

A Story-Based Approach to Teach Foreign Languages: The Case of English*

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ABSTRACT

This study scrutinizes the effectiveness and feasibility of a story-based language teaching in Moroccan EFL classrooms. In doing so, a quasi-experimental mixed method was adopted and sample of 80 common core students were randomly selected and put into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was exposed to story-based lessons whose source of input was stories while the control group was exposed to lessons from the ministry EFL textbook. To assess the impact of this approach, a student questionnaire and a classroom observation were also used. The results revealed that the experimental group performed better in proficiency tests than the control group. A statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control group was observed. A positive change in motivation to learn the language was also noticed during classroom observations. The results also showed a positive difference in grammar scores concerning the structure taught via stories. Therefore, the findings in general, proved that the use of story-based language teaching can boost the students' grammar knowledge along with the students' eagerness to read more stories. Some students even started using some vocabulary items and chunks in their production be it speaking or writing.

Keywords: *Story-Based Language Teaching, TEFL, Applied Linguistics, Motivation and Retention*

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Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde Hikâye Tabanlı Bir Yaklaşım: İngilizce Örneği

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Fas'ta yabancı dil olarak İngilizceyi öğrenen sınıflarda hikâye tabanlı dil öğretiminin etkinliğini ve uygulanabilirliğini incelemektedir. Çalışma sırasında yarı deneysel karma yöntem benimsenip 80 temel seviye öğrencisi rastgele seçilerek deney ve kontrol gruplarına ayrılmıştır. Deney grubu, bilgi kaynağı olarak hikâyelerden alınan derslere maruz kalırken kontrol grubu bakanlığın İngilizce öğretim kitabından alınan derslere maruz kalmıştır. Bu yaklaşımın etkisini değerlendirmek için öğrenci anketi ve sınıf gözlemi de kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, deney grubunun yeterlilik testlerinde kontrol grubundan daha iyi performans gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Deney grubu ile kontrol grubu arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark gözlemlenmiştir. Sınıf gözlemleri sırasında dil öğrenme motivasyonunda olumlu bir değişim de fark edilmiştir. Sonuçlar ayrıca hikâyeler aracılığıyla öğretilen yapı ile ilgili dil bilgisi puanlarında olumlu bir fark olduğunu göstermiştir. Dolayısıyla genel olarak bulgular, hikâye tabanlı dil öğretiminin öğrencilerin dil bilgisi kapasitesi ve daha fazla hikâye okuma isteğini artırabileceğini kanıtlamıştır. Bazı öğrenciler konuşma veya yazma pratiği esnasında bazı kelime ve ifade kalıplarını kullanmaya başlamışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Uygulamalı Dil Bilimi, Motivasyon ve Bilgi Korunumu, Hikâye Tabanlı Dil Öğretimi, TEFL.*

مدخل قائم على القصة لتعليم اللغات الأجنبية: اللغة الإنجليزية أمودجاً

مُلخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة فعالية تطبيق تدريس اللغة القائم على القصص في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المغرب. ولتحقيق ذلك، أُعتمد منهج وصفي وتحريبي أيضاً حيث تم اختيار عينة من 80 تلميذاً من التعليم الأساسي بشكل عشوائي ووضعهم في مجموعتين: مجموعة تجريبية وأخرى مرجعية. تعرضت المجموعة التجريبية لدروس تعتمد على القصص كمصدر للمعلومات، بينما تلقت المجموعة المرجعية دروساً من كتاب الوزارة لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

ولتقييم تأثير هذا المنهجية أُستُخدم استبيان للطلاب وملاحظة الفصول الدراسية حيث كشفت النتائج أن المجموعة التجريبية أدت بشكل أفضل في اختبارات الكفاءة مقارنة بالمجموعة المرجعية. كما لوحظ في المستوى اللغوي، وأيضاً في تغير إيجابي في الدافعية لتعلم اللغة خلال ملاحظات الفصول الدراسية. كما أظهرت النتائج فرقاً إيجابياً في درجات القواعد النحوية فيما يتعلق بالبنية التي تم تدريسها عبر القصص. لذلك، أثبتت النتائج بشكل عام أن استخدام تدريس اللغة القائم على القصص يمكن أن يعزز معرفة الطلاب بالقواعد النحوية إلى جانب رغبتهم في قراءة المزيد من القصص. حتى أن بعض الطلاب بدؤوا في استخدام بعض المفردات والتعابير في إنتاجهم سواء كان في الحديث أو الكتابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس اللغة القائم على القصص، تدريس اللغات، اللسانيات التطبيقية، الدافعية، الاحتفاظ بالعناصر اللغوية.

