the effectiveness of storytelling for developing reading competency, as well as provide suggestions for good storytelling class sessions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Storytelling and the Input Hypothesis

The Input-Hypothesis by Krashen (1985) attempts to explain how second language acquisition should take place. According to the hypothesis, the natural order of learning is one step beyond one's linguistic competence. For example, if a learner is currently at stage "i", then he or she should be exposed to "comprehensible input" that belongs to stage "i+1" for the most effective learning to take place. Because not all learners are the same, Krashen emphasizes that natural communicative input is the key to designing syllabuses.

Stories are a comprehensive input of real spoken and written language in use, facilitating teachers and enabling learners to use language and motivating the process of learning with a rich source of ideas. A substantial amount of literature has been published on storytelling and reading comprehension. According to Craig et al. (2001), storytelling enhances reading comprehension in ways that "build the capacity of all children to academically succeed" (p.48). Wajnryb (2003) also reviews conditions for language learning, which shows a relationship between stories and language learning. Wajnryb emphasizes the fact that stories appeared a very long time ago, and they offer a naturalistic means of teaching. Since stories are favorable and enjoyable, "thought-provoking qualities of a good story" build up "an educated person's intellectual, emotional and moral development". Because stories are effective at catching people's attention, they act to maintain the culture and thus have a rhetorical function in literature.

There is much proof to show that storytelling is an effective tool in any

language classroom. Miller and Pennycuff (2008) found that "...storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy that can be woven into instruction to increase children's competencies in all areas" (p. 38). Storytelling, teacher's talk, repetition and clarification can be considered as comprehensible inputs (Moon & Maeng, 2012). When language is internalised via listening to stories, children develop positive attitudes to continuing to read other stories in English.

2.2 Story Retelling and Reading Comprehension Development

There is much evidence in the literature to support the use of storytelling in English language acquisition. Ellis and Brewster (2017) point out that "Stories are motivating, challenging and fun and can help develop positive attitudes. They can create a desire to continue reading" (p.114). According to Soltani (2013, p. 594), "storytelling is an effective way to enlarge learners' reading comprehension ...improve the academic performance of children in the areas of reading...". With exposure to stories, children learn the various skills needed to become literate (Hava, 2019). Therefore, storytelling can bring the gift of reading comprehension to young learners. Although storytelling is used in various fields of society, this research aims at one of its treasures in education. Researchers have agreed that storytelling is a powerful teaching and learning tool (McDowell, 2018). Works on the power of storytelling in teaching and learning have been conducted and released a number of benefits. For example, Booth and Barton (2000, p. 91) explicit the importance of storytelling to reading: "through storytelling, children will come to the printed text with a degree of familiarity and certain expectations of story structure, language and patterns." Khaerana and Nurdin (2018) believe in stories' benefits in teaching as they provide authentic language and meaningful contents. Besides, they offer readers a chance to promote literacy and understanding of a story. Due to these reasons, storytelling itself is compared to an extrinsic motivation for continuing reading.

Besides, Wajnryb (2003, p. 57) points out that the value of narrative is to provoke learners' "intellectual, emotional and moral development." Stories are built around the concept of morality, which has developed throughout mankind's history. While listening to stories, children are prone to have positive and negative feelings; children can experience their hate via villains and develop their love of goodness in morally-optimistic endings. Fables and bibles are great examples of

vehicles for transmitting morals and values (Harrison, 2016). Through storytelling, children and even adults can enjoy the beauty of courage, altruism, love and the like. It is obvious that children develop these characteristics while listening to stories.

In conclusion, for language learning purposes, storytelling helps learners to effectively build language aspects like vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar as well as macro-skills like listening, reading, speaking and writing. Exposure to stories receptively (listening and reading) and productively (speaking and writing) gives the scaffolding to language learning (Vitali, 2016). Stories can be used to “teach multitude of language-related concerns: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, the four macro-skills, and all kinds of discussion about content” (Wajnryb, 2003, p. 91). Stories are crucial for children’s linguistic development, as they provide a context for children’s imagination and the chance to meet unfamiliar language (Peres et al., 2018).

2.3 Selecting Stories to Tell

There are a number of issues that the storyteller should consider prior to using them with their children.

Firstly, knowing clearly who the teller is, his or her style and what stories the teller likes can predict the success of storytelling lessons. Each storyteller has different ways to tell a story based upon their experience. Regarding the criteria to select a story to tell, Morgan and Rinvulcri (1984) stress on the story the teller enjoys. Spaulding (2011) states that the story is chosen to tell should be appropriate to one’s “own sense of values, sense of humour, and comfort level with self-exposure.” Frankly speaking, a story would not be the best choice when the teller does not enjoy telling it, does not feel it easy to remember, or does not understand the meaning.

