

The Effect of Teachers' Storytelling and Reading Story Aloud on the Listening Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract—This study was an attempt to compare the effect of reading story aloud (RSA) and storytelling (ST) on intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension. The design of the study was quasi experimental with listening pre and post tests. The participants were 99 Iranian EFL learners who were selected based on their performance on a Placement and Evaluation Package. For 6 sessions, the participants of both experimental groups who were 66 students listened to their teacher reading a story aloud in group 1 and telling the story in the second group. At the end of each session, they answered the questions that followed each story. After 6 sessions of treatment, the listening posttest was administered to both groups. Besides, there was a control group in which the students were expected to listen to listening parts of the book taught in their term through a traditional method of teaching without receiving extra treatment like the two mentioned experimental groups. Based on the results of one-way ANOVA test, it was evident that the ST method was more effective in improving the learners' listening comprehension than the RSA. In order to specify where the difference(s) were, Scheffe post hoc test was applied. The results indicated that the gain in ST group's listening comprehension was significantly more than that of RSA group. The results could have been due to the influence of the way of telling story with the help of teacher's body language and continuous eye contact that attracted the students to follow the stories eagerly. The results have some implications for syllabus designers, material developers, and language teachers.

Index Terms—listening, storytelling, reading aloud

I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to understand what others say is the first skill to master in language learning and the success of the rest of the skills to a large extent depends on this skill. The process of understanding what others say includes many aspects such as phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and meaning. Therefore, enhancing the listening skill of students is a crucial part of every language teaching syllabus.

According to Lee and Hatesohl (1993, as cited in Nurul Isalm 2012), in spite of the great importance of listening skill in comparison with reading or writing, most people do not possess great listening skills. So, the study of techniques to enhance listening comprehension is nowadays considered as a building block in second language acquisition researches (Dunkel, 1991). It is also believed that when teachers provide students with abundant opportunities for listening practice, the process of developing useful listening strategies will be best achieved. It seems that providing students with a variety of listening opportunities can lead to the enhancement of this important skill. On the one hand, in real life situations, students might listen to people talking or reading something and on the other hand stories have always been attractive to students and successful in getting their attention. Attempting to take advantage of the undeniable fun and enjoyment in stories, teachers try to include stories in different classroom activities. Storytelling is one of the ways of presenting a story and reading aloud is the second form. For different reasons, teachers might prefer one over the other. The results of some studies show that storytelling which, based on Abrahamsen (1998), forms the very foundation of the teaching profession, can be beneficial in improving students' speaking as well as listening skills. Also, Bendt and Bowe (2000) and Simmons, (2006) found similar influences. The other approach is reading story aloud that has its own followers. For example, Dragan (2001) suggests reading aloud to develop children's attention span and listening skills. Considering the vital role that listening plays in communication and the limited number of studies in the area of storytelling and reading aloud makes the present study justifiable to investigate and compare the effects of these two strategies on the listening comprehension of students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Denning (2005), stories can have different roles in helping language learners. For example, using their own experiences, language learners can interpret stories which might lead to further involvement of their cognitive abilities in problem solving. A story can add a personal component of understanding and connection that statistics alone cannot achieve, so the value added by stories and metaphor can be substantial (Hansen, 2008).

Furthermore, students' interest in stories and the benefits of listening to stories as well as reading them have been studied from different points of views. The relaxed environment created by stories and the emotions evoked by them can contribute to remove affective filters in second language learning. A case in point is the study by Weiss (2000) in which the students learned and retained better due to the association of learning with emotions evoked by stories. Similarly, Green and Brock (2000) emphasized on the effectiveness of story in comparison with simple examples, because stories can engage the students' thinking, their emotions, and imaginations. While they are listening to a story or when they are reading it, they follow the line of the story and what happens to the characters and their interest in finding out what happens next and how the story ends keep them focused and interested.

There are a number of studies emphasizing on the importance of storytelling in improving language comprehension and listening skills (e.g., Delano, 1977; Mottley & Telfer, 1997; Douglas, 2005). Zemke claims that Storytelling is also a natural medium for learning that can make learning enjoyable and effective (1990). In 1992, Mallan's study of storytelling showed that when students listen to a story they in fact learn how to listen. Besides, by taking part in the experiences of the story they realize how this kind of discourse works and it can even influence their other skills such as reading and writing. Narrative and storytelling are used as means of better understanding teachers' thinking and actions (Ornstein, 1995).