1. Introduction

Thanks to recent findings in applied linguistics, we know that learners differ in terms of their learning styles and cognitive abilities. Having this idea in mind, as Moroccan EFL teachers, we are constantly looking for ways and activities that help us cater to these styles and abilities to achieve an effective teaching/learning process. In addition, we face many problems with our students. For instance, teachers claim that their students lack the confidence to speak the language comfortably in classrooms, lack motivation to learn, and have inadequate speaking practices. Other teachers cannot deny the fact that they have difficulties in making lessons more fun and their teaching styles more effective. Besides, they find it difficult to encourage the shy student to participate in class and to take risks. All these claims can be seen clearly during the correction of baccalaureate exams as we witness students' inabilities to perform well in some easy tasks such as completing a paragraph, English tenses and even some comprehension tasks. There has been much interest recently in the aim of overcoming these problems to make the teaching/learning process an effective, enjoyable, and effortless experience that leads to the lesson expected objectives, and in some cases, it even leads to unexpected outcomes. Accordingly, this research is an attempt to show that a story-based language teaching can be an effective solution for all these problems especially nowadays with high school students who have retention problems because they easily get bored with the traditional teaching styles. Moreover, the research attempts to reject the claim that "language stories are not appropriate for adults." Another important purpose of this research is to investigate the feasibility of story-based language teaching in Moroccan high schools. Various conceptual and empirical research has revealed that short stories are effective learning tools teachers can use to boost English as a foreign language (EFL) learning performance. According to Lee, fairy tales have been commonly used as reading materials in EFL classrooms and they are a great vehicle for enhancing foreign language development.¹ Furthermore, fairy tales offer a valuable

¹ Lee, "Fairy Tales in EFL Classrooms," *Journal of Language Teaching*, 2020, 45.

moral lesson that can be used as an alternative to character learning for young learners.² Additionally, the use of fairy tales in EFL classes can assist children in developing a hobby for reading and getting exposed to different reading cultures.³ Before designing this story-based textbook, the researcher investigated the Moroccan EFL context so as to be more practical and the textbook will stand on solid ground and have an added value, not just be repetitive. That's why a quantitative study was conducted to collect up-to-date data and see whether stories are already used or not in Moroccan EFL classes. By doing this, the researcher also shed light on the benefits and challenges stories have according to these teachers. Furthermore, the study demonstrated some of the most challenging obstacles behind not using stories in Moroccan EFL classrooms.

In my main thesis, I claim that a story-based language teaching textbook will be much more useful than the existing ones in that it will enhance learners' retention and motivation and hence improve their language proficiency level. I mean, the study is about the importance of stories in EFL classrooms, unlike earlier work in the literature which focuses mainly on using stories to teach some skills or components (grammar, vocabulary, and culture). Here the focus is exclusively on stories as the source of all the input learners will be exposed to. To put it differently, some famous stories from different cultures will be the starting point to teach all language skills and components.

a. Background

I would like to begin by explaining how my interest in using bedtime stories as a source of input developed. From my humble years of experience as an EFL teacher, I noticed that reading is not given much importance in our EFL textbooks. F. Dubin claimed that language teachers have turned away from the reading skill because of its apparent association with the "old-fashioned" grammar-translation method and the talk about

² Parsons, "Moral Lessons in Fairy Tales," *Educational Research Review*, 2021, 112.

³ Simon, "Reading Cultures and Hobbies," *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 2022, 78

communicative competence which fills the air.⁴ According to Dubin, too little attention is devoted to reading in language pedagogy.⁵ For me, although the grammar-translation method was much criticized for its teacher-centeredness and focus on grammar and written language, no one can deny that it has exposed learners to extensive reading that allowed them for sure to become good at languages. My story-based approach will be, let's say, a compromise of both the grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching. In other words, this approach will focus on reading stories to teach language skills and components in a learner-centered and communicative way. To explain my vision, I may take from Martin Luther King's famous speech, and I say:

“I have a dream that one day foreign language teaching will be as enjoyable and educative as reading a bedtime story. I hold this claim to be self-evident that reading is the right key to the language proficiency door.”

b. Statement of the Problem

Thanks to research in applied linguistics, we know more about students' different learning styles and cognitive abilities. Consequently, foreign language teachers have become obliged to find new methods and activities that help them meet the different needs of students in order to improve the teaching /learning practices and thus get fruitful education with good results. What makes the problem worse is that 21st century students have become difficult to motivate in the class using the traditional methods and textbooks, especially these days which have witnessed a breakthrough in information and communication technology. Accordingly, curriculum developers need to keep up with such advances and provide lessons and materials that meet 21st century students' needs, skills and preferences. Additionally, EFL teachers in Moroccan high schools face many problems with their students. For instance, some teachers claim that their students lack confidence to speak the language comfortably in classrooms, lack motivation to learn and have inadequate

⁴ F. Dubin, "Reading in EFL Pedagogy," *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1992, 56.

