



## Improve Literacy Learning through Using Storytelling: Survey of Literature

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**Abstract:** Storytelling is one of the most important forms of human communication in the development of language skills. Substantial literature is available on story telling as an effective pedagogical tool in developing language skills. According to literature effectiveness of storytelling depends on the factors such as fun, joy, engaging, highly memorable and enhancing learners' interest in listening to stories, as well as in speaking, writing and reading. As a language teaching tool, storytelling has been identified as the most effective language teaching method than the traditional teaching materials such as textbooks. The aim of this literature review is to provide definitions on what is storytelling and provide an overview about what research says about how storytelling helps with improving reading and writing skills of young children. This paper will help teachers to understand the role of storytelling in a language classroom and improve their language teaching skills.

**Keywords:** Stories, storytelling, improve, literacy, learning.

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### Introduction

Improving language literacy in areas of oral language, reading, and writing is very important at each grade level. According to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation it is imperative in improving language skills of young children as a considerable percentage of young children in the world are still facing difficulties in reading at a basic level. Improving literacy competency is an important aspect for every educational institute as the success of society depends on the creativity of the students. High literacy skills are required for employees in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Reading and writing have been identified as the most important communication methods of language learning. The abilities and skills of literacy include not only reading and writing, but also appropriate response to the various messages such as e-mails that include pictures, ability to persuade as well as inform and express our emotions (Cairney 1992).

Teachers as well as educational institutions use different pedagogical strategies to improve the literacy learning of all students. Storytelling is one of the most important strategies teachers use in improving literacy development of young children in the classroom. According to the literature, storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy that can be used to enhance students' language competencies in all areas such as oral language, reading comprehension, and writing. However, researchers around the world found that many students struggling in improving language reading and writing skills in their classrooms. According to global research findings if a student is not reading fluently they would be likely to have difficulty reading in adulthood. Poor reading and writing skills can have a negative impact on higher levels of school dropouts which can cause various social issues. Therefore, it is important to take immediate steps to improve students' language ability. This article presents a literature survey on how storytelling can be used as an effective pedagogical method in improving literacy learning in young children in the classroom.

### ***What is storytelling: Definitions***

Storytelling is usually defined by researchers in the field of language teaching in terms of how it works or what it does to encourage communication between storytellers and listeners. According to National Council of Teachers of English, (1992, p. 1) storytelling activities has been identified as a way to motivate students who are poor in reading and writing. In this process storytelling is defined as, “relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice, gesture and interactions”

As mentioned by Dyson et.al; (1994) storytelling is a process where a teller uses a narrative structure and dramatic and mental imagery in order to communicate with an audience. This is because audience too uses mental imagery to provide the storyteller with verbal and non-verbal feedback (Dyson and Genishi, 1994, Maddumage 2021a, Maddumage 2021b, Maddumage 2021c). A similar idea was presented by Hsu (2010:7) about storytelling. According to Hsu storytelling is “the use of voice, eye contact, gestures, facial expressions and interaction to connect a tale with listeners”. A tale is created through the interaction between the storyteller and the audience. Thus, while the storyteller uses his/her voice and gesture to convey a story, the audience physically reacts to it by squinting, staring or smiling, providing the storyteller with feedback on the effectiveness of his/her storytelling. According to Dugan (1997) the success of storytelling relies on both the listener and the teller. Therefore, Dugan suggested language teachers need to pay more attention on the development of social interaction and collaboration with others in order to make literacy instruction more effective and efficient.

McDrury and Alterio (2003) defined storytelling considering the content and material. According to them stories allow everyone to know about the nature of the real world and different places, cultures, traditions, values and so on. Therefore storytelling can be identified as a strategy of conveying human experiences to others. Mello (2001), Groeber Wang and Lee (2007) emphasized the importance of storytelling as a different activity of reading aloud. They consider reading aloud as an important part of storytelling activity. They believe that a reader is expected to speak exact words in the given story and also present a summary of the memorized story to the class through reading aloud. They further believe that students creativity can be improved through reading aloud. Also this pedagogical strategy can provide solutions to the students who have difficulties in speaking as they try several times to read. Supporting to this Remenyi (2005), Maddumage (2022), Maddumage (2023) stated that storytelling is a fundamental technique that teachers can use in sharing knowledge among students.