Secondly, it is vital to decide which story to tell, for the success of lessons is much dependent on the material selection. Hence, understanding the types of stories is necessary. Spaulding (2011) lists the following types of stories: folklore (folk and fairy tales), wonder tales, Pourquoi tales, myths, legends, fables, parables, ballads, hero tales, epics, modern fantasy, tall tales, urban legends and personal story. Though each type of story has its own advantages, the teller needs

to decide which type she or he enjoys most, and the appropriate audience.

Lastly, there are other issues like heritage, culture, religion, and versions of stories should be considered (Spaulding, 2011). Avoiding restrictions of culture, religion, and heritage helps the storytelling lessons less risky.

2.4 Previous Studies

The use of storytelling has been exploited widely and thoroughly in education. A case study by Halleck (2007) accesses fourteen second-graders' DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) reading comprehension scores. According to the research, DRA is an assessment tool used to measure and document primary children's development as readers over time. A class of twenty-one children in a northwest Ohio school district is part of the treatment group, but only fourteen children with parental consent forms are chosen to take the pre-and post-treatment DRA scores. The investigation followed by a unit of eight stories with the same procedure attempts to get children to retell stories to each other or in groups of two after the researcher's storytelling. Reading comprehension strategies such as predicting, inferring, visualizing, and questioning as well as storytelling activities, are used in the while-reading phase. Data are analyzed by Excel computer program. Afterward, reading scores are gradually increased. The results of this action research indicate that storytelling in a rich-literacy environment does not have any adverse effects upon children's reading comprehension scores and strengthens reading comprehension.

Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman (2011) conducted a study with 40 Saudi elementary stage children on teacher's storytelling aloud to children during the academic year (2009-2010). A Pre-posttest Control group design is used, and data are collected within almost one semester. All the male participants from Al-Riyadh Educational District were chosen randomly and divided into two groups of twenty children each. The authors claimed that storytelling at the elementary level has a positive impact on reading comprehension and that the curriculum can build around stories to gain more interest and interesting comprehensible input to children. However, this technique of reading stories out loud is very traditional; the study suggests more research in the field with children of different ages, levels. The researchers also wish to know how storytelling aloud helps children build self-confidence.

Moon and Maeng (2012) carried out a study with 40 Korean four-graders aimed at investigating the effects of storytelling and story singing on elementary school children's reading comprehension. Children are tested by a Practical English Language Test Junior (PELT JR) level 1 to make sure the similarity in reading comprehension between the two groups. Over a period of ten weeks, pretests and posttests are administered to see the difference prior and after the treatment. Interviews are also conducted to investigate children's interests and attitudes in learning English in the classroom. The results of the independent samples t-test and paired t-tests have drawn up the significant difference between the storytelling group and story singing group. The authors claim that children in the storytelling group improve their reading comprehension statistically compared to the story singing group. It is admitted that story singing may be appropriate for younger classes. However, both groups developed a more positive attitude towards the lessons and motivation to read further outside the class.

Meanwhile, Safdarian and Ghyasi (2013) studied the influence of storytelling on Elementary Level children both school achievement and motivation. Assigned in the Experimental group and Control group, 110 first grade children of a secondary school in Iran are exposed to storybooks in one semester. The study supposes that stories reinforce learning by offering suitable context for vocabulary, extra words, sentence structure practices and reading activities to children. Then pretest-posttests, questionnaires, and interviews are used to collect data. After the treatment, the Experimental group results for school achievement scores are higher, yet the mean scores of motivation between the two groups are not significantly changed. The study reports that storytelling has a positive influence on school achievement and suggests that teachers can employ the use of storytelling to improve reading skills, vocabulary knowledge, and structure patterns.

Most previous studies focus on the effect of storytelling on reading comprehension, and how the teachers and learners changed roles as storytellers. However, there has been little discussion about the techniques of teaching storytelling. In Vietnam, storytelling is a common choice for Vietnamese lessons at school, but it is not widely used in foreign language classes. This paper study tries to fill the gap by implementing techniques of storytelling in teaching reading comprehension for children at a private language school.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Instruments

Using pretest-posttest between-groups quasi-experimental design (Hung, 2017), the study attempted to investigate the impact of storytelling on young English learners' reading performance and how they perceive storytelling. Quantitative data were collected via reading pretest, posttest and questionnaires. Classroom observation field notes provided qualitative data for triangulation with tests and questionnaires. Before the experiment, both groups had the same reading comprehension ability proven by t-test, same teacher and learning conditions. Permission to conduct the study was approved by the head of the language school at the research site.

3.2 Research Participants

Forty children aged eight to twelve were chosen to take part in the study from the two classes at a private language center in Vietnam on the basis of convenience sampling. All of them were around A1 level of English and were working towards A2 (Cambridge Flyer Certificate). They are divided into an experimental group (EG, n=20) and a control group (CG, n=20). All the participants have comparable levels of language proficiency and have previously had at least one-year of tuition in English.

