The Effects of Story Reading on First Grade Students' Story Comprehension and Retelling Skills*

Hikâye Okumanın Birinci Sınıf Öğrencilerin Anlama ve Anlatma Becerileri Üzerindeki Etkileri*

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Öz

Bu araştırmada, hikâye okumanın birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin anlamaları ve yeniden anlatma becerileri üzerindeki etkileri araştırılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini toplam 30 birinci sınıf öğrencisi oluşturmuştur. Bu yarı deneysel araştırma için, birinci sınıf öğrencileri deney ve kontrol grubu olarak seçkisiz olarak atanmıştır. Deney grubunda öğrencilere günlük olarak hikâyeler okunmuş ve hikâyeler okunduktan sonra hikâyelerle ilgili informel sohbetler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Okunan kitaplarla ilgili tüm günlük aktiviteler, Rosenblatt'ın dönüşümsel-işlem teorisine dayanan bilişsel ve estetik boyutları içermiş ve yaklaşık olarak 30 dakika sürmüştür. Hikâye konuşmalarında karakterler, sahne, olay örgüsü, çatışma, çözüm ve hikâyelerin öğrenciler üzerindeki etkileri tartışılmıştır. Öntest ve sontest değerlendirmesi için her iki gruptaki öğrencilere sınıf düzeyinde bir hikâye okunmuş ve yeniden anlatmaları istenmiştir. Aynı zamanda 5Ws ve 1H tekniği kullanılarak öğrencilerin anlama düzeyleri belirlenmiştir. Birebir değerlendirme süreci kullanılmış ve bu doğrultuda öğrencilerin hikâye elementlerini söyleyip söyleyemedikleri, hikâyeyi sıralı bir şekilde anlatıp anlatamadıkları, anlama düzeyleri ve öğrencilerin kullanmış oldukları cümle yapıları ortaya konulmuştur. Araştırmanın sonuçları ilgili literatür aracılığıyla tartışılmış ve gerekli önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hikâye Okuma, Hikâye Elementleri, Anlatma Becerileri, Anlama

Abstract

This research aimed to explore the effects of story reading on first-grade students' comprehension and retelling skills. A total of 30 first-grade students constituted the research sample. For this quasi-experimental research, the first-grade students were assigned to the treatment and comparison groups at random. In the treatment group, the stories were read to the students daily and after reading the stories, the informal conversations related to stories occurred. All the daily activities related the books read, which included efferent and aesthetic dimensions based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory, lasted around half an hour. In the story conversations, it was focused on story elements including characters, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution and the effects of stories on the students. For the pretest and posttest assessment of the first-grade students, a grade-level story was read to the students in both two groups and asked each one of them to retell the story. In addition, after retelling the process, five Ws and one H technique were used to discuss the story and clarify comprehension levels of the students in the groups. This one-on-one assessment procedure was taken place for learning the awareness of the students on the story structure if the student retells orderly the events the story, the sentence structures of the students, and the students' comprehension levels. The results of the research were discussed through the related literature and some profound implications of the research on first-grade students' education were provided.

Keywords: Story Reading, Story Elements, Retelling Skills, Comprehension

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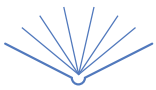
Introduction

Learning reading and writing is one of the important skills in today's societies. Turkish language reading and writing instruction are implemented based on course materials prepared according to the language arts curriculum. In the historical period, a variety of different methods were used to teach Turkish language arts skills and every method made a contribution to success. However, it is stated that while the instruction includes only textbooks and different methods would not create effective language teaching settings (Egan, 2005), children's literature-supported learning settings may help children to develop oral and writing language skills, their vocabulary, active use of language, and their reading comprehension skills (Barnitz, Gipe, & Richards, 1999; Peck, 1989). According to Webster (1961), As children should leaf through books, listen to be read, read to others, write and draw about books, criticize them, and transfer what they learn into their lives, adults should make collaborations with children, guide them, and give necessary supports. Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1999) contented that children's literature makes a profound contribution to children's academic and personal development. In addition, they stated that who supports children in this process emerges as another factor affecting. Children's acquisition of reading habits and having a reading culture are related to their reading exposure from early childhood periods. Children's reading exposure to books from their early childhood not only supports their academic, social, emotional, esthetic, and cultural but also increases children's language development. In this process, there are two underlying factors appearing. One of them is the quality of children's books and another one is the persons helping children make interactions with books.

