



Research Article

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF STORY RETELLING ON IMPROVING IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The place of speaking is the heart of the language learning in general and foreign/second language learning in particular. Thus developing this oral productive skill is of great importance in the process of language learning and particularly in the process of foreign language learning. The more authentic materials of teaching speaking the more successful effective foreign language classes we would have. So the present study aimed at investigating the effect of the story retelling on improving speaking performance of the learners. Sixty female learners have participated in this quasi-experimental study of which lasted one academic semester. The findings of the study provided strong support for the positive effects of story retelling; it might be due to the authenticity and attractiveness of the stories. Through reproducing stories learners would be more autonomous and self-directed learners. This might be due to the role of authenticity of materials in language learning processes. Since authentic materials are designed for real language use in real situations and not for pedagogical purposes.

KEYWORDS Story retelling, Iranian EFL learners, speaking performance

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is primary to human communication. Speaking is the skill to create words in language use. Speaking is a vital skill that learners must master. It is so, because in speaking we know how to assess the students' ability to produce the target speech. Zhang (2009) argued that speaking is the most complicated skill to master for the bulk of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. As said by Ur (1996), there are lots of factors that result in trouble in mastering speaking, they are as follows: 1. Inhibition. Students are anxious about making faults, fearful of criticism, or simply shy. 2. Nothing to say. Students have no reason to express themselves. 3. Low or uneven contribution only one participant can talk at a time because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to control while others speak very little or not at all. 4. Mother-tongue use. Learners who

share the same mother tongue tend to make use of it because it is easier and since learners feel "less exposed" when they are speaking their mother tongue. Stories play fundamental role in the development and improvement of children. The story books children read and the characters they become familiar with become like their buddies. It's safe to claim that story books are useful sources of social/cultural and communicational information. Through reading story books learners gain the most effective reading strategies, and through listening to audios of stories, learners not only learn how to listen to foreign texts but also they learn how to use language in extremely different contexts. When it comes to children stories are helpful for relaxation, before bedtime for instance. Regarding Story retelling Owcki (1999) states: Retellings aid children rethink and alter their ways through a text, thus enhancing their perception. Storytelling does require

any particular equipment but the ability of listening and speaking to recreate messages.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stories are motivating and inspiring therefore attracting listeners and promoting communication. While telling stories pupils are to read, write, listen, and speak. The comfortable ambiance and active situation formed by stories promotes the students to talk and discuss with each other. When they present stories, listening gets a two way road. Through making good eye contact and body language these storytellers converse with their addressees as learners tell and listen to stories, they inter into stories and forget about themselves and their anxieties. They get more self-confident in expressing themselves imaginatively. The activities and skills that they find out will be utilized across the syllabus and during life. Storytelling is deemed to have refused in western cultures until recently when it looks to be making reappearance (Nor Hasni et al. 2011). According to Mallan, (1992) storytelling aids expand the imagination which in turn constructs problem-solving competencies. Consequently increasing the imagination can authorize students to determine new and imaginative ideas. In other words increasing the imagination can contribute to self-confidence and personal inspiration as students predict themselves competent and able to achieve their hopes and dreams. Bagnole (1977, p.48) proposed six factors that control students' awareness of the need to learn English as a foreign language and their enthusiasm and aspiration to learn that language

- The historical colonial background of the country,
- The existence of bilingualism or trilingualism
- The impact and status of minority groups,
- The political and economic orientation,
- The levels and extent of literacy, and
- the degree of cultural awareness and implementations of policies fostering that awareness”.

Stories provide language users with cultural and social information. McKay (2003) argues that culture affects language teaching in two forms: “linguistic” and “pedagogical”. Linguistically, it influences the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language. Pedagogically, it affects the picking of the language teaching materials because cultural content of the language teaching instruments and the cultural foundation of the teaching methodology are to be taken into account whilst deciding on the language materials. This belief is supported by ‘Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis’. This hypothesis has clarified the interconnections between language and cultures. This theory implies that theoretical contents of languages and cultures are considerably decided on by words and their semiotic materializations and semantic differences; and these “cultural implications” could be used among languages and substituted among cultures (Pinker, 2007; Perlovsky, 2009). As it was mentioned earlier stories also reflect the social factors of the target culture which cannot be downgraded in the process of foreign language learning. According to Halliday (1999), context of situation also is of great importance in the process of foreign language learning. In the framework planned by Halliday, the notion

of context is of three strata: context of culture, context of situation and co-text. Context of culture (which previously mentioned) and context of situation are outside of language itself. Co-text, also known as linguistic context, is certainly inside of language itself. There is a close mutually dependent connection between language and context. Context verifies and is verified by the choice of language. Context of situation consists of three aspects: field, tenor and mode. Field refers to what is happening, to the nature of social action that is taking place. Tenor refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their status and roles. Mode refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation. Certain situational context requires certain text and accordingly, certain text generates certain context. In the process of communication, the meaning structure is largely decided on by the three aspects of situational context: ideational meaning by field, interpersonal meaning by tenor and textual meaning by mode (Baker, 2000). Since different stories reflect different contexts thus help learners to imagine themselves in different contexts of cultures and contexts of situations, and accordingly remove one of the most impediments of speaking in target language.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study tries to find answer to the following questions:

Does story retelling have any effect on Iranian EFL Learners’ speaking performance?

Does story retelling result in improving Iranian EFL Learners’ speaking performance?