3.3 Research Procedure

For data collection, the pretest and posttest were delivered to children in both CG and EG prior to and after storytelling exposure to determine any difference between the two groups. During the eight weeks experiment, children in EG would get storytelling sessions instead of the regular reading sessions in their curriculum while those in CG would take the regular reading sessions at the language center. Classroom observation field-notes were kept to record EG children's participation during storytelling lessons. At the end of the experiment, the questionnaire was given to assess how EG children felt during the storytelling classes.

The English teacher in charge of the experimental class at the language center was given training in storytelling techniques and took the role of storyteller for all sessions. The props, puppets, headbands, signs, and hand-outs necessary for storytelling sessions were prepared by the researchers. After being exposed to

storytelling for two months, the children were asked to take the posttest. The test consisted of four parts and was scored using the 10-point scale. Children were familiar with the test format as they had taken the Cambridge Movers language tests (YLE Movers) in their previous level. YLE Movers is the second of three Cambridge English Qualifications designed for young learners. These tests introduce children to everyday written and spoken English around familiar topics to children. Test instructions were clearly stated for children to follow, and there were two examples at the start of each section as a guide of what they were expected to do. Children had thirty minutes to complete each test, which was then collected for data analysis. To do the tests, children must read comprehensively and be able to write appropriate answers.

The researchers observed children’s participation instead of interviewing them. The reason for this was that children sometimes provided naïve responses - false answers or even jokes - due to their inability to understand the questions or give correct answers. For more concise research, classroom observation field notes were used in 16 storytelling sessions. The researchers wrote down notes before, during and after the storytelling stage to record children’s participation in storytelling lessons. Table 1 presents the time schedule and list of story titles.

Table 1
Stories Chosen for Storytelling Sessions

Week	Date	Class Story Title	Source of activities
1	June 7	The little duckling	Once upon a time – using stories in the language classrooms
2	June 8	Horror over the hill	Storytelling with children
	June 14	Yama-uba	Storytelling with children
3	June 15	The little white cat	Storytelling with children
	June 21	Hansel and Gretel	Once upon a time – using stories in the language classrooms
4	June 22	King Midas	Storytelling with children
	June 28	Mr Nose met a wizard	Storytelling with children
	June 29	Kormi	Storytelling with children
5	July 5	Jack and the Beanstalk	Once upon a time – using stories in the language classrooms
6	July 6	Nessy	Storytelling with children
	July 12	Ma Liang	Storytelling with children
	July 13	The kangaroo in the jacket	Storytelling with children
7	July 19	The lion	Storytelling with children

Week	Date	Class Story Title	Source of activities
8	July 20	Mouse	Storytelling with children
	July 26	Rabbit's ears	Storytelling with children
	July 27	Caterpillar, the bravest animal	Storytelling with children

Since respondents are young children, the questions have only three responses for each question and use the pictorial format. The questions used both positive and negative wording in order to avoid guiding children to one side or other of the rating scale (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Children in the experimental group were given the questionnaire to complete in 15 minutes, which were then returned to the teacher: 19 questions were employed in total. To assure that children had no difficulty in understanding the questionnaire, it was cross-checked for wording by two teachers at the research site.

The study was conducted in eight weeks in 2018. The CG included children studied in the first shift from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.; the EG included children in the second shift from 9:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday mornings. After children completed the pretest, the two groups studied as usual with their lessons from the school syllabus. The two groups were using the same syllabus designed by the language center. In every class meeting, two lessons were taught, and each unit was carried out in two weeks. A foreign teacher came to meet children every Saturday morning for forty-five minutes to give children exposure to native English accent. The homeroom teacher taught for the rest of the time. Foreign teachers are usually asked to work on Phonics and Speaking lessons. In the three chosen units, "animals", "sports" and "daily routines" are the main topics of the three units. Therefore, the researchers selected stories related to these topics. In total, 16 stories were used (Table 1).

Right after the children finished the posttests; the researcher delivered the questionnaires and explained clearly what children were expected to do. Children looked through the questionnaires (Vietnamese version) to see if they had any questions. Then they were asked to complete the questionnaires in about fifteen minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

For the quantitative part of this research, all the data were collected and computed using SPSS Statistics version 20 and Microsoft Excel 2010. First, the validity and

reliability of the questionnaires and tests used in the pilot study were checked through Cronbach's Alpha, leading to a revised version of the questionnaire in the formal study. Cronbach's Alpha value for the final questionnaire version was 0.81, 0.87, 0.85, respectively, for the three constructs on perceptions of storytelling, perceptions of class activities and impact on reading comprehension. Independent sample t-tests were employed to measure the difference in reading comprehension tests between the two groups before and after the treatment.

For qualitative analysis, each observation session recorded students' behaviors and researchers' comments in three stages: before storytelling, while storytelling and after story retelling. The purpose of these observation sessions is to find out how engaged and interactive students are during the storytelling sessions. Table 2 provides a sample of the observation notes. In total, 16 sheets of observation notes were collected. Achievements and drawbacks of all storytelling sessions are analyzed and reported according to the three stages mentioned.