Stories are important elements in children's literature. Miller and Pennycuff (2008) claimed that a variety of pedagogic strategies are required to be employed to teach literacy skills to children in schools and they pointed out that telling stories or reading stories one of the effective pedagogic strategies to teach reading and writing. According to Spaulding (2011), storytelling should be fun and allow for listeners' thoughts grow gradually. Telling stories are known by the educators as practical classroom technique. Children listening to stories develop a sense toward stories. Their awareness of story structure can help them to comprehend more complex stories. The activities including discussions about story and presentation, reciting story and reforming story after telling story develop children's oral and writing language skills (Peck, 1989).

The literature related to telling stories defined as making meaning for all cultures and the way of cultural transmission has shown that it has a strong educational value (Craig, Hull, Haggart, & Crowder, 2001; Cutspec, 2006; Dunst, Simkus, & Hamby, 2012; Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Heller, 2006; Isbell, 2002; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrence, 2004; Kies, Rodriguez & Granato 1993; Malo, 2000; Mello, 2001; Nelson 1989; Peck 1989; Reilly, 2007; Riley & Burrell, 2007).

Given that while there is a growing literature on the effects of telling stories about children's cognitive, social, affective, and linguistic skills, using stories effectively in today's classrooms are neglected. Like most of the other instructional methods, there is lots of research stressing the importance of telling stories as a pedagogic tool. However, some research has shown that all these research findings are not taken into account by the teachers because of some reasons such as usefulness and effectiveness of telling stories (Ates & Yildirim, 2015). According to Vygotsky, literacy, which is a high-level cognitive function, requires social interaction between environment and student and internalize new information. This view of Vygotsky is the main point of the current research (as cited in Reiley, 2007). In that framework, this present research aimed to investigate the effects of reading stories on students' development of language skills. With this overall aim, the following questions of the research were addressed:

1. Was there any statistically significant difference between comparison and treatment groups' posttest scores with regard to reading comprehension?

2. How did the students' number of words and sentences they used in reciting process of the stories vary before and after the treatment?

Method

Research Design

This research employed one of the quasi-experimental designs including the pretest-posttest nonequivalent group (Creswell, 2003). When researchers investigate the impact of a particular instructional intervention, they may decide that intact classes constitute the most ecologically valid setting for the research to take place (Plonsky, 2017). In this case, a comparison group, engaged in normal classroom instruction, may serve as the best baseline to the experimental condition. In the present research, while one of two intact classes was assigned to the treatment group, another one assigned to comparison group at random.

Participants

The present research took place in a public school of Turkey's Ankara province. A total of 30 first-grade (14 boys and 14 girls; 6-7 years old) from an elementary school constituted the research sample. While 15 of them involved in the comparison group, another half of the sample involved in the treatment group. The information gathered from the participants' families showed that all of them were low socioeconomic status and their families did not read stories to them. Besides, all of the participants were the native speakers of Turkish language. Before the research, the informed consent forms of the students' families were obtained. Also, the necessary permission to conduct the research was taken from the Board of Education of Turkey's Ankara province.

Measure

The students were assessed on reciting protocol before and after the treatment. Before the treatment, a story was read to the students in the groups. Then, they recited the story aloud at the one-on-one sessions. The one-on-one sessions were video-recorded. The video-recorded sessions transcribed and analyzed in terms of the number of words, the number of sentences, and story elements. The same protocol was processed on the new story read to the students after the treatment. In addition, after retelling the process, five Ws and one H technique were used to discuss the story and clarify comprehension levels of the students in the groups.

Procedure

The data collecting process occurred in three phases. Prior to the treatment, a story was read to all students in the groups including comparison and treatment groups. Then, it was asked to recite the story and answer the questions related to the story. After pretests, every week one story
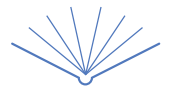
was read to the students in the treatment group. After every story reading taking around 15-20 minutes, informal conversations concerning the stories occurred. These conversations between the students and the storyteller (first author) focused on the elements of the stories, readers' responses including efferent and aesthetic dimensions of comprehension. The treatment duration took 8 weeks except for pretest and posttest measures and a total of 8 stories (see Appendix) were read to the students in the treatment group. After the treatment, a new story was read to all students for posttest assessments in the comparison and treatment groups.

