Effects of Storytelling on EFL Young Learners' Vocabulary Knowledge and Learning Motivation: A Case Study in Thailand

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Abstract

This paper focuses on exploring the effects of storytelling on EFL young learners' vocabulary knowledge and their learning motivation. The study participants comprised 40 fifth-grade students at a primary school under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), in Bangkok, Thailand, who were recruited to participate in the study by means of a purposive sampling method. Three research instruments consisted of storybooks, a vocabulary knowledge test, and the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. Ten storybooks were used as a treatment via the storytelling technique given to the participants. A vocabulary knowledge test was utilized to measure the participants' vocabulary knowledge, and the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery was employed to reveal the participants' attitude/motivation after learning through the technique. A t-test was used to analyze the data gained before and after the participants received the treatment. The findings significantly show the impacts of the storytelling method on both students' English vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation. The results obtained will be a guideline for language teachers at a primary level on how storytelling can be integrated into an English language class of EFL young learners to boost the students' language progress.

Keywords: Storytelling, Vocabulary Knowledge, Motivation, EFL Young Learners, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA)

Introduction

Storytelling refers to a process which helps the narrator convey his or her content to the audience by using both linguistic and imagery means (McDrury & Alterio, 2003). Storytelling has been known as one of the most traditional forms of communication, and it has been used in several domains such as in the field of entertainment, culture, and education (Lucarevschi, 2016). In the realm of language teaching, at various educational levels, including a primary level, storytelling can be considered as an academic tool to bring about learners' language improvement (Isbell et

al., 2004) in many aspects such as reading abilities and vocabulary knowledge. Besides its pedagogical implications, storytelling can be counted as a motivation instrument to encourage learners' academic motivation in the participation in their language learning process.

Several scholars state that storytelling is a technique which helps expand language learners' vocabulary knowledge. That is, the method gives learners an opportunity to acquire and practice innovative words while they are listening to the stories (Stachurska, 2013). According to Mart (2012), learners' listening combined with the narrator and the learners' physical activities occurring in the storytelling activity can cause learners' inspiration in learning new vocabulary. Apart from that, learners' feelings and emotion stimulated when they are listening to the story have a strong impact on the process of their vocabulary learning (Eck, 2006). That is why language learners can broaden their lexicon through the storytelling method.

Such an influence of storytelling on young learners' vocabulary knowledge can be seen in related previous literature. For instance, Trostle and Hicks (1998) found that the 7–11-year-old students in the experimental group learning through the storytelling method had significantly higher scores on measures of story comprehension and vocabulary than those in the control group. In the same way, the findings are in line with those gained from a study undertaken by Özdemir (2015) in primary school in Türkiye. To be specific, the 8th-grade students in the experimental group learning through the storytelling technique achieved significantly higher scores in the immediate recall, the recognition tests, and the delayed-recall than those in the control group learning those same words through the current implemented English curriculum. Similarly, findings from a research study conducted by Huang (2006) show that the storytelling method could enhance Taiwanese sixth grade students' word recall and reading comprehension.

In addition to its impact on vocabulary knowledge, researchers discovered an effect of storytelling on primary school students' motivation. To illustrate, listening directs learners' attention via fun activities and formal learning (Shin & Crandall, 2014). This leads to learners' understanding and engagement in the message delivered. Also, as Wajnryb (2003) elaborated, the message and its meaning conveyed through the storytelling technique are a powerful tool to help involve language learners in the language learning process, and this eventually helps enhance the abilities of learners in that foreign language.

Literature in the past reveals the importance of storytelling in increasing language learners' motivation, one of the key psychological constructs in English instruction, referring to a factor that makes learners willingly allocate their time to a certain academic task (Filgona et al., 2020) which involves both subjective expectations as well

as incentive values (anticipated consequences such as reactions of significant others, and interest in activity) (Schrader & Helmke, 2015). Liu et al. (2018) found that the digital storytelling method could boost Taiwanese sixth-grade students' motivation, particularly their extrinsic goal orientation and elaboration. Based on what Alemi et al. (2022) discovered, an impact of digital storytelling on young EFL learners' motivation can be clearly seen. To sum up, the literature review mentioned above helps demonstrate how the storytelling method plays an important part in increasing young learners' learning motivation in a foreign language setting.

Owing to the benefits of storytelling, the technique has been applied in English language classes for various groups of students, including young learners who have coped with challenges in learning English vocabulary as can be seen in several research studies. For instance, Rosyada and Apoko (2023) found that Indonesean young learners encountered difficulties within learning English vocabulary in terms of the pronunciation of new vocabulary, accurate spelling, usage of word meanings, and retention or memorization of innovative words. Similarly, Surmanov and Azimova (2020) revealed that young learners in Uzbekistan faced problems in learning vocabulary. The challenges were pronouncing words, different grammatical forms of innovative words, selecting proper meaning of words, using words in different contexts, and understanding words which are idiomatic.

Despite the empirical evidence on the role of storytelling in young learners' vocabulary knowledge as well as on their learning motivation, findings from research studies on the effects of the approach on both two mentioned factors can be rarely seen. To help shed some light on it, the present study was undertaken to find out whether the storytelling technique could develop vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation of young learners at a primary level in Thailand.