Table 2
A Sample of Classroom Observation Field Notes

Stages	Children's participation	Researcher Memos
Before storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children looked at parts of the animals and guessed what gave names of the animals. • Children repeated names of the animals. • Children learned the vocabulary items related to the story: flamingo, peacock, duckling, cock. • Children predicted the story while looking at the illustrations. • Children raised their hands to predict the story content. 	<p>→Children did not recognize the cock's hat.</p> <p>→Children gave different story content while looking at the illustration.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children listened to the first verse attentively. • Children followed the sequences in the illustration and guessed the next verse of the flamingo. • Children followed the verses and gave correct story lines by looking at the previous story lines. • Children mimed as if they were sinking when the teacher mimed the action of the little duckling. 	<p>→Children predicted the next verse correctly by looking at the illustration.</p> <p>→Children were able to follow the teacher's story with the illustrations.</p> <p>→Children said it was easy to predict the next verses of the story.</p>

Stages	Children's participation	Researcher Memos
After storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children looked at the features on TV and discussed the animal features. Children worked in pairs to a new verse of a creature. Children presented their verses to the whole class. 	<p>→Children chatted in Vietnamese and sometimes argued while making a new verse.</p> <p>→Children were noisy.</p>

4. Results

4.1 Results from the Pretests and Posttests

Table 3 shows that the pretest mean score of CG ($M=5.75$, $SD=1.13$, $n=20$) is a little higher than that of EG ($M=5.70$, $SD=1.08$, $n=20$). An Independent Samples T-test was conducted to check whether there was a statistically significant difference. The results of the Independent samples t-test in Table 3 show that there is no significant difference between CG and EG means ($t=0.14$, $df=28$, $p>.05$).

Table 3

Independent Samples T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Pretest Results

CG (n=20)		EG (n=20)		95% CI for Mean		
M	SD	M	SD	Difference	t	df
5.75	1.13	5.70	1.08	-0.66, 0.76	0.14*	38

* $p > .05$

From Table 4, the general descriptive statistics of CG and EG posttest scores show that EG's posttest mean score ($M=6.39$, $SD=0.68$, $n=20$) was significantly higher than that of CG ($M=5.77$, $SD=0.94$, $n=20$). However, a test needs to be carried out to confirm that the difference between the mean CG and EG scores was statistically significant. The independent samples t-test results in Table 4 show that the discrepancy between the posttest CG and EG means was statistically significant ($t= -4.48$, $df=38$, $p<0.05$). EG significantly outperformed CG on the reading posttest.

Table 4

Results of Independent Samples T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Posttest Results

CG (n=20)		EG (n=20)		95% CI for Mean		
M	SD	M	SD	Difference	t	df
5.77	0.94	6.93	0.68	-1.68, -0.64	-4.48*	38

* $p < .05$

4.2 Classroom Observation Field Notes

4.2.1 Before Story Retelling

When asked to predict the sequences of the story, children were excited to look at the illustrations and gave appropriate answers. These illustrations aimed to arouse children's interests in the upcoming story. Before children actually listened to the story, illustrations helped to convey the information of the story, pre-teach the vocabulary and give clues for children to follow. With eye-catching illustrations hooking the children's attention, even some reluctant children were interested to give their predictions. Also, illustrations helped children describe and construct sentences in pairs or in groups. Enlightened with illustrations, children felt engaged and ready to listen to the story. Activities in storytelling lessons were appealing to children; almost all children participated in activities like drawing, reading in the chorus and making predictions. These activities motivated children to join in story sequences, gave hints to support comprehension and promoted additional chances for language practice. Obviously, the more children joined in the activities, the better the comprehension. Reviewing the field notes at this stage, the researcher came to the conclusion that children were eager to join in the storytelling activities.

However, sometimes children were distracted by their surroundings. The teacher had to maintain eye-contact with these children in order to keep them on the track of storytelling. A minority of children talked with their friends because they were curious about other irrelevant aspects of the story.

4.2.2 During Story Retelling

Children followed the teacher's preamble and contributed to the question and answer practice. At certain points of the story, children knew where to respond or call out the story-lines. They also worked with partners to guess the next part of the story. At this stage, the teacher found out that the children's attention increased, and their retention capacity was improved. During the story time, the teacher sometimes asked children to switch roles, and children became interested in telling the story with the teacher's help. While telling the stories, the teacher requested children to read the story lines, which offered children sample structures to follow and gave them a chance to practice the language. Interestingly, the children conducted in choral rendition and repetition increased. Children communicated with their partners, discussed their points of view and the stories'

sequences. When sharing their viewpoints, children understood more about the story content and drew lessons from the stories. Moreover, children's awareness of the story's sequence, cause, and effect improved their comprehension.