According to these definitions it can be concluded that storytelling is a creative methodology of pedagogy that can be used to share human experiences and also, that it is a process where a storyteller uses a narrative structure, and mental imagery to communicate with an audience.

As a pedagogical strategy storytelling improve students’ desire to talk and interact with others in the classroom or group. Some researchers have found that the students who were poor in reading and writing have shown higher levels of performance as a result of building collaboration and interaction with others through storytelling (NCTE, 1992). Therefore, building collaboration among students is imperative in improving interactions among students which enhance language skills.

### **How storytelling helps with reading**

Storytelling is a great way for children to develop their reading, comprehension and writing skills. When students listen to a story that is being read to them it provides an opportunity to learn new words, which in the long run result in the improvement of children’s vocabulary. Haven and Ducey (2007) stated that storytelling helps children to develop their reading, listening and comprehension skills. When stories are interesting for the students it encourages them to actively participate in reading and listening and thereby developing language skills. Aiex, (1988) stated that during storytelling the interaction should be engaging and immediate. This means that when someone tells a story it should make the reader feel interested and encouraged. This will

result in children being able to listen and share a similar event that had happened to them which alternatively boosts their imagination skills.

Further, storytelling helps the children to structure a better story with a proper beginning and a proper ending. Craig et al, (2001) stated that storytelling allows children to understand what might happen next and the effect of a certain consequence. This helps children in developing their problem solving and critical thinking skills which lead to cognitive development in the long run. Similar to this Aiex, (1988) mentioned that “ the sense of a story allows students to make better predictions, to anticipate what is next, to increase awareness of cause and effect, sequence events, and develop other skills that aid comprehension” hence stating clearly that children will be able to make predictions about what might happen as the story continues. Students have the ability to watch the storyteller use intonation and facial expressions to engage with the audience (Aiex, 1988, Maddumage, 2022, Mddumage 2023). When students repeat stories, they have the opportunity to further develop their skills of comprehension by relating stories with expressions. Eder (2007) describes using the oral tradition of storytelling as a powerful strategy for setting patterns of meaning. She found that events which tend to be most memorable and engaging are those associated with heightened emotion.

According to Isbell et al. (2004), storytellers normally use more rhyming words and fascinating and colorful pictures to grab the attention of the listener and this helps in enhancing children’s creativity and imagination skills .As stated by Cliatt and Shaw (1988) storytelling does not only help with developing language and social skills but also it helps the children to develop a positive attitude towards their learning that leads to improve self-motivation and engaging in more reading. Storytelling is a powerful strategy of development of reading skills of young children as it supports to interact and engage more in sharing their ideas and opinions. Storytellers use colorful pictures and good use of vocabulary in order to encourage children to actively participate in storytelling (Eder 2007, Maddumage 2021a, Mddumage 2021c). According to Eder the stories that have memorable events tend to make children more emotional and as a result develop their empathy skills in the long run.

In addition, as a pedagogical strategy storytelling improve students’ desire to talk and interact with others in the classroom or group. Some researchers have found that the students who were poor in reading and writing have shown higher level of performance as a result of building collaboration and interaction with others through storytelling (NCTE, 1992). Therefore, building collaboration among students is imperative in improving interactions among students which enhance language skills.

