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The effect of teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of Saudi elementary stage students

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Abstract This study aims at investigating teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of Saudi elementary stage students. The sample of the study consisted of 40 students randomly chosen from Al-Riyadh Educational District and assigned to experimental and control groups. Data of the study were collected within almost one semester period via a pre–posttest design for equivalent groups. The control group was taught by the regular teacher with the direct administration of one the researchers, however, the experimental group was taught by one of the researchers. The researchers assessed the effect of the storytelling program on the reading comprehension of the Saudi elementary stage students. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the measure. This indicated that reading aloud by the teacher may have a significant positive effect on learners' reading comprehension.

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1. Introduction and background

Reading is an important language skill and a highly complicated act that everyone must learn. Reading is not solely a single skill but a combination of many skills and processes in

which the readers interact with printed words and texts for content and pleasure. Through reading, one can teach writing, speaking, vocabulary items, grammar, spelling and other language aspects. The basic goals of reading are to enable students to gain an understanding of the world and themselves, to develop appreciation and interests, and to find solutions to their personal and group problems.

However, (Nabeel, 1994) claims that in some English classes, the announcement of a reading assignment elicits moans and groans from students as they envision the long time it will require, the laborious task of looking up words' meanings in the dictionary. What makes matters worse is that after all the time and efforts; students fail to comprehend the text. Most EFL students, especially school students, are often unable to comprehend a written text effectively. Therefore, teacher's storytelling aloud, the focus of this study, is one of the factors that may motivate students to read and improve their reading comprehension.

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Storytelling began with the advent of civilization. Generations heard and experienced the power of the word through oral expression. Oral interpretation gave way to the written word when cave paintings, then stone tablets, became the means of conveying and preserving the story. It was not until the end of the middle ages, when Gutenberg invented the printing press that the common person was instructed to read the written word. Prior to that time, storytelling or the read-aloud was the primary source of the literary instruction and entertainment (MacKinney, 1996). However, to date only limited research has been done on the effects of storytelling on children's learning.

The importance of reading aloud to children has been demonstrated in the results of over 75 years of educational research (Wood, 1994). Gold and Gibson (2001) emphasize that reading aloud is the foundation of literacy development. They also state that reading aloud demonstrates the relationship between the printed word and meaning and invites the listener into a conversation with the author. Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently. It is the single most important activity for reading success (Neumann et al., 2000). It provides children with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). It reveals the rewards of reading and develops the listener's interests in books and desire to be a reader (Mooney, 1990). Trelease (1994) says that storytelling aloud fosters the desire to read independently. It is like a TV or radio ad for literature. Read-aloud time encourages children to grow as readers and broadens the types of literature they choose to read (Harste et al., 1988). The single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading, is reading aloud to children (Anderson et al., 1985). Moreover, Beach (1993) states that oral reading instruction is a legitimate part of the developmental reading program and can offer benefits of increased fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. It is obvious that the researchers seem to agree that as long as teaching exists, the read aloud should be incorporated in the curriculum, regardless of the students' ages.

Rog (2001) states that reading stories aloud mean to develop children's "concepts about print, story structure, and other elements of text" and "provides the child with a wealth of information about the processes and functions of written language". It develops children's attention span and listening skills (Dragan, 2001). Reading aloud to children gives them new understandings on various subjects that they encounter only through books (Terblanche, 2002). In addition, students' attitudes toward reading appear to be more positive when they are read aloud to on a regular basis. The read-aloud is the keystone of a language program that puts a high premium on student involvement (Hennings, 1994). Reading aloud to children motivates them to read more challenging books and a greater variety. Moreover, seeing teachers reading with enjoyment increases the chances that children will become lifelong readers; increasing the chances that reading life doesn't end with high school graduation (Kimmel and Segal, 1983). Atwell (1987) concludes that her students are affected by good read-alouds and that these activities motivate them to borrow the books

that are shared, to locate other books by the same author, and to respond actively and personally with texts.