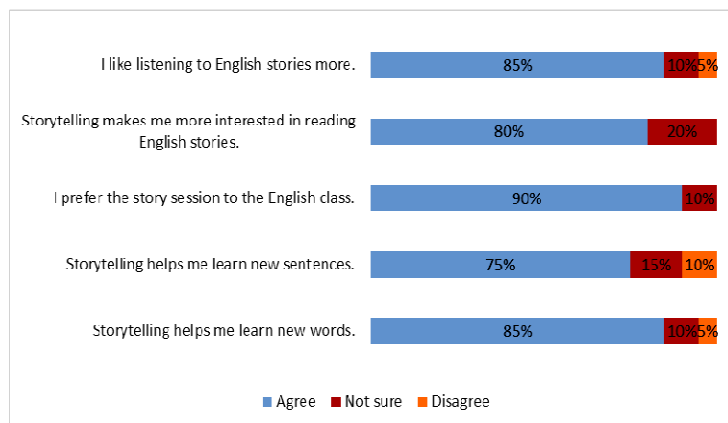
4.2.3 After Story Retelling

Children were actively involved in questions and answers about the stories. Working in groups to write and ask their comprehension questions about the stories, children recalled what they heard and practiced to read fluently. Even more, children could retell the important parts of the stories. To do activities like retelling and asking questions, children summarized the information and made inferences. Therefore, the teacher only had to look at the activities to know how well children understood the stories. Non-verbal activities like drawing and coloring can check children's understanding. Inasmuch as children did pretty well on the drawings, the teacher noticed that children understood and labeled the pictures correctly during the story retelling stage. These drawings and paintings could be used later in other activities. The reflection of children's feelings and attitudes towards the drawings were recorded. Children expressed their likes and dislikes, or their imaginations upon the stories.

4.3 Questionnaire

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of children's answers tilted to *Agree*. Particularly, "I prefer the story session to the English class" got 90% on *Agree* and just 10% on *Unsure*. "Story retelling helps me learn new sentences" got 75% on *Agree*, two children (10%) disagreed, and three children (15%) were unsure. The other items also got high percentages on *Agree* from 80% to 85%, and the percentage on *Disagree* did not exceed 10%. For each item, only two children (10%) said they were unsure (*Not-sure*). From the data, we can see that children preferred story retelling to be used in class.

Figure 1
Children' Perceptions of Story Retelling (n=20)



As for children's perceptions of class activities, a similar trend appears (Figure 2). In a range, "The activities are very interesting," got the highest percentage on *Agree* with 90%; one child (5%) was unsure and one (5%) disagreed. While "The activities help me understand the story" and "I like to hear a story followed by activities" got the same percentage (75%) on *Agree*, these two items had the highest percentage on *Not-sure* (25% and 20%). The other items received quite a similar percentage on *Agree* from 80% to 85%, *Not-sure* from 5% to 15%, and *Disagree* from 5% to 10%. Again, most children in the study had positive perceptions of the activities employed in the storytelling lesson.

Figure 2
Children' Perceptions of Class Activities (n=20)

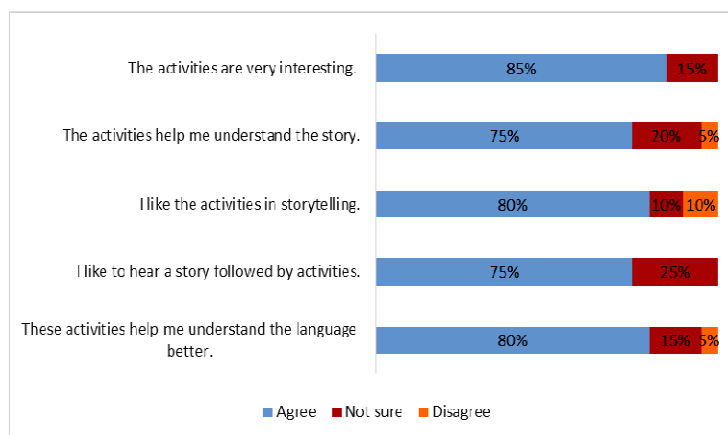
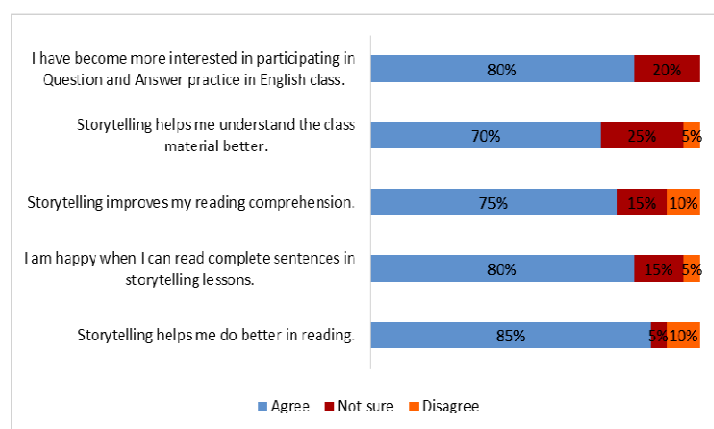


Figure 3 reports storytelling's impact on reading comprehension. Similar to the previous two questionnaire constructs, the percentage of Agree for all questions was from 70% to 85%. Most children agreed that "Storytelling improves my reading comprehension" (85%). "Storytelling helps me understand the class material better" got 25% on Not-sure, the highest for Not-sure responses. Besides, very few children chose Disagree (0% -15%).