Storytelling is a crucial tool in the development of reading as it helps the children to create stories of their own by using the different elements such as a plot, the theme of the story, the setting of the story and the characters included. Understanding the elements used in storytelling, provides the children with an opportunity to create a story of their own using their imagination. This leads to the children being able to build up their self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience to build up a story of their own. Accordingly it can be seen that all these studies have proven that storytelling is a crucial tool in the development of reading and comprehension skills in children. Storytelling can serve as an effective technique for developing literacy and reading comprehension skills. This is made possible through storyteller’s ability to capture the attention of the students, thus enhancing the development of a sense of story in participants.

### **How story telling helps with writing**

Storytelling helps with not only reading and comprehension but also with children’s writing skills as well. By using storytelling children develop writing skills. When children read through the book they may come across certain types of sentence structures which may help them towards their creative writing. Particularly, when children go through a story book it helps them to understand the sentence structures used, the vocabulary and how the ideas are presented in the story. This pedagogical strategy supports students to grasp the way of producing a creative piece of writing.

As mentioned by Nicolini (1994) students can motivate to start writing through encouraging to select the stories that like to read. Similar to this Nicolini, (1994), Wallace, (2000) and Houston,(1997) stated that the main aim of storytelling in the classroom is to encourage students to engage in listening and eventually convert the story to the written form. According to them

students can benefit from using storytelling to further develop their writing that resulted in students being able to transfer their skills to writing and also analyze a text. Storytelling helps students to plan and organize their story before start writing. Therefore, researchers have highlighted the importance of the prewriting stage of the writing process and hence teachers as facilitates need to support their students in creating an outline incorporating the things that they want to include in their stories. As mentioned by Phillips (1999) students who struggle in reading as well as writing need careful attention in crafting a well-organized story write from the beginning.

Supporting to this Black (2008) stated that students can make decisions about what type of story they want to tell and what details they should include by participating in oral discussions with their teachers and friends. In fact this allows the writer to get an idea about how their story should be structured before starting writing. Similarly, Houston et al., (1991) states that it gives the student an opportunity to get feedback from the teachers and their friends during the prewriting stage. This gives a more confidence particularly for a struggling writer to craft an interesting story including new ideas.

Nicolini,(1994), Wallace, (2000), Houston,(1997) found that both middle and high school, students can benefit from using storytelling to enhance skills pertaining to story writing. Further, they discovered that students are able to transfer their skills in story writing to more analytical forms. In the writing classroom, storytelling is based on the telling of a narrative by the teacher or the student with the intention of eventually recording the story in written form. This pedagogical strategy easily links to a narrative form of writing. One benefit of using storytelling prior to writing is that students are given an opportunity to develop language about their story and get feedback from others before writer's block can set in (Houston, Goolrick, & Tate,1991). There are two key areas that storytelling positively impacts to improve student writing: use of language and identification of audience. The use of language for writing addresses vocabulary and the organization of story. The audience is whom the writer is addressing and for what purpose. However, teaching young children how to think about their audience can be challenging (NCTE, 1992)

According to the study conducted by Mottley and Telfer (1996) on potential teachers' knowledge of the impact of storytelling on literacy development and identified what prospective teachers needs have in order to be prepared to use this strategy with students. In their study the prospective teachers were asked to consider their needs as they implemented this strategy in the classroom. The research findings show that choosing appropriate stories, concern about their ability to effectively tell a story, and the need to understand the purpose of storytelling in education etc as the greatest areas of their need. They emphasized that storytelling should become a part of the strategies studied in teacher training program so that teachers can prepare to implement storytelling with reading and writing in classroom

## **Conclusion**

Storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy which has the ability to enhance skills pertaining to reading and writing of young children. When children engage in storytelling it helps children being able to understand the grammar and the structure that has been used in the story. This is important as grammar plays a vital role in a story particularly the uses of present and past tenses, add an important role in a story. Also, storytelling helps young children remember the stories told to them rather than facts and information. This leads young children to start writing a story based on their memories rather than remembering the facts and information told to them thereby making the story more interesting, simple and memorable. Also teachers find effective ways to implement storytelling in the classroom and researchers engage on more research to find out the

benefits of this pedagogical strategy.

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