There are other benefits of storytelling in other language skills such as oral language production or even reading and writing. An example is Trousdale's (1990) study that emphasized the use of storytelling as a good help in enhancing students' speaking abilities. Other studies such as those done by Cooper (1989) and Hicks (1990) have pointed to similar improvements in students' oral skills. Storytelling contains not only literacy-related benefits, but also it helps many students learn course content more effectively. Students who may not learn through lecture and discussion may find that they learn the same content more easily with the use of stories. Examples of positive results for learning content through storytelling are social contents done by Pierce (1996), moral development, Tappan and Brown (1989), and even learning mathematics, Anderson (1995).

As for the difference between storytelling and reading story aloud, researchers are not unanimous. Storytelling is an enjoyable activity, because the storytellers, according to Roney (1996), have a lot of techniques and skills in their disposal to help them to communicate with their audience. Similarly, those who listen to a story engage in a wide range of cognitive activities to make sense of the story. Therefore, storytelling has always been used as a medium of instruction, especially for young learners and there are books such as Farrell, 1991 and Greene, 1996 (both cited in Mottley & Telfer, 1997) which show teachers how to use storytelling in their teaching.

There are also studies which confirm positive results for using reading story aloud. Dragan (2001), for instance, claims that reading aloud can be beneficial in developing students' listening skills, broadening their attention span as well as improving their precession of recall. According to Rog (2001), teachers can help their students develop their concepts about different elements of texts, the structure of stories and other elements of texts by reading aloud stories to them. Furthermore, as Terblanche 2002 asserts, when children listen to stories read aloud to them, they get familiar with various subjects presented in books. Similarly, Bredekamp et al., 2000 claim that listening to stories read aloud makes students familiar with how a story is written and can increase their knowledge of conventions and structures used in stories. Mol, 2010 claims that one of the advantages of reading aloud to children is that they can distinguish between written and spoken language. That is, they increase students' knowledge of writing as well as their phonological awareness.

Some of the storytelling artists do not associate storytelling with reading aloud. The attributes of reading a story may be similar to storytelling's attributes but not exactly like a well-told story. In their idea, they are two separate entities with some differences. The first main difference between these two is that the teller of a story is not limited by what has been written whereas the one who reads the story is bound. In other words, the reader has to have the book in his hand and read from the printed page. The storyteller is not limited by written sentences; he stands or sits, free to watch his audience, free to pay attention to their reactions to the story, free to use the body, eyes, and voice as aids in expression.

Another main difference between telling and reading a story which is related to the first difference is that the story teller can add personal touches to the story and make it his/her own. This can make the story personal and suitable to those who are not ready to read or who have low reading ability. However, it is worth mentioning that while reading a story, if the teacher notices that the students cannot follow some parts of the story, they can pause and explain the ambiguous parts.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed at investigating the comparison between the effects of storytelling and reading story aloud on the listening comprehension of students. Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following questions and test the three null hypotheses that follow them:

1. Does storytelling have any significant effect on the students' listening comprehension?
2. Does Reading story aloud have any significant effect on the students' listening comprehension?
3. Is there any significant difference between the effects of storytelling and reading story aloud on the listening comprehension of students?

H1: Storytelling has no significant effect on the students' listening comprehension.

H2: Reading story aloud does not have any significant effect on the students' listening comprehension.

H3: There is no significant difference between the effect of storytelling and reading story aloud on the students' listening comprehension.

IV. METHOD

The study was a quasi-experimental study with two experimental and a control groups.

A. Participants

A total number of 99 intermediate TEFL undergraduate students took part in this study. There were 56 females and 43 males who shared the same first language. They formed up a representative sample of Iranian EFL learners.

B. Instruments

There were three instruments used for collecting the data: An English placement test for selecting intermediate learners, an Objective Placement Test by Lesley et al (2008) as the pretest, and another test from the same book as the posttest. Besides, a Storybook called *the turn of the screw* by Henry James (2002) was used to present the stories.

The English placement test comprised of 70 multiple-choice questions. The test was from Placement Evaluation Package by Lesley (2008) that assessed students' knowledge of listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary. If students answered 24 to 36 questions correctly, they were considered as intermediate and could participate in the present study.

The pretest consisted of nine listening situations along with twenty multiple-choice questions. The same pretest was used for the three groups. Another test similar in the level to the pretest was used as posttest at the end of the treatment sessions. It was a test consisting of nine listening situations with twenty multiple-choice questions.