Comprehension is certainly the most crucial reading skill addressed by educators. Reading aloud has positive effects on the development of reading comprehension and vocabulary. Reading comprehension has been shown to improve in meaningful ways when read-aloud is used regularly in the classroom. One way cited by Trelease (1994) is that when one book is read-aloud by the teacher, often students will seek out the sequels to that book. Comprehension of the sequels is increased because interest and background knowledge have been introduced to the student. Moreover, Primamore (1994) argues that learners benefit more than others when they are read to because they often enter school lacking the necessary tools of literacy, and may be 'at risk' in developing their reading skills. Reading aloud to children can be used proactively to avoid problems in reading such as poor vocabulary and lack of comprehension and motivation towards reading in general and would guarantee reading success.

In addition, Needlman (2004) asserts that there are many good reasons to read aloud to students. These include: (1) reading together is fun; (2) reading aloud keeps interest high; (3) reading aloud is especially important if your child is having difficulty learning to read; (4) reading aloud builds listening skills; (5) reading aloud builds vocabulary; (6) stories are the building blocks of imagination and (7) stories help teach character.

Moreover, Rippel (2006) indicates that reading aloud to students has many benefits. Some of these benefits are: (a) hearing stories read aloud expands the students' vocabulary; (b) through read-aloud stories, students can learn about many different topics: science, history, geography, etc.; (c) the student's attention span increases as he/she sits still for an interesting story; (d) through hearing well-written stories being read aloud, students are absorbing proper grammar and word usage and (e) when teachers read with their students, they are modeling an important skill for them.

One of the major reasons for reading aloud to elementary grade students is that the approach creates a bond between the adult reader and the student (Mackinney, 1996). For those who have been read to since birth, the nurturing atmosphere is recreated and the pleasurable memories of reading are fostered. For those students who have not been read to from an early age, this new beginning creates a pleasant atmosphere in which reading can be seen as enjoyable experience shared between an adult and classmates. Kimmel and Segal (1983) indicate that the shared experience that reading aloud provides as creating a genuine bond in a group of diverse children that is likely to occur in any other way. Furthermore, Gibson et al. (2007) see that reading aloud to elementary-school students can: (a) continue to associate reading with warm, pleasant feelings; learn about words and language; build listening skills; expand vocabulary; talk about the characters, settings, and plot then relate them to their own lives; gain knowledge about a variety of topics; (b) gain exposure to a variety of writing styles and structures; (c) explore social and moral issues and behavior; (d) become more skilled independent readers; (e) discover which authors and writing styles they like; (f) develop their reading comprehension and (g) be motivated to read on their own.

Reading aloud to children builds the foundation of literacy learning. Listening comprehension comes before reading com-

prehension. According to Fisher and Medvic (2003), the more stories students are exposed to, the more opportunities they will have for hearing rich language, learning new vocabulary, grasping story structures, and developing of love of reading. They also suggest that students who are consistently exposed to storytelling gain skills that prepare them for reading. Moreover, they note that during storytelling, students are more attentive and relaxed, yet highly focused.

Teachers differ in their read-aloud strategy mainly in the amount of discussion during and after the reading. Some encourage children to discuss the story during the read aloud session; others leave the discussions until the end. Involving students interactively while reading the story aloud helps improve comprehension and engagement, and post-reading discussions encourage students to link the story events to their personal experiences (Terblanche, 2002). It is also particularly important that the teacher be the reader to children, namely at the elementary stage. Trelease (1994) gives specific reasons why it is imperative that elementary stage teacher instruct the class using this method. The first reason for adolescents being read to by the teacher is that they are captive audiences. When students see others focused on the story they imitate that positive behavior, and are less likely to become unfocused as in silent reading situations. Another reason is that reading ability and the desire to read is increased. Students with high reading achievement are most likely to have been read to as children. Reading aloud to students fosters the life long desire to read which in turns produces high standardized test scores.

Students benefit from this strategy when teachers establish clear and daily routines and plan for the read-aloud sessions seriously. When employed as an on the spot activity, students would not profit from any of the positive effects that this strategy provides (Terblanche, 2002). Despite the great advantages that the storybook read-aloud provides, it can have no effect if it is not well implemented. Rog (2001) warns teachers that read aloud storybooks would not turn students into readers by simply listening to stories. Success would be determined by the good selection of books and the method used in reading.