⁵ *Ibid.*

speaking practice. Other teachers cannot deny the fact that they have difficulties in making lessons more fun and their teaching styles more effective. Besides, other teachers find it difficult to encourage the shy student to participate in class and to take risks; as a result, they just give up and let them on their own. All in all, Teachers are nowadays trying to overcome these problems so that the teaching/learning process would be an effective, enjoyable and effortless experience.

c. Purpose

Accordingly, this research is an attempt to show that the key solution to those problems is a textbook based on fairy tales and supported by a Moodle platform in Moroccan foreign language classes. Therefore, students will no longer get bored in the class feel demotivated to learn. Moreover, the research attempts at rejecting the faulty claim that says “language stories are not appropriate for adults, they are just a waste of time.” Another important purpose of this research is to investigate the feasibility of this story-based EFL textbook in Moroccan high schools.

d. Rationale

The rationale behind doing this research is threefold:

1-To contribute to the literature since there is not much written on this topic in Morocco

2-To provide teachers who want to use language stories in their teaching methods with valuable resource and experience about the feasibility of this idea

3-To make the foreign language teaching/learning enterprise more enjoyable and motivating for teachers and learners respectively

e. Research Objectives

The main goal of this study is to show that believing in the effectiveness of language stories is what Moroccan EFL teachers are in need of especially nowadays with high school students who easily get bored with the traditional teaching styles. Moreover, this research is meant

to find out the frequency and effectiveness of using stories in the Moroccan context. In other words, this research is meant to show whether Moroccan EFL teachers use stories or not and to shed light on their attitudes towards both foreign language textbooks based on stories and supported by a Moodle platform.

The specific objectives were as follows:

a-To reject the faulty claim that says “language stories are not appropriate for adults”

c-To investigate the feasibility of story-based EFL textbooks in Moroccan high schools.

f. Research Questions

1-To what extent do learners who are taught using the story-based approach reach a language proficiency level higher than students who aren't?

2-What is the effect of this story-based electronic textbook on students' retention?

3- What are learners' attitudes towards learning English using a story-based approach?

g. Research Hypothesis

1- a story-based EFL textbook is an effective learning tool teachers can use to boost foreign language proficiency

2- learners get bored easily with books and traditional ways of teaching. So, a story-based textbook will break this boredom and increase retention.

3-Students have positive attitudes towards learning English using story-based language teaching

h. Organization of the research paper

As far as the organization of the study is concerned, besides the present general introduction, the next chapter will discuss the literature

related to the topic of research, chapter 2 will report the methodology followed in the investigation of the topic, chapter 3 will report and discuss the results obtained and the study will end with a general conclusion.

2. Literature review

a. Definition of bedtime stories

No one can deny the benefits of bedtime stories, but before we go into more details about this, let's first define what we mean by bedtime stories. There are so many definitions of bedtime stories. Here are some:

According to Wikipedia: "A bedtime story is a traditional form of storytelling, where a story is told to a child at bedtime to prepare the child for sleep. The bedtime story has long been considered 'a definite institution in many families'. Reading bedtime stories yields multiple benefits for parents and children alike. The fixed routine of a bedtime story before sleeping can improve the child's brain development, language mastery, and logical thinking skills. The storyteller-listener relationship creates an emotional bond between the parent and the child."⁶ Due to "the strength of the imitative instinct" of a child, the parent and the stories that they tell act as a model for the child to follow.⁷ According to this definition, it seems that bedtime stories have been for ages a well-established practice, they have many benefits such as brain development, language mastery, and logical thinking skills. They can even strengthen our relationships, be they parent-child or teacher-student. According to this definition, bedtime stories help a lot in language teaching. First, they improve brain development. Well, no one would deny how this development will help in language teaching since the brain is an essential and key element in language learning. In addition, it is stated clearly in the definition that bedtime stories help in mastering and learning the language effectively. Along with developing critical thinking skills, bedtime stories strengthen the teacher-student relationship, and thus there will be a stress-free

⁶ Wikipedia, s.v. "Bedtime story," last modified 2011, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedtime_story.

⁷ Patti, "The Importance of Bedtime Stories," *Journal of Parenting* 25, no. 3 (2011): 45.

atmosphere during the sessions. This will surely be conducive to learning since the learners' affective filter will be lowered and learning will then take place. During the sessions, learners will be engaged in purposeful and fun activities that lead to successful and effective communication without fear or stress. All the mentioned benefits are related to the concern of this study, more benefits will be discussed thoroughly in the coming sections.

b. Benefits of stories

Most of what has been done in applied linguistics literature emphasized the fact that the language teaching/learning experience has been a very demanding task for both the teacher and the learner; this gives rise in some cases to frustration and tension in the classroom. Because of that, teachers and other specialists have been for decades concerned mainly with how they can lessen this atmosphere of anxiety and inhibition and make learning as joyful and enthusiastic as possible. This constant effort results in the use of stories in language classes as a means to entertain and educate at the same time. Giving students a chance to practice language skills and structure in a less stressful atmosphere, stories are also effective activities that highly motivate students and enable them to use the language in a natural and real-life context. Pedagogically speaking, Gudmundsdottir notes that pedagogical content can be thought of as narrative text, and teaching as essentially the exercise of textual interpretation.⁸ In short, stories are widely employed as a powerful medium of teaching and learning. But how do stories foster learning? Neuhauser answered this question by claiming that stories are effective as educational tools because they are believable, rememberable, and entertaining.⁹ There are other reasons behind using stories. According to Duff and Maley, the use of literature in the classroom offers the following advantages: it offers a wide range of styles, vocabulary, etc.; it deals with matters that concern children

⁸ Sigrun Gudmundsdottir, "The Narrative Nature of Pedagogical Content Knowledge," in *Reform in Teacher Education: A Study of School-Based Programs*, ed. Sandra Hollingsworth and Hugh Sockett (Falmer Press, 1995), 205.