Data Analysis Strategy

The present research used One-Way ANCOVA to test whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between the groups' adjusted posttest mean scores. Additionally, descriptive statistics such as mean scores were used to explore the extent to which the students in groups recited the stories read with regard to the recited sentences, words, and story elements before and after treatment.

Results

In this phase, the findings related to the research questions were presented. Our first research question investigated whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of posttest scores of the students.

Table 1. *Results of Analysis of Covariance*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	78.233	1	78.233	27.302	.50
Method	79.000	1	79.000	27.570***	.51
Error	77.367	27	2.865		

***p< .001

Considering Table 1 above, there was a significant difference in posttest mean scores [F(1,27)= 27.570, p= 0.000] between the groups, whilst adjusting for pretest scores of the students. The partial Eta Squared value indicates the effect size and should be compared with Cohen's guidelines (0.2 – small effect, 0.5 – moderate effect, 0.8 – large effect). It can be seen that for method the effect size is moderate (0.51). This value is also used to describe how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable (51%). Ideally, this number would be fairly large.

A one-way ANCOVA was conducted to compare the groups' reading comprehension mean scores whilst controlling for the groups' pretest scores. Levene's test and normality checks were carried out and the assumptions met. There was a significant difference in mean scores [F(1,27)= 27.570, p= 0.000] between the groups. Post hoc tests showed there was a significant difference between the treatment group and the comparison group (p= 0.000). Comparing the estimated marginal means showed that the statistically significant difference was in favor of the treatment group (M= 13.33) compared to the comparison group (M= 10.01).

Another research question of the research was to determine the number of words and sentences the students in the groups they used when reciting the story

Table 2. *The Mean Scores of the Number of Words, the Number of Sentences, and Story Elements of Treatment and Comparison Group Students Recited Before and After Treatment*

Source	NSPT (M)	NSAT (M)	NWPT (M)	NWAT (M)	SEPT (M)	SEAT (M)
Treatment	13.13	27.93	73	139.46	3.87	5.70
Comparison	11.66	18.93	60	86.27	3.80	4.23
Mean Difference	1.47	9	13	53.19	.07	1.47

Note: NSPT: The Number of Sentences Prior to Treatment, NSAT: The Number of Sentences After Treatment, NWPT: The Number of Words Prior to Treatment, NWAT: The Number of Words After Treatment, SEPT: Story Elements Prior to Treatment, SEAT: Story Elements After Treatment

Given the Table 2, it was seen that while the groups' mean scores differentiated slightly with regard to the number of words, story elements, and the numbers of sentences prior to the implementation. After the treatment, the differences between the groups widened in favor of the treatment group with regard to the number of words, the number of sentences and story elements.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present research aimed to determine the impact of reading stories on first-grade students' reading comprehension levels. For this overall aim, the quasi-experimental method was employed and one treatment and one comparison group were assigned. While in the treatment group procedure proceeded reading stories to the students every day, in the comparison group, stories were not used and the Turkish language art curriculum requirements were carried out. The research finding revealed that there was a significant difference between treatment and control groups in terms of reading comprehension posttest scores of the students in favor of the treatment group. In addition, considering the posttest assessments of the students in the groups related to reciting stories, the number of words and sentences used by the treatment group students in the retelling process of the story were more than the control group students used. Those results were consistent with previous research findings (Delano, 1977; Mazi, 2008; Mottley & Telfer, 1997).

According to those findings, it might be contended that reading stories made a positive contribution to reading comprehension levels of the students in the treatment group compared to the control group students. Considering the underlying reasons, previous experiences of students with stories, enthusiastic parts of stories, and easy access to stories (Horton, 2013) would have a profound effect. Also, the present research findings were similar to the research findings of Morrow, Pressley, Smith, and Smith (1997). Morrow et al. (1997) compared the literature-only program to the literature/science program. The research findings showed that the children with literature/science program scored statistically significantly better on all literacy measures than the children in the literature-only group. Additionally, the children in the literature/science program developed retelling skills and their awareness of story structure.