METHOD

The design of the current study is quasi-experimental, that is without random assignment. Typical experimental study involves a control group for the sake of comparing the results of treatment

Participants

A total number of 60 language female learners with an age range of 14-17 participated in this study. The subjects all were from Turkish background. The participants were selected from 8 classes. They were all at inter-mediate level. They were divided into two groups of experimental and control.

Instruments

For collecting quantifiable data the researcher made use of the following instruments:

One language proficiency test (*PET*) was administered for assuring the proficiency level of the participants. The next instrument was pre-test of speaking that was carried out for proving that there were not significant preexisting differences on the speaking ability of the participants. During the study the researcher utilized various stories

which include audio files of the texts. The participants were to record their production of the stories as student-work, thus voice recorders were also applied. At the end of the study one post-test was conducted on the pupils speaking performance for measuring the effectiveness of the listening to and retelling stories.

Procedures

As mentioned before after conducting *PET* test on learners' language proficiency the researcher has started the program. In the experimental group the participants were asked to work on predetermined set of stories which were of audio files. The participants were asked to work on each

story three times: firstly they were to read the story without listening to the files, and then they were to just listen to them without taking any look at the texts, afterward they needed to reproduce the story and record it. Thus the participants while comparing their production with that of native speaker have been enabled to find out their faults in speaking - fluency, pronunciation, intonation etc- and they could try them again and again before presenting in the classroom. In the control group the participants were asked to speak on different topics which were at approximately at the same difficulty level, but without any particular treatment. After 15 sessions one post-test was conducted to the both groups. The gathered data was analyzed by means of SPSS.

RESULTS

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	16.7222	30	.724555	.13507
	12.1444	30	1.19544	.21478

Indicated in the Table, the experimental group of the study had a mean score of 12.14 ($SD=1.19$) in the speaking pretest. The group, however, scored higher ($M=16.72$, $SD=0.72$) in the speaking posttest. It is safe to claim that there was a statistically significant increase in the speaking scores from Pretest to Posttest following the treatment sessions.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
osttest - Pretest	4.52227	1.00637	.18774	4.18084	4.95247	24.754	29	.000

Table 2 depicts that the mean increase in speaking scores was 4.52 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.18 to 4.95. It is also indicated that the mean increase in the speaking posttest was statistically significant ($t(29) = 24.75, P = .000$). Consequently the Null Hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Posttest	12.8777	30	.91789	.16867
	Pretest	12.0955	30	1.0552	.19496

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the control group. By a brief look, it can be noticed that there was not a statistically significant increase in the speaking scores from Pretest ($M = 12.09, SD = 1.06$) to Posttest ($M = 12.87, SD = 0.91$).

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
	Pretest	80000	.4099	.07427	.64804	.95195	10.756	29	.000

According to the Table, the mean increase in speaking scores was 0.80 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.64 to 0.95. The mean increase in the speaking posttest was statistically significant ($t(29) = 10.75, P = .000$). In comparison with the experimental group, the control group performed much poorly in the speaking posttest though.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	30	12.1777	1.17699	.21478
	30	12.0348	1.06690	.19496

Table 5 portrays the descriptive statistics for the speaking pretest. The experimental and control groups of the study had a mean score of 12.16 ($SD=1.17$) and 12.03 ($SD=1.06$) respectively. To be precise, the two groups did not perform in a different way in the pretest and they were harmonized in terms of their speaking performance.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.056	.814	.460	58	.645	.13344	.28993	-.42704	.72271
Equal variances not assumed			.460	5.734	.645	.13344	.28993	-.42717	.72472

An independent-samples t-test was accomplished to compare the statistics scores of experimental and control groups in the speaking pretest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 0.13 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.42 to .72.



The results revealed no significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the speaking pretest $t(58) = .460, p = .645$. Therefore, the two groups completed equally in the speaking pretest.

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Experimental	30	16.7222	.724555	.13507
	Control	30	12.8777	.91789	.16867

According to the descriptive statistics shown in the Table, the experimental group performed much better than the control group in the speaking posttest. The mean score for the former was 16.72 ($SD=0.72$) whereas for the latter the mean score is 12.87 ($SD= 0.91$).

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.856	.095	18.179	58	.000	3.80000	.21477	3.45051	4.34993
Equal variances not assumed			18.179	55.519	.000	3.80000	.21477	3.45022	4.34997

Another independent-sample *t*-test was carried out to compare the statistics scores of the two groups in the speaking posttest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 3.80 with a 95%confidence interval ranging from 3.45 to 4.34. The results exposed significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the speaking pretest $t(58) = 18.179, p = .000$. Hence the Null hypothesis is rejected and the Alternative hypothesis is supported

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of the present study are in line with the research studies which studied the effectiveness of the

stories on speaking and reported positive effects of them. For instance the current research provides strong support for the work of the Praneetponkrang and Phaiboonnugulkij (2014). They also examined the Use of Retelling Stories Technique in Developing English Speaking Ability of Grade 9 Students and reported meaningful changes in the outcomes. Also the findings of the Norberg *et.al* (2015) have been supported in the present research. But the most important point here is the effectiveness of the authentic materials in language learning. The stories audio taped by native speakers of English, thus there was no problem regarding the pronunciation or intonation. Although the stories have been adjusted regarding foreign language users but the fact is that they are deemed as authentic materials. There were no exaggerated adjustments in them. It is safe to claim that they are not for pedagogic objectives, but they are for real language needs and for real use. Through using different types of stories learners would be able to use language appropriately in different contexts of use. Since through listening to these stories it is the learners who is supposed to work on them, consequently they get more self-regulated and self-directed pupils. There would be a relaxed atmosphere and learners stay away from all of anxieties of the pedagogic contexts.

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