⁹ Peg Neuhauser, *Corporate Legends and Lore: The Power of Storytelling as a Management Tool* (McGraw-Hill, 1993), 10.

and are related to their personal experiences; it is open to multiple interpretations and opinions, bringing about genuine interaction and participation in the classroom.¹⁰

Martínez sheds light on four main reasons for using stories in language teaching. According to Martínez, stories: can be one more tool to reach the curriculum goals; can be used to arouse interest and increase motivation among students who are learning a second language; are one of the best ways for children to not only learn the language but also learn content, cultural aspects, and how to solve everyday problems; and help students acquire and develop individual reading tastes, skills, and creativity.¹¹

No one can deny the fact that language learning is a difficult task, which makes learners unable to maintain their attention and effort for long periods of time and thus they lose interest and motivation to learn. In such cases, stories are of great help for many reasons. Firstly, stories encourage and motivate the students so that effective learning takes place. Secondly, stories help teachers meaningfully contextualize the language being taught by making it possible for the learners to experience language rather than just study it. Thirdly, unlike mechanical drills, stories engage learners emotionally and even cognitively by identifying themselves with the characters and solving the problems respectively, and thus learners experience the meaning of language. Finally, thanks to stories, learners are provided with intense and meaningful context for the target language. Therefore, they must be regarded as central to learning. Parkinson and Reid Thomas state that literature should be used in language classes because it provides cultural enrichment, linguistic model, mental training, extension of linguistic competence, authenticity, memorability, and they are rhythmic resources and motivating convenient material that are open to interpretation.¹² Along with this, using stories as the main source of

¹⁰ Alan Duff and Alan Maley, *Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 56.

¹¹ Ana Martínez, "Using Stories to Teach English," *Teaching English* 40, no. 4 (2007):22.

¹² Brian Parkinson and Helen Reid Thomas, *Teaching Literature in a Second Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 45.

input in language classes has gained approval by many foreign language teachers and thus we can talk about the emergence of a new language teaching method notably the story-based language teaching method. According to Khatib and Seyyedrezaei, this method is a humanistic literature-based language teaching method that aims at promoting the learners' personal, cultural, and linguistic awareness.¹³ The main purpose of this new method is to help learners to learn language by enjoying and using language for communication through using stories as the materials in a friendly atmosphere. It develops the learners' communicative competence and critical thinking. This method also aims at cultivating all language skills cooperatively.

c. Stories and language components

As far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned, stories offer a meaningful context for the new structure or vocabulary item and thus learners are engaged in meaningful learning rather than rote learning as explained by Ausubel. That is to say, stories present grammar, vocabulary, and formulaic speech within a meaningful and structured context that supports comprehension of the narrative world and the content the story is related to.¹⁴ For instance, many learners find grammar challenging and really hard to retain. This is so for many reasons such as some teachers focus more on form than meaning. That is to say, students learn the form without becoming aware of the use of such forms in their daily life. Moreover, some textbooks present the forms in an uncontextualized way using unauthentic language. In doing so, learners easily get bored when it is a grammar lesson. So, the solution is to use stories as a source of the target structures because only they offer the learners rich contexts for

¹³ Mohammad Ali Khatib and Seyyedrezaei Seyyedrezaei, "A Story-Based Language Teaching Method: Promoting the Learners' Personal, Cultural, and Linguistic Awareness," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 70 (2013): 20-25.

¹⁴ Glazer, Susan Mandel, and Anne W. Burke. *An Integrated Approach to Early Literacy: Literature to Language*. Allyn and Bacon, 1994; Jennings, Jean. "The Power of Stories in the ESL Classroom." *TESOL Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1991): 681-684; Koisawalia, R. "The Role of Stories in Language Teaching." *Language Learning Journal* 32, no. 1 (2005): 32-37.

introducing the target structures and keeping students motivated with the story events and characters. This solution goes hand in hand with the goals of ACTFL. According to this framework, grammar should be addressed within meaningful communicative contexts as one element of language proficiency. Instead of focusing on grammar rules and diagramming sentences, teachers should guide students towards an understanding of how grammar functions. Students learn how to use the form rather than memorized conjugations that may not be applicable across contexts.¹⁵

d. Stories and language skills

In terms of language skills, we can say that stories will allow learners to practice the skills in an integrative way. For instance, in a reading lesson, students will be engaged in a pre-reading task in which they are asked to check their familiarity with the story via whole class discussion using pictures. Then in while reading tasks, learners will answer different comprehension questions. Finally, in post-reading tasks, students will express their attitudes towards different elements of the story, namely events, characters, and ending. So, there will be whole class discussion which will result in more interactions. Then at home, students may write summaries or different endings of the story. Sell criticizes standard foreign language textbooks for abnormal and non-authentic language. She also mentions that textbook topics are inappropriate to the foreign language learners. They rarely address the real issues that learners face in real-life. Textbooks are full of fiction and unreal materials. Besides, as McKay argues, literary texts can be ideal for all the four language skills.¹⁶

e. Stories and culture

Stories Stories can be an efficient means to foster learners' intercultural competence. I mean, only by reading stories and discussing

¹⁵ American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. 3rd ed. Alexandria, VA: ACTFL, 2006.