C. Procedures

In the first phase of the study, the participants took part in a placement test. Then the qualified subjects who were divided to two experimental and one control group took the pretest. The two experimental groups took 6 sessions of treatment in which the storytelling group listened to stories told by their teacher and the reading aloud group listened to stories read aloud by their teacher. Students in the control group did not have any stories, instead they listened to the listening parts of their textbook. After six sessions of treatment the students in all three groups answered the questions of the posttest.

V. RESULTS

Table 1 below displays the results of the pretest and Figure 1 indicates the means.

TABLE 1
THE RESULTS OF THE PRETEST

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Control	33	9.91	2.112	6	13
Storytelling	33	10.12	3.090	6	17
Reading	33	9.27	2.140	6	13

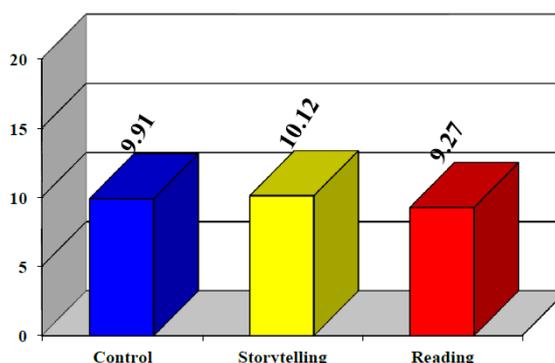


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the means for the pretest

According to Figure 1, there seems to be slight differences among the three means; however, it is not clear if the differences are significant. Therefore, a one-way ANOVA was implemented. Table 2 presents the results of the ANOVA.

TABLE 2
THE RESULTS OF THE ONE-WAY ANOVA FOR THE PRETEST

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.869	2	6.434	1.039	.358
Within Groups	594.788	96	6.196		
Total	607.657	98			

As shown in Table 2, the amount of F-observed ($F_{3, 99}=1.039$) is not high enough to be considered statistically significant because the probability value is above the safe value of .05 ($p=.358$). As a result, it can be concluded that at the beginning of the experiment, the three groups were homogeneous with regard to their listening comprehension.

A. Results of the Posttest

At the end of the treatment period, once again the groups were given the listening comprehension test, and their results were compared to see if different treatments produced different results. Table 3 shows the statistics for the comparison, and Figure 2 shows the means graphically.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF THE POSTTEST

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Control	33	10.27	2.140	7	14
Storytelling	33	13.21	2.607	10	19
Reading	33	11.70	2.186	8	15

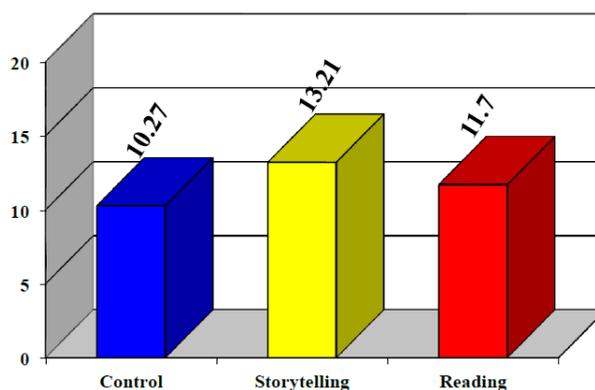


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the means for the posttest

According to Table 3 and Figure 2, the means of the three groups are not equal. To find out if these inequalities are meaningful or not, another one-way ANOVA was employed. Table 4 reports the results of this ANOVA.

TABLE 4
THE RESULTS OF THE ONE-WAY ANOVA FOR THE POSTTEST

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	142.606	2	71.303	13.239	.000
Within Groups	517.030	96	5.386		
Total	659.636	98			

Based on table 4, the amount of F-observed ($F_{3, 99}= 13.239$) is significant at the probability level of $p=.000$ which denotes a statistically significant amount. However, this result does not show where the exact place(s) of difference(s) are. In order to find this out, Scheffe post hoc test was applied. Table 5 gives the results of the Scheffe post hoc test. On the other hand, Table 4 does not provide information concerning which group is different from which other groups. To understand it, we should look at the results of post hoc test (Pallant, 2007). Table 5 tells us exactly where the differences among the groups occur. In table 5, there are some asterisks next to the values which show that the two groups being compared are significantly different from one another at the $p<.05$ level. According to the asterisks, the following conclusion was drawn.