Figure 3

Children's Perceptions of The Impact of Storytelling on Reading Comprehension (n=20)



To summarise, a large proportion of children's responses was for Agree, which means children responded positively to the impact of storytelling on their reading comprehension. Based on the findings of this part, it can be assumed that storytelling supported the children's reading comprehension and motivated them to participate in storytelling activities and express their interests in stories.

5. Discussion

This study sought to accomplish several goals through its investigation of how story retelling impacts English reading comprehension in young learners. The first goal was to measure the impact of story retelling through pretests and posttests. Two groups performed approximately the same at the beginning of the experiment, based on the outcome of the pretest scores. However, after taking sixteen story retelling sessions, the posttest scores varied significantly for the two groups ($t = -4.48$, $df = 38$, $p < 0.05$). Children in the EG demonstrated better

results than the CG in reading comprehension. As previous research has concluded, findings from the pretest posttest study affirm the effectiveness of story retelling on children's reading comprehension. In a rich literary environment, children who experience story retelling have built their reading skills and performed better on their reading comprehension tests (Khaerana & Nurdin, 2018; Miller & Pennycuff, 2008; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2017; Vu, 2015). The findings in this study confirm that story retelling demonstrated definite virtues in teaching reading comprehension to young learners.

The experimental group's stronger reading comprehension success can be explained by the emphasis of Wright et al. (2008, p. 367) that literacy fluency is dependent on positive attitudes and even kids who do not understand anything become experts in "searching for meaning, predicting and guessing." Story retelling works well for listening and reading skills to catch the interest of youngsters. It can also cultivate comprehension and the ability to predict, speculate and acquire meanings (Boyce, 1996; Kasper & Prior, 2015; Mossberg, 2008). Story retelling thus develops listening abilities, which are directly related to the achievement of reading. Story retelling is an effective and important method for improving the understanding and production of vocabulary by learners (Khaerana & Nurdin, 2018; Lucarevschi, 2016). Other studies also indicate that the retelling of stories has a significant effect on the growth of literacy (Brodin & Renblad, 2019; Collins, 1999; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2017). Booth and Barton (2000, p.91) describe the relevance of story retelling to reading, stating that "children can come to the printed text with a degree of familiarity and some perceptions of story structure, language and patterns through story retelling." Khaerana and Nurdin (2018) believe in the benefits of stories in teaching as they provide authentic language and meaningful content (Hung, 2019). In addition, they provide a chance for readers to encourage literacy and comprehension of a story. Storytelling itself is known as an extrinsic encouragement to continue reading for these purposes.

The second goal of this research is to explore young learners' perceptions of story retelling through questionnaires. The findings of questionnaires on the influence of story retelling on the understanding of children's reading showed that children strengthened their vocabulary, sentence structures and understanding as well. In particular, story retelling helped kids better understand the class content.

Participants in this research were self-aware of the advantages of retelling stories for their reading success. A sufficient amount of lexis, syntax, and pragmatics was given by story retelling for children to resolve their reading deficits. The story retelling touched children's inherent enjoyment of stories is among the possible reasons for these findings. Since children love stories, they extended their attention to listen, to read and to practice the language. Gradually, children instinctively internalized elements of the language, and the capacity to comprehend was strengthened. In addition, the questionnaire reconfirmed the encouragement of children to engage in story retelling events. Children said that in story retelling classes, they enjoyed the games and were more likely to respond to questions. This suggests that the exercises in story retelling lessons were enticing enough to encourage kids. The result provides evidence that motivation is one of the intrinsic values of teaching children to understand the reading. The finding is in line with previous literature that can be found in the works of Hung (2019), Miller and Pennycuff (2008), Vu et al. (2020) on motivation, engagement, and participation.

The field-note observation data show the high motivation of students in story retelling sessions. They became acquainted with add-on activities such as drawing, painting and coloring, which allowed the teacher to understand the children. Since children were involved and imaginative in story retelling activities, the interaction between teachers and children and interaction among the children were enhanced. Particularly when children shared their views on aspects of the stories or when they spoke in groups, the teachers discovered that children were very much involved in the plays. The field notes also reveal that in the story sequences, kids were involved in guessing and sharing their emotions. In addition, in the questionnaire, children posited that they enjoyed the exercises in story retelling lessons. It was a clear indicator that children feel optimistic about stories accompanied by encouraging events.