¹⁶ Jennifer Sell, "Critique of Foreign Language Textbooks," *Language Learning Journal* 34, no. 3 (2005): 56; Sandra McKay, "Literature as Content for ESL/EFL," in *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 3rd ed., edited by Marianne Celce-Murcia (Heinle & Heinle, 2001), 319-332.

their morals and messages that learners can develop some values and manners such as openness, awareness, tolerance, and acceptance towards other ways of understanding life. In this sense, learners can gain sensitive attitudes towards others which will make them better prepared for future exchanges with foreigners and hence avoid possible misunderstanding and culture shocks. In reading comprehension tasks, literary texts can stimulate interest and closer reading of the texts, as well as integrating the four skills during reading practice. Literature also provides learners with hefty valuable cultural information. As Sell mentions, "Teaching literature provides learners with a truly cultural competence, equipping them with culturally-apposite pragmatic and socio-psychological components around which to build effective identities which will enable their socialization in the target culture and enhance the effectiveness with which they participate in that culture."¹⁷ Regarding appropriateness for classroom discussion, literary texts are often rich and have multiple layers of meaning, and can be effectively mined for discussions.¹⁸ Furthermore, Murdoch states that "short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency."¹⁹ Erkaya also believes that reading literary texts can lead learners to be critical thinkers. Arigol believes that short stories can have the following pedagogical advantages: making the students' reading task easier because they are simple and short; giving learners a better view of other cultures; requiring more attention and analysis; presenting a fictional and interesting world; helping students to be more creative and raising the critical thinking skills; raising cultural awareness; reducing students' anxiety and helping them feel more relaxed; and providing multicultural contexts because of its universal language.²⁰

¹⁷ Jennifer Sell, *Why Teach Literature in Language Classes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45.

¹⁸ Meiling Chiang, "Multiple Interpretations in Literary Texts," *Journal of Language and Literature* 29, no. 2 (2007): 120.

¹⁹ George Murdoch, "Exploiting Short Stories in the Language Classroom," *Language Learning Journal* 26, no. 3 (2002): 9.

²⁰ Ozgecan Baskent Erkaya, "Benefits of Using Short Stories in the EFL Context," *Asian EFL Journal* 8, no. 1 (2005): 38-39.

f. Stories and communication

Stories can be a good opportunity for learners to express themselves and interact with each other, especially after reading the story. We all remember how we were hooked by the stories we read to the extent that we identified ourselves with the characters and we expressed our attitudes, be they positive or negative. In fact, stories used to provoke us to react, discuss, and sometimes critically analyze the stories' events, characters, and ending. That's why stories can be a good incentive to pushing learners to participate more in the classroom and interact with their teachers and peers. According to Verdugo, stories also enhance children's interaction and communication not only with their teacher but also with their peers. Reading or listening to a story related to a specific content can make children react to it verbally or non-verbally. This enables them to construct knowledge and express ideas, even with the very limited language they may have.²¹

g. Story based Language Teaching

Using stories in language classes has gained a general consensus; no one can deny the fact that stories can be a great source of contextualized input because they can offer a valuable way of contextualizing and introducing new language, making it comprehensible and memorable.²² Thanks to the many benefits stories can offer to teachers and learners in language classes, we opted for a story-based approach in carrying out this project. That is to say, stories will be the main source of input, be it language components or skills. So, every unit in this project will be based on a story and this latter will be the starting point for most of the target structures or skills. The coming sections will give more details about this story-based approach, reasons behind adopting it along with some benefits and practical tips while using stories in language classes.

²¹ Dolores Verdugo, *Enhancing Communication Through Stories* (Madrid: Pearson, 2015), 78.

²² Barbara Wasik and Mary Alice Bond, "Interactive Book Reading and Language Development," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 93, no. 2 (2001): 243-250; Andrew Wright, *Stories for Classroom and Assembly* (Scholastic, 2000).

Learning is undoubtedly a process of meaning making. I mean, learners try to make sense of all the input they are exposed to. Similarly, narrative is a fundamental structure of human meaning making.²³ The events and actions of one's life are understood and experienced as fitting into narrative episodes or stories. Rossiter states that narrative is deeply appealing and richly satisfying to the human soul, with an allure that transcends cultures, centuries, ideologies, and academic disciplines.²⁴ Pedagogically speaking, Gudmundsdottir notes that pedagogical content can be thought of as narrative text, and teaching as essentially the exercise of textual interpretation.²⁵ In short, stories are widely employed as a powerful medium of teaching and learning. But how do stories foster learning? Neuhauser answered this question by claiming that stories are effective as educational tools because they are believable, rememberable, and entertaining.²⁶

There has been recently important progress and innovation in language teaching methods so as to make the teaching/learning enterprise a more effective and effortless experience for teachers and learners respectively. Along with this, using stories as the main source of input in language classes has gained approval by many foreign language teachers and thus we can talk about the emergence of a new language teaching method, notably the story-based language teaching method. According to Khatib and Seyyedrezaei, this method is a humanistic literature-based language teaching method that aims to promote the learners' personal,

²³ Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Harvard University Press, 1986); Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Harvard University Press, 2002); Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (State University of New York Press, 1988); Donald Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1996.