It is recommended that reading aloud be used as a teaching routine in every class (Rasinski and Padak, 2000) as such strategy allows learners to become more familiar with literacy (Wood and Salvetti, 2001). Read aloud is when children listen to an adult read different types and genres of texts (Franzese, 2002) and then engage in talking about the book. Reading aloud establishes a mutual relationship between the teacher and the students through encountering the same stories and characters and experiencing common reactions towards the events. Leuenberger (2003) believes that reading aloud is the foundation of a well-balanced literacy curriculum.

2. Statement of the problem

In the series of textbooks designed by the Saudi Ministry of Education for the primary stage through the elementary stage, the teacher manual states that reading aloud is limited to the early stage, the primary and completely disregarded in the elementary. Saudi EFL students complain about being unable to read efficiently and fully comprehending what they read. They also notice that most students get low grades in the reading exams. The researchers suggest a technique to develop students' reading comprehension abilities. They believe that storytelling aloud by

the teacher may have a significant role in helping students develop the skill of reading comprehension.

3. Significance of the study

It is common for teachers to read stories to young elementary school students in class. Storybook reading is widely recommended in educational literature (Kaderavek and Justice, 2002; Rubin and Wilson, 1995; Snow, 1983). In addition to its entertainment value, some proponents of storytelling believe that storytelling may have considerable potential as an educational tool (Alna, 1999; Colon-Vila, 1997; Hamilton and Weiss, 1993; Mallan, 1997). The role of storytelling in the foreign language classroom has been the concern of many teachers and scholars; however, its validity as an equal complement to language learning has often been ignored (Hyland, 1990). Farrell and Nessel (1982) pointed out "classroom storytelling has a ragtag reputation among school teachers". The reason for this reputation may be that much of the evidence that indicates storytelling is beneficial to children is either qualitative or anecdotal (Gallets, 2005). In the current environment of research-based practices, many educators may be skeptical about allowing the use of a "new" educational tool until the effects of that tool have been clearly documented through quantitative research. This study investigates the effect of teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of elementary stage learners, which is an issue previous studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, did not tackle at all. To the best knowledge of the researchers, this is the first attempt to determine whether or not elementary stage students' reading comprehension significantly improves when they are told stories by the teacher. Therefore, it is hoped that:

- (1) It will help researchers involved in the educational process gain insights into storytelling and seek to improve it over time.
- (2) It may encourage further research, which in turn, may lead to the enrichment of the field of storytelling in general and language teaching and learning in particular.
- (3) It will help teachers to better understand the issue and integrate storytelling into their classroom routine.
- (4) The information gathered in this study will aid proponents of storytelling in better understanding the educational effects of their craft.
- (5) As a result of this study and of other studies, practitioners of storytelling will be welcome in schools not only as entertainers, but also as partners in the educational process.

4. Objective of the study

Because stories are ever-presented and children receive stories in a variety of ways, because storytelling aloud should be an important part of the school curriculum, and especially because storytelling aloud has not been widely studied, the present study attempts to investigate the effect of teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of Saudi elementary stage students. Thus, it is hoped that using storytelling aloud in the classroom would help students improve their reading comprehension abilities and create a positive attitude towards reading.

5. Hypothesis of the study

This study attempts to test the following hypothesis:

Teachers' storytelling aloud has a positive effect on the reading comprehension achievement of Saudi elementary stage students and eventually leads to developing all areas of language competence.

6. Question of the study

The present study attempts to answer the following question:

Is there a statistically significant difference between the achievement of the experimental group and that of the control group due to the treatment?