Findings from the questionnaires and observation field-notes also confirm the values of story retelling in shaping children's behaviors and attitudes. Kellas (2017) claims that story retelling is perhaps the most powerful teaching tool ever used to transfer beliefs and values. Ideally, the world is getting better through the lessons from stories. Children exposed to good stories will love to do the right thing. Story retellers like the Brothers Grimm exploited this great tool long ago in public events to capture children's attention and support. For this reason, story retelling has the

potential to build a sense of community and of shared meaning and values (Paterno et al., 2018; Tinckler, 2017). Wajnryb (2003) points out that the value of narrative is to provoke learners' "intellectual, emotional and moral development." Stories are built around the concept of morality, which has developed throughout mankind's history. While listening to stories, children are prone to have positive and negative feelings; children can experience their hate via villains and develop their love of goodness in morally-optimistic endings. Fables and bibles are great examples of this as vehicles for transmitting morals and values (Harrison, 2016; Sarlej & Ryan, 2013). Through story retelling, children and even adults can enjoy the beauty of courage, altruism, love and the like. It is obvious that children develop these characteristics while listening to stories.

It was notable from the study that storytelling is a very powerful tool in the hand of teachers. Preparing storytelling lessons may take a lot of time; however, when teachers are familiar with storytelling, they find themselves indulged in the teaching stories. The joy of telling and listening to a story is a shared activity among teachers and children, help them stay closer and overall assist children's learning.

6. Conclusion

To sum up the results, story retelling sessions help enhance the performance of reading comprehension for children. Activities accompanied by animated illustrations were involved and helped to express meaning in the stories, leading to a greater understanding of children. Productive operations such as drawing and discussion, on the other hand, helped the teacher to shape the attitudes of children towards stories and story retelling. More significantly, children who enjoyed story retelling activities developed feelings of relaxation, developed active interaction, verbal skills and understanding as well. While there were still a few kids who refused to engage in some of the more difficult tasks, the effects of adapting story retelling strategies were positive in the classroom.

Since this research is carried out in a private language school, it is necessary to use convenience sampling. Therefore, the generalization of results is not as strong as in random sampling. The small number of participants in both CG and EG is another limitation. While researchers have tried their best to monitor the variables, the findings can be influenced by various time shifts and room conditions. In

addition, at school, story retelling is not used often, and the absence of teaching aids is expected. The investigators had to make their own props, puppets, headbands, signs, and hand-outs. It was regarded as a time-consuming task. Often, regardless of the need to do art work, planning teaching aids is often very difficult. This is why the efficiency of story retelling can be affected.

To make story retelling sessions successful, good preparation is important. When teaching stories, it is challenging for teachers because the story retellers must prepare the lessons well beforehand. It is taking time for those who are always busy with other school work. However, it is worth using stories in the classrooms. Besides, techniques and remembrance are not easy at all since teachers have to practice them frequently to bring excitement to children. On the one hand, telling stories can improve teacher's skills of teaching language to young children. Thus, story retelling is the inborn ability each of us does everywhere in our daily life. On the other hand, children benefit a great deal in their academic achievement when stories are employed. One more thing, story retellers should keep in mind that there is no perfection, and do not expect they can do well for all the lessons. It is the teller who makes the story valuable to language teaching, not just learning by heart and techniques. Future research can apply group work in which students can share ideas before they retell stories. Cooperative learning can help students develop many competencies of EFL students (Hung, 2019).

It is recommended that further studies into the field of storytelling pedagogy be extended to other language skills and areas like listening, speaking, and writing. If randomly selected participants at different levels of English were possible, insights into the use of story retelling in language teaching could be better generalized. In addition, in teaching reading, more study should be undertaken to compare story retelling and story reading. By making the comparison, teachers have more chances to choose the acceptable style of teaching.

References

- Al-Mansour, N. S., & Al-Shorman, R. A. (2011). The effect of teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of Saudi elementary stage students. *Journal of King Saud University - Languages and Translation*, 23(2), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jksult.2011.04.001>
- Booth, D., & Barton, B. (2000). *Story works: How teachers can use shared stories in the new curriculum*. Pembroke Publishers.
- Boyce, M. E. (1996). Organizational story and storytelling: A critical review. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 9(5), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534819610128760>
- Brodin, J., & Renblad, K. (2019). Improvement of preschool children's speech and language skills. *Early Child Development and Care*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1564917>
- Collins, F. (1999). The use of traditional storytelling in education to the learning of literacy skills. *Early Child Development and Care*, 152(1), 77–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443991520106>
- Craig, S., Hull, K., Haggart, A. G., & Crowder, E. (2001). Storytelling addressing the literacy needs of diverse learners. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(5), 46–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990103300507>
- Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2009). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing*. Routledge.
- Ellis, G., & Brewster, J. (2017). Tell it again! The storytelling handbook for primary English language teachers. *ELT Journal*, 71(1), 113–117. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccw074>
- Halleck, G. (2007). Data generation through role-play: Assessing oral proficiency. *Simulation and Gaming*, 38(1), 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878106298268>
- Harrison, A. (2016). Fable, myth and folk tale: The writing of oral and traditional story forms. In D. Head (Ed.), *The Cambridge history of the English short story* (pp. 84–99). Cambridge University Press.
- Hava, K. (2019). Exploring the role of digital storytelling in student motivation