²⁴ Marsha Rossiter, *Narrative and Stories in Adult Teaching and Learning*, ERIC Digest, 2002, 119.

²⁵ Sigrun Gudmundsdottir, "The Narrative Nature of Pedagogical Content Knowledge," in *Reform in Teacher Education: A Study of School-Based Programs*, ed. Sandra Hollingsworth and Hugh Sockett (Falmer Press, 1995), 205.

²⁶ Peg Neuhauser, *Corporate Legends and Lore: The Power of Storytelling as a Management Tool* (McGraw-Hill, 1993), 10.

cultural, and linguistic awareness.²⁷ The main purpose of this new method is to help learners to learn language by enjoying and using language for communication through using stories as the materials in a friendly atmosphere. It develops the learners' communicative competence and critical thinking. This method also aims at cultivating all language skills cooperatively.

Here are some characteristics of story-based language teaching:

- The primary function of language is interaction and communication.
- It is based on humanism and cooperative learning.
- Personal, cultural, and linguistic awareness should be developed.
- Stories are used as learning and teaching materials.
- Linguistics, sociolinguistic, and communicative competence are emphasized.
- All four language skills receive attention and are practiced integratively.
- The student's native language should be avoided in the classroom but can be used to talk about the procedure and cultural points.
- All of the class activities should be done in a stress-free friendly environment.
- Vocabulary is taught in the context of the short story.
- Grammar is taught based on focus on form.
- All types of interaction: Teacher-student, student-teacher, and student-student interaction exist.

²⁷ Mohammad Ali Khatib and Seyyedrezaei Seyyedrezaei, "A Story-Based Language Teaching Method: Promoting the Learners' Personal, Cultural, and Linguistic Awareness," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 70 (2013): 20-25.

- One of the main purposes of this method is to help learners to be critical thinkers.

3. Methodology

a. The design

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-method design to ensure a comprehensive evaluation. In doing so, 80 common core students were randomly assigned to either the experimental group, which received story-based lessons, or the control group, which continued with the traditional textbook curriculum. That is to say, the first group was the control group in which the students taught English with a ministry textbook with lessons that did not include stories. Upon some research on textbooks used in Moroccan high schools, it was found that the analyzed course books did not include any stories; they only included artificial reading passages composed for specific purposes of the lessons. The course books investigated are: “Outlook” and “Visa to the World” by Moroccan Ministry of Education, none included story-based language teaching lessons. The second group was the experimental group in which the students were taught English in a new way, with lessons whose source of input was stories and fairy tales. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test scores to measure language proficiency changes, student questionnaires to gather perceptions and feedback, and an observation grid to assess classroom dynamics and teaching practices.

b. The participants’ characteristics

The participants are students at a public school where the researcher works. They are his common core students with a total number of 80 students. These students study English as a foreign language three hours a week. All of the students are at the age of 14 or 15. They have A2 proficiency in English, and their purpose in learning English is to pass the Baccalaureate national exam that is applied by the Ministry of Education in Morocco at the end of the third year in high schools. The students are placed randomly by Massar in their classes.

c. The instruments

The quantitative component involved administering a standardized language proficiency test both before and after the intervention. The pre-test served as a baseline measure of the students' language abilities, while the post-test evaluated any changes following the teaching intervention. The qualitative component consisted of students' questionnaires designed to shed light on their subjective experiences and perceptions of the story-based lessons. These questionnaires included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather comprehensive feedback. Additionally, an observation grid was used to systematically document classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and student behaviors during the lessons. This triangulation of data sources aimed to provide a strong understanding of the impact of the story-based teaching method.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, several measures were taken. Validity was ensured by using a standardized language proficiency test that had been previously validated in similar contexts. For the qualitative data, inter-rater reliability was established by having multiple researchers independently code and analyze the responses to ensure consistency in the interpretation of the data. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion to reach a consensus.

d. Results

The quantitative analysis of test scores revealed that the experimental group showed a significant improvement in their scores, with a pre-test mean of 6.80 and a post-test mean of 10.18. This improvement was statistically significant, as indicated by a paired t-test ($t = -14.16$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, the control group, with a pre-test mean of 7.96 and a post-test mean of 7.47, did not show a significant improvement, supported by a paired t-test ($t = 1.07$, $p = 0.29$). An independent t-test further confirmed that the experimental group's post-test scores were significantly higher than those of the control group ($t = 4.07$, $p < 0.001$). These quantitative results demonstrate that the story-based teaching method effectively improved students' language proficiency.

The qualitative analysis of student questionnaires supported these findings. The majority of students in the experimental group found the story-based lessons more engaging compared to traditional textbook lessons. Many students found the stories very interesting, and most students understood the stories most of the time. Additionally, students reported improvements in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. However, some students found difficulties in long stories and some expressions were challenging. They suggested more guided practice, shorter stories, and additional hints to address these challenges. This qualitative analysis aligns with the quantitative findings, showing that students found the story-based approach engaging and beneficial for improving language skills, but also highlighting areas for potential improvement.