7. Review of related literature

Recently many research papers were conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of the storytelling aloud strategy in schools. Although reading aloud receives considerable emphasis in English as a first language, EFL teachers traditionally discourage it. Reading aloud, in fact, is particularly important for EFL learners at the early stage of learning. Beginning readers tend to read word by word. Reading aloud helps them read larger semantic units rather than focusing on graphic cues. Numerous scholars believe children can benefit from listening to storytelling (Alna, 1999; Ellis, 1997; Erikson, 1995; Genisio and Soundy, 1994; Isbell et al., 2004; Meyer, 1995). Kim (1999), stated that "storytelling today is increasingly recognized as having important theoretical and practical implications". The researchers reviewed some of the most related studies to the topic of this study.

One of the reasons for using the technique of storytelling aloud in the classroom is that it allows the modeling of language patterns. Learners can imitate the structure and the sounds they hear. Hillman (1975) explained that while the teacher is reading, he/she can infuse the syntactic order of the written language with pitch, juncture, stress and other paralinguistic cues that contribute to the interpretation of the passage. Imitation of the sounds has a direct bearing on the increased vocabulary that is a result of hearing stories and poems. He also states that hearing words in context adds to the number of meanings in a learner's receptive vocabulary and gives the listener alternative ways to express him/herself.

McCormick (1977) indicates that 4th- through 6th-graders have demonstrated children who are read aloud to on a regular basis over a period of several months show significant gains in reading comprehension, decoding skills, and vocabulary. It was also found that all children benefited significantly as compared to the control groups, who were read to only occasionally or not at all.

Williamson (1988) emphasized that teachers should read to their students. Because as the teachers are reading to their students, the students get a better feel for the language and its structure. Teacher's reading to the students is also a motivation enhancer; the reader's enthusiasm and animated mood are infectious.

Furthermore, Zaytoun (1988) stated that in order to achieve a higher level of comprehension, the teacher should expose the students to real-life situations in which native speakers of English use language in spontaneous, conversational and

communicative way. He also adds the teachers should have their students listen to then read short stories about personal experiences, family, friend, or even tales about current events or controversial issues. In doing so, the teacher exposes the students to natural language with infinite variety of structure, new vocabulary and idiomatic expressions and adds a lot of terms of meaningful cultural exchanges.

Elley (1991) found that exposing children to an extensive range of high-interest illustrated storybooks makes them learn the target language more quickly. She also found that when the children are engaged in meaningful text without the constraint of structure and vocabulary, they are likely to learn the language incidentally and develop positive attitudes towards books and school. In addition, Elley said that reading stories aloud to children can be a significant source of vocabulary acquisition and she concluded by indicating that the influence of systematic story reading aloud to children is evident in the language learning process.

Warwick (1992) reported the findings of a comprehensive study that was conducted between 1990 and 1991. It involved thirty-two countries. The study assessed the reading achievement of 210,000 students, aged nine and 14 years old. The results showed that the top four nations were Finland, United States, Sweden and France, respectively. Two significant factors that were found to create these high achievement scores throughout the school years were: the frequency of teachers reading aloud to students and the frequency of sustained silent reading.

Trélease (1994) found that students who had a story read aloud to them by the teacher and then asked to complete several artistic assignments produced more creative work than their counterparts who saw the movie version of the same story. The read-to students used visual imagery to create scenes and characters, while the others tended to regurgitate what they had viewed on the screen whether it was image created in their mind or not.

Vivas (1996) studied the effect of systematic storytelling aloud on language comprehension and language production of pre-school and first grade children. The findings of the study showed that listening to stories read aloud helps students develop the habit of listening and at the same time gives them specific training in comprehension through exposure to the interesting and meaningful content of the stories.

Amer (1997) investigated the effect of the teacher's reading aloud on the reading comprehension of EFL students reading a story. Seventy-five students participated in the study. The experimental group had a story read aloud to them by the teacher, whereas the control group read the story silently. Two dependent measures were used: a multiple-choice test and a story frame test. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on both measures. This indicated that reading aloud by the teacher may have a significant positive effect on learners' reading comprehension.

Beck and Mckeown (1999) investigated the relationship between storytelling aloud and reading comprehension. The findings of the study indicated that storytelling aloud positively affected the subjects' reading comprehension.