TABLE 5
THE RESULTS OF THE SCHEFFE POST HOC TEST FOR THE POSTTEST

Group	Group	Mean Difference	Sig.
Control	Storytelling	-2.94*	.000
	Reading	-1.42*	.049
Storytelling	Control	2.94*	.000
	Reading	1.52*	.034
Reading	Control	1.42*	.049
	Storytelling	-1.52	.034

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

B. Answer to the First Research Question

Does storytelling have any significant effect on the students' listening comprehension?

The results showed a significant difference between control group and storytelling group ($p = .000$, mean difference = -2.94).

As it can be seen, the mean difference is negative which means that storytelling group outperformed control group. This conclusion allows us to reject the first null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant effect of storytelling on the listening comprehension of students", and conclude that storytelling has a positive effect on the performance of students.

C. Answer to the Second Research Question

Does Reading story aloud have any significant effect on the students' listening comprehension?

The results showed a significant difference between control group and reading story aloud group ($p = .049$, mean difference = -1.42).

Like the previous conclusion, since the mean difference was negative, it meant that reading story aloud group showed a better performance than control group. This conclusion helps us to reject the second null hypothesis stating that "there is no significant effect of reading story aloud on the listening comprehension of students", and claim that reading story aloud affects the performance of students positively.

D. Answer to the Third Research Question

Is there any significant difference between the effects of storytelling and reading story aloud on the listening comprehension of students?

There was a significant difference between storytelling and reading story aloud group ($p = .034$, mean difference = 1.52), and the positive amount of mean difference confirmed that storytelling group outperformed reading story aloud group. As a result, the third null hypothesis stating that "there is no significant difference between the effects of storytelling and reading story aloud on the listening comprehension of students" is rejected, too.

VI. DISCUSSION

The research questions in this study were concerned with the influence of RSA and ST on the listening ability of the students as well as the differences in the listening comprehension skill between ST and RSA groups. All the three null hypotheses suggested at the beginning were statistically rejected. The analyses indicated that both ST and RSA groups had positive effects on the students' listening comprehension; however, after an exact comparison between these two groups, it was clear that the ST group outperformed the RAS group in posttests. The result in this study is in line with some studies such as (Isbell, 1979; Raines and Isbell, 1994; Isbell et al., 2004) that demonstrated Storytelling as a successful learning tool in promoting language development. Isbell even found evidence that storytelling was more effective than reading aloud.

Likewise, the findings of this study support Mallan's (1992) claim that as students listen to a story they in fact learn how to listen. Furthermore, the efficacy of ST technique in this study is in line with Brice's, 2004 study who claims that storytelling is a successful strategy to increase students' oral skills. The results also confirm Kalfus and Van Der Schyff (1996) and Peck (1989) who recommend storytelling as a means of enhancing children's language and literacy development. Similar results were also gained by Raines and Isbell, 1994 who believe that storytelling is particularly successful in promoting language development. As mentioned in literature review, Dragan 2001 claims that storytelling can develop children's attention span and listening skills.

As far as the better results for ST are concerned, one can say that telling a story without the aid of the printed page helps the storyteller and listener to have more connection. Because the storyteller doesn't have to hold the book in his hand and read from the printed page. Therefore, he/she is free to use gestures, walk, and pay more attention to the listener. Because of all these reasons, students might pay more attention and stay more focused on the story line.

To sum up, the findings showed positive effects for both ways of presenting stories in EFL classrooms; however, storytelling had more positive effects than reading aloud on the learners' listening comprehension improvement. These results can have some implications for syllabus designers, material developers, and language teachers. They can include

storytelling in the syllabus of language classes to help students get rid of some boring traditional methods for improving their listening comprehension. Storytelling costs nothing, is enjoyable, and can be used anywhere and at any time.

Second, language teachers can also benefit from the results of this study. From time to time, some of the class activities that prove to be not fruitful enough can be replaced by storytelling; however, in order to support these implications many more researches should be done. For example, this study can be replicated with a larger number of participants at different language proficiency levels to compare the results across these levels. As one of the limitations of this study was the length of the course, a similar research can be conducted through a longer course of instruction to compare the results of the investigations. Also, the same study can be conducted with younger and older students as well as students with different proficiency levels. Besides, the factor of gender can be investigated to see the possible relationship between the effect of storytelling and story reading on different genders. Finally, the same research can be carried out on the improvement of other language skills and sub skills.

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