Data from the observation grid provided further insights into the effectiveness of the story-based approach. The teacher effectively used teaching materials, including textbooks, boards, and other resources. Engagement strategies, such as activating students' prior knowledge and using prediction strategies, were successfully implemented. Classroom management was effective, with a good variety of interactions and balanced teacher-student talk time. Feedback and error correction were timely and constructive. The lesson objectives were clearly stated, and there were smooth transitions between lesson stages. Activities promoted learner autonomy and creativity. However, the observation grid also highlighted the need for more guided practice and additional activities, such as jumbled story exercises and communication assessment tasks. These observations confirm that the story-based lessons were well-planned and effectively executed, but also identify areas for further enhancement.

e. Triangulation

The triangulation of data from the classroom observation grid, test scores, and student questionnaires provides a comprehensive evaluation of the story-based teaching method. First, there is consistency across data sources. I mean, the high engagement and effective skill development

observed in the classroom are supported by the significant improvements in test scores and positive feedback from students. This consistency across data sources reinforces the validity of the findings. Second, findings also shed light on some challenges to be addressed. That is to say, the challenges noted in the observation grid and questionnaires, such as initial difficulties and story length, align with the need for more guided practice and tailored story content. These findings highlight areas for improvement in order to further enhance the effectiveness of the story-based language teaching. Third, as a holistic approach, the triangulated data demonstrate that the story-based teaching method had a holistic impact on students. In other words, it does not only improve language proficiency but also enhances student engagement and motivation, contributing to a more dynamic and effective learning environment. To conclude, the deep analysis confirms the effectiveness and feasibility of the story-based language teaching method in Moroccan EFL classrooms. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study provides well-established evidence that this approach enhances language proficiency and student engagement. Addressing the identified will further optimize the method, making it a valuable strategy for foreign language teachers.

f. Discussion

The integration of quantitative, qualitative, and observational data provides a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the story-based language teaching approach. The story-based method effectively engages students and enhances their interest in learning, leading to improved language proficiency. This conclusion is supported by the significant improvement in test scores for the experimental group, high levels of engagement and interest reported by students, and the effective use of engaging teaching strategies and materials observed in the classroom.

The story-based method also effectively improves various language skills. Students reported improvements in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, and these self-reports are supported by the

observed effective classroom management and well-structured activities. This multi-faceted improvement underscores the method's potential as a comprehensive teaching strategy.

Addressing the challenges identified by students and observations will further enhance the effectiveness of the story-based approach. The lack of significant improvement in the control group highlights the need for effective teaching methods. Students identified challenges with long stories and difficult expressions, suggesting more guided practice and varied activities. Observational data also recommended more guided practice and diverse activities. Addressing these challenges will enhance the effectiveness of the story-based approach. Specific recommendations include incorporating more guided practice, adjusting story length and complexity, and diversifying activities to support learning.

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the benefits of narrative-based learning. Stories are known to provide a meaningful context for language use, making abstract language concepts more concrete and relatable. The narrative structure aids memory retention, as students can relate new vocabulary and grammar rules within the storyline. Moreover, stories often involve repetition of key language structures, which reinforces learning through exposure in different contexts. This study adds to the literature evidence supporting the pedagogical value of stories, particularly in engaging students and improving their language skills in an EFL context.

g. Implications for Practice

To further enhance the effectiveness of the story-based language teaching method, it is recommended to incorporate more structured practice sessions to reinforce learning and help students internalize new language structures. Activities like guided exercises, group work, and discussions can provide additional support. Using a variety of engaging activities can cater to different learning styles and maintain student interest. Examples include jumbled story exercises, peer communication tasks, and interactive games. Selecting or adapting stories to appropriate

lengths and difficulty levels can ensure that they are engaging and comprehensible for all students, helping prevent students from feeling overwhelmed or bored by long or complex stories. Encouraging students to create their own stories, which can be used as learning materials, fosters creativity, ownership of learning, and deeper engagement with the language. Incorporating visual aids such as illustrations, storyboards, and multimedia presentations can enhance comprehension and engagement, helping clarify difficult concepts and making stories more accessible. Implementing continuous assessment methods to monitor student progress and adjust teaching strategies accordingly can include formative assessments, regular feedback sessions, and self-assessment tools.

Teachers implementing story-based approaches should also consider the cultural relevance of the stories used. Culturally relevant stories can increase students' interest, making the learning experience more meaningful. Additionally, professional development programs can equip teachers with strategies to effectively integrate stories into their teaching practices. Such programs can provide training on selecting appropriate stories, designing complementary activities, and assessing student progress in a narrative-based learning environment.

Incorporating culturally relevant stories can make the learning experience more meaningful and engaging for students. Stories that reflect the students' own cultural backgrounds or that introduce them to new cultures can broaden their perspectives and foster a deeper understanding of the world and thus boost their cultural competence. This approach not only supports language acquisition but also promotes cultural awareness and empathy, which are essential components of good and effective education.