Campbell (2001) emphasized that reading a story aloud to students presents endless opportunities for related activities such as classroom discussions, role plays, shared readings, group writings, arts and crafts, and songs. He also indicated that read-alouds provide many types of literacy support for

children: children learn about literacy through an adult who provides a model of reading; form an understanding of how print functions and how it is used; develop a knowledge and understanding of letters and letter-sound relationships; learn new words, new sentences; and discourse patterns; learn about the structure of stories; and develop a positive attitude toward books. Moreover, he recommended using read-alouds as a starting point for further learning in several curricular areas.

McCarthy et al. (2001) tried to improve the kindergarten, first, third, and fifth grade students' reading comprehension and their attitudes toward recreational reading through the use of storytelling aloud. The findings of the study showed that telling stories aloud to students helped them to develop background knowledge about a variety of subjects, build vocabulary, become familiar with rich language patterns, develop familiarity with story structure, develop understanding of the reading process, and identify reading as an enjoyable activity. The findings also showed that students' recreational habits improved, the students' desire for their teacher to read aloud to them on a daily basis increased, and students' reading habits at home were positively influenced.

Wood and Salvetti (2001) designed a project called the 'Project Story Boost' to help children who were considered at risk of reading failure due to poverty and provided story read-aloud sessions for several weeks. Children who took part in this project improved in vocabulary development and participation in discussions, and reading and writing activities. Children who remained longer in the project improved in retelling stories by sequencing events and using details, and vocabulary of the stories. The positive effects of the storybooks read-aloud were also transferred to the primary grades where children scored higher in reading fluency and comprehension than those who did not participate in the project. Along the same lines, Hargrave and Sénéchal (2000) examined whether economically disadvantaged children who participated orally during storybook reading made gains in language. They found that preschool children from low-income homes who responded to open-ended questions around the text had better results than children who listened passively to stories; in 4 weeks, children achieved an increase in vocabulary which would usually take 4 months.

Morgan (2002) examined fourth graders' responses to a story presented in three different delivery systems: read independently, read aloud, and told as a shared storytelling experience. The findings of the study indicated that using the oral delivery systems of read-alouds and storytelling provokes more positive responses than does independent reading. Moreover, students in the read aloud treatment group made more interpretational responses. More free responses came from the storytelling group indicating that storytelling as a mode of delivery may generate more conversation about literature than reading independently.

Queini et al. (2008) conducted a 10 weeks study with fifty-three 5–6 year-old kindergarteners to investigate the effect of read-aloud on children's vocabulary development and comprehension skills. The read-aloud strategy consisted of two teachers reading storybooks to children and explaining unfamiliar words. The teachers engaged children in meaningful discussions about the text, involving logical and critical thinking. Data were collected through observations, conferences with children and children's writing samples. Findings revealed gains in children's vocabulary and comprehension skills. Stu-

dents were able to use the new vocabulary words and engage in analysis and synthesis as they participated in discussions of the read-aloud stories.

After reviewing these studies about the effect of storytelling aloud, we notice that researchers unanimously agree that reading aloud to students of all abilities and age motivates. The present researchers believe that stories provide students with opportunities to listen to language in context rather than in pieces. Stories also introduce new vocabulary and language forms with rich networks of associations. Moreover, stories can have a deep impact on a person's construction of knowledge and self.

The present study is similar to the reviewed studies in the general aim of investigating the effect of storytelling aloud on the learners' reading comprehension. However, the effect of storytelling aloud on basic stage students' reading comprehension has not received much attention in the literature. Therefore, this fact empowered the researchers to focus the attention of the study on the effect of storytelling aloud on the Saudi elementary stage students' reading comprehension.

8. Method, sample, instrument and procedures

The present study was carried out with Saudi elementary stage students in Al-Riyadh Educational District – following a randomized control-group pretest–posttest design. The subjects were randomly assigned to two groups. Each group was then assigned at random to either the control group or experimental group. The treatment consisted of two levels: the method of storytelling aloud and the traditional method alone. The experimental group undertook the first level of the treatment and the control group undertook the second level. The experimental group students were exposed to storytelling aloud four 40-min periods a week for almost one semester period of the experiment. However, the students of the control group were not exposed to storytelling aloud during the course of the treatment. Both groups were subjected to a reading comprehension pretest immediately before starting the experiment and the same test was administered as a posttest immediately after it.