- and satisfaction in EFL education. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 2, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1650071>
- Hung, B. P. (2017). Vietnamese students' learning the semantics of english prepositions. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 17(4), 146–158. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2017-1704-10>
- Hung, B. P. (2019). Meaningful learning and its implications for language education in Vietnam. *Journal of Language and Education*, 5(1), 98–102. <https://doi.org/10.17323/2411-7390-2019-5-1-98-102>
- Kasper, G., & Prior, M. T. (2015). Analyzing storytelling In TESOL interview research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(2), 226–255. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.169>
- Kellas, J. K. (2017). *Family storytelling*. Routledge.
- Khaerana, A. S. A., & Nurdin, N. N. (2018). The effectiveness of story telling and story reading methods in teaching speaking. *ETERNAL (English, Teaching, Learning, and Research Journal)*, 4(2), 181–199. <https://doi.org/10.24252/eternal.v42.2018.a4>
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.
- Lucarevski, C. R. (2016). The role of storytelling on language learning: A literature review. *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria*, 26(1), 24–44.
- McDowell, K. (2018). Storytelling: Practice and process as non-textual pedagogy. *Education for Information*, 34(1), 15–19. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-189003>
- Miller, S., & Pennycuff, L. (2008). The power of story: Using storytelling to improve literacy learning. *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education*, 1(1), 36–43.
- Moon, J., & Maeng, U. (2012). A comparison study of the effect of reading instruction using storytelling and storysing. *Proceedings of the 17th Conference of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 75–78.
- Morgan, J., & Rinvulcri, M. (1984). *Once upon a time: Using stories in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mossberg, L. (2008). Extraordinary experiences through storytelling. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 8(3), 195–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250802532443>

- Paterno, M. T., Fiddian-Green, A., & Gubrium, A. (2018). Moms supporting moms: Digital storytelling with peer mentors in recovery from substance use. *Health Promotion Practice*, 19(6), 823832. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839917750816>
- Pellowski, A. (1990). *The world of storytelling*. H.W.Wilson.
- Peres, S. G., Naves, R. M., & Borges, F. T. (2018). Symbolic resources and imagination in the context of storytelling. *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*, 22(1), 151–161. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-35392018013877>
- Rahimi, M., & Yadollahi, S. (2017). Effects of offline vs. online digital storytelling on the development of EFL learners' literacy skills. *Cogent Education*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1285531>
- Safdarian, Z., & Ghyasi, M. (2013). The influence of storytelling on elementary level students: A triangulated study among foreign language learners. *International Journal of English and Education*, 2(3), 78–89.
- Sarlej, M., & Ryan, M. (2013). Generating stories with morals. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Including Subseries Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence and Lecture Notes in Bioinformatics)*, 8230 LNCS, 217–222. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02756-2_26
- Soltani, R. (2013). Storytelling and reading comprehension: a case study. *Language in India*, 13, 588–595.
- Spaulding, A. E. (2011). *The art of storytelling: telling truths through telling stories*. Scarecrow Press.
- Tinckler, R. (2017). Connecting storytelling and social wellness: A case for holistic storytelling in the elementary classroom. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 10(2), 319–333. <https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v10i2.818>
- Vitali, F. (2016). Teaching with stories as the content and context for learning. *Global Education Review*, 3(1), 27–44.
- Vu, N. N. (2015). English and Vietnamese idioms: From traditional to cognitive view. *Journal of Social Sciences, HCMC University of Education*, 7(73), 5–10.
- Vu, N. N., Phuong, L. T. T., Lien, N. T. H., & Luong, N. T. (2020). Using interactive whiteboard for teaching vocabulary to young English learners:

Students' performance and perceptions. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(19), 6651–6657.

Wajnryb, R. (2003). *Stories: Narrative activities for the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

Wright, C., Bacigalupa, C., Black, T., & Burton, M. (2008). Windows into children's thinking: A guide to storytelling and dramatization. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(4), 363–369. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-007-0189-0>

About the Authors

¹ **Nguyen Ngoc Vu** is Associate Professor of Linguistics at Hoa Sen University, Vietnam and chairman of STESOL, a TESOL organization setup by Association of Vietnamese Universities and Colleges. His research interests include Cognitive Linguistics, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and Computer Assisted Language Learning. Email: vu.nguyenngoc@hoasen.edu.vn.

² **Pham Thi Ngoc Lan** is Lecturer of English at University of Finance-Marketing, Vietnam. She teaches courses in language skills and English for young learners. Her research interests include Second Language Acquisition and Teaching English to Young Learners. Email: ptn.lan@ufm.edu.vn.

³ **Nguyen Thi Hong Lien** is Lecturer of English at Hoa Sen University, Vietnam. She teaches courses in language skills and business English. Her research interests include Technology in Language Teaching, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and Content and Language Integrated Learning. Email: lien.nguyenthihong@hoasen.edu.vn.