Professional development programs for teachers can focus on the practical aspects of implementing story-based teaching methods. Workshops and training sessions can provide teachers with experience in selecting, adapting, and using stories in the classroom. These programs can also offer strategies for managing classroom dynamics, providing effective

feedback, and fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. By equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge, these programs can ensure the successful implementation of story-based language teaching.

h. Implications for Future Research

Future research could explore the long-term effects of story-based language teaching on language proficiency and student engagement. Longitudinal studies that track students' progress over several years can provide valuable insights into the sustained impact of this teaching method. Additionally, studies could investigate the effectiveness of this approach in different educational contexts and with diverse student populations. For example, research could examine how story-based teaching impacts students in rural versus urban settings or how it affects learners with different levels of language proficiency.

Comparative studies between story-based teaching and other innovative methods, such as project-based learning or gamified learning environments, could also provide valuable insights. These studies can help identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of different pedagogical approaches and guide educators in selecting the most effective methods for their students.

Another promising area for future research is the integration of technology in story-based language teaching. Digital storytelling tools, interactive storybooks, and multimedia resources can enrich the learning experience and provide additional avenues for student engagement. Studies could explore how these technological tools impact student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes in EFL settings. Research could also examine the potential of virtual reality and augmented reality technologies to create immersive storytelling experiences that enhance language learning.

i. Practical Applications

Educators can apply the findings of this study by incorporating story-based lessons into their EFL curricula. Developing resources and materials, such as storybooks and multimedia content, can support this integration. Collaboration among educators to share best practices and strategies can further enhance the effectiveness of story-based teaching. Administrators and policymakers should recognize the value of this approach and provide the necessary support for its implementation. This support can include funding for professional development, resources for classroom use, and time for teachers to plan and implement story-based lessons.

By fostering a collaborative community of educators, schools can create an environment that encourages the sharing of successful strategies and innovative practices. Teachers can collaborate on creating and adapting stories, designing complementary activities, and assessing student progress. This collaborative approach can lead to the development of a rich repository of resources that can be shared and used across different classrooms and schools.

Administrators and policymakers play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of story-based language teaching. By providing funding for professional development and resources, they can ensure that teachers have the tools and training they need to succeed. Additionally, by recognizing and promoting the value of innovative teaching methods, they can create an educational environment that encourages experimentation and continuous improvement.

4. Conclusion

The story-based language teaching method has proven to be effective and engaging for students, significantly improving their language skills. By addressing the challenges identified and incorporating the recommended enhancements, this approach can be further optimized to enhance its effectiveness and feasibility in EFL classrooms. The integration of quantitative, qualitative, and observational data provides a

comprehensive understanding of the method's impact, underscoring its potential as a powerful tool for language education.

The story-based language teaching method leverages the natural human affinity for narratives to foster a more engaging and effective learning environment. By contextualizing language within stories, this approach makes abstract language concepts more tangible and memorable. The significant improvements in language proficiency observed in this study highlight the method's efficacy. Furthermore, the positive feedback from students regarding their engagement and interest suggests that story-based teaching can motivate learners, which is crucial for sustaining their effort and enthusiasm over the long term.

To ensure the continued success and scalability of story-based language teaching, it is essential to address the identified challenges. Providing more guided practice can help reinforce language structures and ensure that all students, regardless of their initial proficiency levels, can benefit from the lessons. Adjusting the length and complexity of the stories to match the students' proficiency levels can prevent cognitive overload and maintain engagement. Additionally, incorporating diverse activities that cater to different learning styles can enhance the overall learning experience and effectiveness of the method.

The findings of this study also have significant implications for teacher training and professional development. Educators need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively implement story-based teaching strategies. Professional development programs should focus on helping teachers select appropriate stories, design complementary activities, and assess student progress. Moreover, fostering a community of practice among educators can facilitate the sharing of best practices and successful strategies, further enhancing the implementation of story-based teaching.

Future research should continue to explore the potential of story-based language teaching in various contexts and with different student populations. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term

effects of this approach on language proficiency and student engagement. Comparative studies with other innovative teaching methods, such as project-based learning or gamified learning environments, could also offer valuable perspectives on the relative efficacy of different pedagogical approaches.

The integration of technology in story-based language teaching is another promising area for future research. Digital storytelling tools, interactive storybooks, and multimedia resources can enrich the learning experience and provide additional avenues for student engagement. Investigating the impact of these technological tools on student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes can help educators harness the full potential of technology in language education.

In practical terms, schools and educators can apply the findings of this study by integrating story-based lessons into their EFL curricula. Developing resources and materials, such as storybooks and multimedia content, can support this integration. Collaboration among educators to share best practices and strategies can further enhance the effectiveness of story-based teaching. Administrators and policymakers should recognize the value of this approach and provide the necessary support for its implementation. This support can include funding for professional development, resources for classroom use, and time for teachers to plan and implement story-based lessons.

In conclusion, the story-based language teaching method offers a promising alternative to traditional textbook methods. By fostering a love for stories and encouraging active participation, this approach can transform EFL classrooms, making language learning an enjoyable and rewarding journey. The significant improvements in language proficiency and the positive feedback from students underscore the method's potential as an effective and engaging teaching strategy. By addressing the identified challenges and incorporating the recommended enhancements, educators can further optimize this approach to enhance its effectiveness and feasibility in various educational contexts.

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