Objectives

1. To examine the effect of storytelling on vocabulary knowledge of EFL young learners at a primary school under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA).
2. To explore the effect of storytelling on learning motivation of EFL young learners at a primary school under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA).

Hypotheses

H1: The post-test meant score of vocabulary knowledge of EFL young learners at a primary school under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) was higher than the pre-test mean score of vocabulary knowledge of EFL young learners at a primary school under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA).

H2: The post-test mean score of learning motivation of EFL young learners at a

primary school under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) was higher than the pre-test mean score of learning motivation of EFL young learners at a primary school under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA).

Concept theory framework
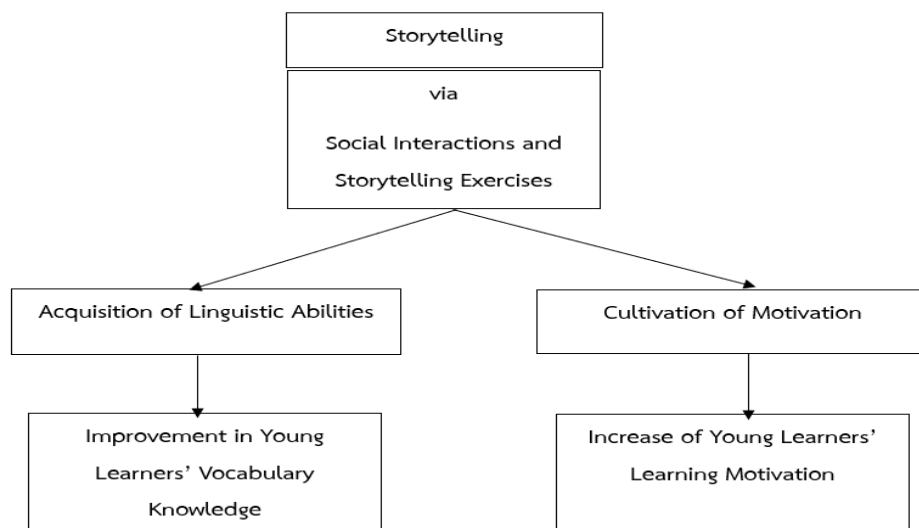
The figure shows the concept theory framework of the study. That is, the storytelling method, which was implemented via social interactions between the narrator of the story (the teacher) and the actor in the roleplay (the students) as well as the audience (the students), was the highlight of the present study. Based on the theories/principles on acquisition of linguistic abilities and cultivation of motivation, the students' vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation were anticipated to significantly increase after the students had learned through the ten lessons.

Methodology

This study was an experimental study which was implemented in a Thai context. It aims to investigate the effects of storytelling on EFL young learners' vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation.

Participants

This research was conducted among 40 fifth-grade students at a primary school in Bangkok, Thailand. The group of participants was an intact group of the study, and it was obtained to participate in this research by using a purposive sampling method. The participants contained both male and female students, and they were at the age ranging from 10 to 11 years old. Their proficiency of English language could be considered as that of a beginners' level.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used to gain data, namely, stories, a vocabulary knowledge test, and the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB).

The first research instrument was ten storybooks which were selected based on the level of the students' English language proficiency, and the themes of the stories chosen were like those of the units included in their course book. Specifically, the themes of the stories concerned general themes such as colors, fruits, food, animals, and hobbies.

The second tool was a vocabulary knowledge test containing 30 items. It was developed by researchers and used as both a pre- and a post-test to assess the participants' vocabulary knowledge which they learned from the ten storybooks.

The third instrument was a questionnaire called the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) that was employed to measure the primary motivational level of the learners. The original version of AMTB was created by Gardner (1958) and revised by Gardner and Lambert (1972) later. The questionnaire was adapted to suit the age of the participants and the context of study. The modified version comprised 39 items which consist of five content areas: 'Interest in Foreign Languages' (9 items), 'Attitudes toward learning English' (10), 'English Class Anxiety' (5 items), 'Motivational Intensity' (9 items), and 'Desire to Learn English' (6 items).

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data were collected in the second semester of Academic Year 2022. As for the storytelling lesson, each of the ten stories, which was used in the ten-week treatment, was read by the teacher, who was one of the researchers, and then the meanings of the new vocabulary chosen were taught. After that, some grammatical points are explained in the context of the story. The students received subsequent practice to ensure the students' thorough understanding toward the key vocabulary. Next, the story was narrated by the teacher while the students were acting out the story. During this step, comprehension questions were asked to confirm the students' understanding of the story. In the last step, the students were asked to collaborate with their partner to retell the story to the whole class. Besides, a vocabulary knowledge test and the AMTB in a hardcopy version were distributed to the students before and after learning through the lessons to measure their vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation. Descriptive statistics, namely, mean score and standard deviation, were used to show available information in the dataset (Bobbit, 2023) and to portray how far from the mean score the average participant is (Andrade, 2020), respectively. Also, inferential statistics, a t-test, was employed to reveal whether there was an effect of the storytelling technique on the participants' vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation.