The population of the study consisted of all Saudi Elementary Stage male students in Al-Riyadh Educational District in the first semester of the academic 2009–2010. The sample of the study consisted of 40 students who were chosen randomly through the random sampling techniques in the statistical package SPSS. Then the 40 students were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups of 20 students each.

In order to answer the question of the study, the present researchers chose a number of folk stories from Lippert (1997) "Spotlight on Literature", which contains a group of read alouds, poems and choral readings. The stories were chosen according to length and difficulty level. The more complex structure the story included the more difficult it was considered.

Moreover, the researchers also developed a 25-item-multiple choice test on four reading passages. Test items had four choices only one of which is correct. The students were instructed to read the reading passages, one at a time, answer the questions by circling the correct choice. The test included items dealing with vocabulary questions, understanding certain grammatical constructions and reaching implied meaning

by the passage. In scoring, students achievement was computed out of 100 allotting (four) points for each correct answer and (zero) for each wrong answer. The time interval between the pretest and the posttest was (one semester); a period long enough to minimize the effects of the pretest on the results and the conclusions of the experiment. The test was designed and administered by the researchers. The researchers themselves conducted the study. An independent-samples *t* test was used to measure the gain scores of both groups on the pretest and then on the posttest. A One-Way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to measure the gain scores of the subjects in order to eliminate any possible differences between the two groups on the pretest.

The usability of the test was tested through a pilot study of 20 students who were excluded from the sample. The reliability coefficient of the test calculated using Cronbach-Aalpha and found 0.85. The test was also given to a jury of six English language teachers to elicit their views as to the accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness of the instrument. Then the test was reviewed and modified according to their recommendations. The content material (stories) was also given to the same jury to make sure that it suits the level of the students.

Having looked at the methodology used, we will now look at the results obtained.

9. Findings, discussion and recommendations

The broader aim of the study was to evaluate impact of teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of Saudi Elementary Stage students. It compares the storytelling aloud method with the traditional method. The researchers hypothesize that the students who were taught through storytelling aloud method would show better achievement than those who were taught through the traditional method. This hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The data were collected through a pretest-treatment-posttest design for equivalent groups and analyzed via the statistical package SPSS.

An independent-samples *t* test was carried out to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the achievements of the two groups on the pretest. Table 1 represents the results.

Table 1 shows that the difference between the achievement of both groups on the pretest is not statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. Thus, since there is no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the pretest, the two groups were assumed equivalent. Another independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups' achievement on the posttest. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2 shows that there is a statistically significant difference at $\alpha = 0.05$ between the achievement of the experimental group and that of the control group on the posttest in favor of the experimental group. This indicates that using storytelling

aloud in English language instruction to the university students has a positive effect on students' achievement. The mean score for the experiment group on the posttest was 28.40 while that of the control group was 24.25.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that the difference between the achievement of the experimental group and the control group on the pretest was not statistically significant, to eliminate initial differences, a one-way ANCOVA was carried out. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group on the posttest. The achievement of the experiment group, measured by the difference between the pretest and the posttest, was significantly better than that of the control group.

The researchers demonstrate that the difference in the achievement of the students was attributed to using storytelling aloud in English language instruction. The experimental group subjects managed to significantly improved the reading comprehension ability they already have in a period of almost one semester. The improvement achieved by the control group subjects, however, was not statistically significant. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, the researchers reached the conclusion that the improvement achieved by the experimental group may have been attributed to the way they rendered instruction; storytelling.