In the retelling process, cognitive and physical preparations of the students in the treatment group and supporting this with children's picture books made positive contributions to improving the students' positive attitudes toward stories. Miller and Pennycuff (2008) contended that reading children's picture books or telling stories make unmotivated students increase their motivations and poor readers to be involved in the process. Also, the teachers' journals concerning the process provided that reading stories positively affected the students' comprehension and retelling skills, and attitudes toward reading as well as their speaking and writing skills, reasoning, intertextuality skills.

Researchers have documented that reading stories and telling stories help students to make connections with prior knowledge and gain experiences with texts and support their reading comprehension skills and academic achievement (Casteel & Isom, 1994; Craig, Hull, Haggart, & Crowder, 2001). The scientific literature on reading stories has argued that there are positive correlations between the development of high-level cognitive skills such as critical reading and productivity and reading stories (Belet, 2001; Kayahan, 2010). Taken account of all the information above, introducing children to stories and books help them become aware of story structure and deal with difficult texts (Barton & Sawyer, 2003). During the implementation process in the present research, the students' awareness of story structure and prior knowledge related to story were supported with the new stories and the informal conversations between the students and the teacher after story reading shed light on both making meaning and retelling processes. At the beginning of the school year, listening skills appear one of the underlying factors of learning reading and writing skills. Given the holistic structure of language arts, supporting this process with story reading and telling stories can both develop language skills and increase students' awareness of text structures and enable them to learn many reading strategies (Akyol, 2011; Barton & Sawyer, 2003; Lnych-Brown & Tomlinson, 1999). Given that there have been statistically high significant correlations between reading comprehension and listening comprehension, this process makes a significant contribution to reading comprehension. Most of the researchers have argued that listening serves to successful reading comprehension and reading comprehension can be improved through listening activities (Aarnoutse et al., 1997; Aarnoutse et al., 1998; Trinkle, 2008).

There is increasing research showing that stories are one of the important instructional materials. The strong structure of story marks that it can result in effective learning outcomes (Willingham, 2009). Meanwhile, when knowledge is presented through stories, knowledge can be more permanent compared with knowledge not presented through stories (Ansbery & Morgan; Haven, 2007). The meta-analysis study which was concerned with the pedagogic part of telling stories, conducted by Mello (2001) pointed out that telling stories and reading stores have a significant impact on writing, vocabulary instruction, reading fluency, self-efficacy, and awareness of culture.

From these findings of the present research, we can conclude that reading stories are one of the effective instructional tools to improve children's language skills. We imply that every counterpart in the educational environment should support the use of stories in classroom settings to make significant contributions to children's lives. Particularly elementary classroom teachers should become good storytellers. According to Aiex (1988), stories should not be complex and become understandable for listeners, draw children's attention, and motivate children to research. When teachers choose stories, they should choose comprehensible stories. These stories include a few characters particularly children or animals. Also, some researchers (e.g., Andrew, 2008; Roach, 2016; Schatt & Ryan, 2015) have contended that storyteller needs to have extended literature. Having extended literature as a storyteller would make storyteller reach every student in the group. Besides, during the storytelling process, a variety of activities should be used.

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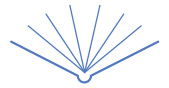
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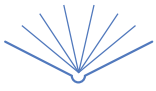
Appendix

The List of Children's Picture Books Read to the Students of the Treatment Group

	Book Title (Turkish)	Author/s of Book	Illistrator of Book	Translator into Turkish
1	İyi Kalpli Küçük Tavşan	Michael Scoffier	Eleonore Thuillier	Korkut Erdur
2	Bekçi Amos'un Hastalandığı Gün	Philip C. Stead	Erin E. Stead	Esin Uslu
3	Kurbağaya Özenen Tavşan Roka	Aysun Berktay	Aysun Berktay	
4	Güzellik Tacı	Saim Keskingöz	Özlem Korçak	
5	Farklı Ama Aynı	Feridun oral	Feridun Oral	
6	Balıkçı Osman	Anne Hofmann	Anne Hofmann	Şeyda Öztürk
7	Mevsimlere Güzelleme	Arslan Sayman, Sara Şahinkanat	Deniz Üçbaşaran	
8	Evdeki Kim	Marisa Vestita	Marisa Vestita	Müge Çevikoğlu