Results

Table 1: Pre- and post-test of a vocabulary knowledge test

	Mean (n = 40)	SD	Mean Differences	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	16	4.3677	8	0.0592	39	.005**
Post-test	24	2.7872				

**p < 0.05

Table 1 shows the students' pre-, and post-test mean score for the vocabulary test before and after the treatment. The post-test mean score (X = 24) was higher than the pre-test means score (X = 18) with the statistical significance (t (39) = 0.0592 p < 0.05). Besides, the standard deviation of the pre-test mean score was 4.3677, and that of the post-test mean score was 2.7872. This suggests that there was a smaller dispersion of the scores around the mean in a distribution after learning through the treatment. Consequently, it can be said that the storytelling method influenced the students' vocabulary knowledge.

Table 2: Pre- and post-test of an AMTB

	Mean (n = 40)	SD	Mean Differences	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	25	0.6824	11	0.1052	39	.005**
Post-test	36	0.4938				

**p < 0.05

According to Table 2, the students' mean score for the AMTB before and after learning through the lesson. The mean score of the students' learning motivation after the treatment (X = 36) was significantly higher than the mean score of the students' learning motivation before the treatment (X = 25) with the statistical significance (t (39) = 0.1052 p < 0.05). Apart from that, the standard deviation of the pre-test mean score of the participants' learning motivation was 0.6824, and that of the post-test mean score of the participants' learning motivation was 0.4938. This shows a smaller dispersion of the scores around the mean in a distribution of the students' learning motivation after learning through the treatment. Hence, the storytelling method had an impact on the students' learning motivation.

Conclusions and Discussion

Conclusions

The current research places an emphasis on examining the impacts of storytelling on EFL young learners' vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation. With evident statistical proof, it was confirmed that storytelling had an influence on the participants' vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation. This helps demonstrate the role of the storytelling method on young learners' cognitive and affective advancement in the field English language teaching. The findings can shed some light on the application of the technique in an English language classroom, which is beneficial for English language teachers and course developers in other educational contexts.

Discussion and Implications of the Study

Discussion of the Study

First, based on the findings from the present research, storytelling influenced EFL young learners' vocabulary knowledge. This indicates an influence of the storytelling method on young learners' English vocabulary knowledge, and it in accordance with what a number of scholars have stated. To be precise, Mart (2021) explains that storytelling activities can cause learners' inspiration in learning new vocabulary while they are listening to the story and experiencing their own physical activities such as acting out. Moreover, the method can strengthen learners' process of their vocabulary learning (Eck, 2006). The finding gained corresponds with that found from other research studies. Trostle and Hicks (1998) revealed that the 7–11-year-old students in the experimental group learning through storytelling achieved significantly better scores in story comprehension and vocabulary when compared with students in the control group. Similarly, Özdemir (2015) asserted that the 8th-grade students in the experimental group learning through the storytelling method attained significantly higher scores in the three vocabulary tests, namely, the immediate recall, the recognition tests, and the delayed-recall, than the students in the control group learning the similar words through the normal English curriculum. The findings of the studies mentioned above are consistent with that disclosed from another research. Huang (2006) discovered that storytelling could enhance Taiwanese sixth grade students' word recall as well as their reading comprehension.

Besides, another finding from the current study shows that storytelling influenced EFL young learners' learning motivation. This could be explained by the importance of storytelling on English learning motivation. Simply put, listening to a story can attract direct learners' attention by means of fun activities (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Such an experience can bring about learners' understanding and involvement in the message conveyed. Thus, the message students gained from listening to the story can be an

influential tool which assists them to be equipped with foreign language success. The findings from this research are in line with that could be seen from other related studies. For example, according to Liu et al. (2018), the digital storytelling method could increase Taiwanese sixth-grade students' motivation, especially, their extrinsic goal orientation and elaboration. Alemi et al. (2022) also reported on the influence of digital storytelling on young learners' motivation in an EFL setting.

With respect to the two main findings of this study, the storytelling method is advantageous in enhancing vocabulary knowledge and their learning motivation of young English language learners. In so doing, the storytelling technique can be used as a basis to develop a story-based lesson or course. Yet, to be successful in implementing it, teachers and course developers are supposed to take an account on selecting stories that are of student's interest and suit their age as well as their English language proficiency. If not, storytelling cannot make any change in terms of learners' vocabulary knowledge and their learning motivation (Safdarian & Ghyasi, 2013). Furthermore, teachers should be trained in how to use a story in a classroom. Since making storytelling interesting in class involves several factors such as how to organize ideas and how to use their pitch and tone, it is vital for teachers to bear such elements in mind while designing a storytelling lesson and applying it in class.

Implications of the Study

Because this research is limited to exploring the effect of storytelling on young learners' vocabulary knowledge. Further research is recommended to be conducted among participants at other educational levels, such as those at secondary school or college. Also, it is suggested to investigate such an effect on other dependent cognitive variables such as grammatical knowledge or oral communication skills of young learners. In addition, due to the limitation of the study, which was a one-group pretest-posttest design, further research may adopt a two-group experimental design which comprises one experimental group and one control group.

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