Furthermore, the differences between the two groups may be attributed to many other reasons. First, using storytelling aloud in English language instruction is a novelty. This novelty may have encouraged the students to deal with this technique enthusiastically, which may have been reflected in better achievement. Second, listening to stories read aloud helped the students developed healthy listening habits and at the same time paved the way to promoting comprehension through consistent exposure to the interesting and meaningful content of the stories. The conditions provided by the storytelling situation promoted total attention that led to greater understanding of the content, which in turns led to improving comprehension. Third, storytelling provided the students with elements necessary for the development of language competencies. The teacher's storytelling allowed the students to recognize units of meaning. With the continuous exposure to the stories, students learned to gradually realize that they could achieve a higher level of comprehension by listening to larger meaningful units rather than individual words. Closely listening to the teacher's language behavior in the classroom helped the students realize the feelings, mood and emotion of the characters in the texts, which helped enhance their overall comprehension of the text. Finally, the researchers believe that reading aloud to students allows them to become literate and motivates them to be active participants in the reading process.

Current research indicates that storytelling aloud to elementary stage student will produce positive results. The findings of this study concur with the results of the studies conducted by Elley (1991), Meyer (1995), Vivas (1996), Amer (1997), Troustle and Hicks (1998), Blaisdell et al. (1999), Beck

Table 1 Results of the t test of the means of the achievement of the two groups on the pretest.

| | Group | N | Mean | Standard deviation | T | Sig. |
|---------|--------------------|----|--------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Pretest | Control group | 20 | 11.619 | 3.154 | 0.073 | 0.943 |
| | Experimental group | 20 | 11.550 | 2.929 | | |

Table 2 Results of the t test of the means of the achievement of the two groups on the posttest.

| | Group | N | Mean | Standard deviation | T | Sig. |
|----------|--------------------|----|-------|--------------------|------|-------|
| Posttest | Control group | 20 | 24.95 | 2.25 | 6.96 | 0.393 |
| | Experimental group | 20 | 28.40 | 1.64 | | |

Table 3 Results of the test of between-subjects effects.

| Source | Sum of squares | df | Means of squares | F | Sig. |
|-----------------|----------------|----|------------------|--------|-------|
| Pretest | 56.677 | 1 | 56.677 | 22.653 | 0.000 |
| Group | 123.681 | 1 | 123.681 | 49.433 | 0.000 |
| Error | 95.075 | 38 | 2.502 | | |
| Corrected total | 273.512 | 40 | | | |

and Mckeown (1999), Bartolomei (2000), Jacobs et al. (2000), Walker (2001), Campbell (2001) and McCarthy et al. (2001). All of these studies showed that using storytelling aloud in English language instruction has positive effects that helped students improve their language skills. They also found that storytelling does offer children certain educational benefits.

Storytelling to elementary stage students does have a positive impact on their performance. It built interest in the reading process, stimulated discussion, and enhanced self-confidence in the participants. It made even poor readers literate and gave them the chance to show their abilities. Although it was only an experiment where the control of all variables was not possible because of its nature, the study did definitely show significant results stressing the value of the treatment. Therefore, the whole language curriculum can be organized around stories, providing students with comprehensible and interesting language at every level of language.

Although the results achieved in this study are sound and significant, the researchers found many areas of further inquiry within the framework of this study. There were questions still unanswered about this issue which could be answered in further studies. One area the researchers found lacking was the self-esteem aspect of this research. Did the storytelling aloud build greater self-confidence in the students? Therefore, they chose to participate more actively in this competition. Further research is needed for a through understanding of this issue and for confirming of its findings. This is especially true when conducting research with more variables than those in the present study. It is also recommended that this study be replicated with a larger number of participants and over the whole semester or the whole year. In addition, it would be interesting to compare results across levels of proficiency as well as gender. Researchers may study other skills of language that might be affected by the practice of storytelling, in addition to studying the implications if experiments were carried out with younger or older school students. Researchers also recommended to investigate the effect of reading more of the stories aloud to the students. If additional stories have been read aloud, will their level of comprehension remain the same?

The possibilities for continued research in the area of the read-aloud seem endless. With each question posed new ones arise. Each avenue that is explored, each genre that is touched leads the researchers to question, who will benefit from this technique and who will each student benefit?

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