

The Opinions of Teachers Teaching English as a Foreign Language on Using Storytelling as a Teaching Tool in Kuwaiti Elementary Schools: Possibilities and Hindrances

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the opinions of some of elementary teachers teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) regarding the possible application of storytelling as a language teaching tool in Kuwaiti elementary schools. One hundred elementary EFL female teachers participated in this study as a representative sample in two educational areas. Seven open-ended research questions were distributed and the teachers provided their opinions and feedback. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were incorporated. The data showed that storytelling is a suitable language teaching tool to elementary school children. However, several difficulties were raised as challenges to the application of this teaching tool. Thus, special care should be given during application time to overcome the difficulties. Teachers were keen to learn about storytelling and its application in the elementary EFL classroom, and showed interest to be trained in it. The study concludes with implications for a continuous in-service teacher training with special attention to storytelling. In addition, there is a need for gap bridging between teachers, policy makers and curriculum designers for a better understanding of such approach.

آراء بعض معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية حول استخدام القصة المسموعة كأداة تعليمية في فصول المرحلة الابتدائية في مدارس الكويت، الإمكانيات والمعوقات

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الملخص:

هدفت الدراسة إلى بحث آراء بعض معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية حول استخدام القصة المسموعة أداة تعليمية في المرحلة الابتدائية في مدارس الكويت. طبقت الدراسة على 100 معلمة كعينة ممثلة لمعلمات منطقتين تعليميتين، وتمركزت الدراسة حول سبعة أسئلة، وتم استخدام المنهج الكمي والكيفي في الدراسة. وقد أسفرت الدراسة عن أن القصة المسموعة تعتبر أداة تعليمية مناسبة لتلاميذ المرحلة الابتدائية لما لها من إيجابيات، إلا أنه يجب الأخذ بعين الاعتبار المعوقات عند التطبيق لتفاديها، وقد أبدت المعلمات استعدادهن لتعرف المزيد عن القصة المسموعة وكيفية تطبيقها والتدريب عليها، وخلصت الدراسة إلى بعض النتائج أهمها الاهتمام بالتدريب المستمر لمعلمي الميدان خاصة فيما يتعلق بالقصة المسموعة، إضافة إلى تضييق الفجوة بين معلمي الميدان، وصناع القرار، وبناء المناهج لمزيد من المعرفة بهذا الأسلوب.

Introduction

Where English language is taught and learned as a foreign language, its use and application will be limited to the language classroom. This is the case in the State of Kuwait in all stages of public education. However, English language teaching in the elementary stage is seen as a new experience to the educational system. In the school year of 1993-94 a ministerial decision was made to introduce English language instruction to public elementary schools. The decision was courageous as it brought an end to an ongoing controversy at that time of whether or not to teach English to elementary school children. It also helped to extend the scope of foreign language learning years in public schools from eight as it was taught beginning from the intermediate stage through high school, to twelve after the introduction of English to the elementary stage.

The decision was ambitious as it aimed at creating better learning opportunities for children to learn English as a foreign language at early years of their schooling. However, the implementation of the ministerial decision was more modest and failed to capture the intentions behind it. Several factors played a major role for such poor implementation of English teaching in public elementary schools. First, local intermediate and high school English language teachers were recruited to teach in elementary schools. The recruited teachers were left with a limited preparation of the nature of young children and the suitable teaching methods. Second, there was and still is a shortage of local elementary English language teachers. As a result, the need for qualified Arab English language teachers increased to make up for the shortfall (Al-Mutawa, 1993). However, the pronunciation of some of the Arab English language teachers proved to be poor. This has a critical effect on children's pronunciation and spoken language proficiency and fluency. Language proficiency and accuracy are very important issues in relation to EFL teachers (Brumfit, 1991). Third, a study by Al-Mutawa (1997) has revealed that some of the new Arab and local elementary English language teachers lack essential teaching competencies and basic language skills. This is a result of the limited pre-service teaching practice student-teachers have access to. In the State of Kuwait student-teachers' practicum lasts for a semester at the final year of their studies. This affects teachers actual teaching practices and classroom management later on. Fourth, the choice of textbooks to be used was not a successful one. At the early years of English language teaching in Kuwaiti elementary schools, the Ministry of Education adopted the textbooks used in the United Arab Emirates. The problem was the content of that textbook series which was especially written to suit cultural, historical and geographical issues of the UAE. As a result, teachers in Kuwait had to transfer all those issues to make them suitable and representative of Kuwait. That was tiring work for teachers and confusing for children.

In the school year of 2002/03, the Ministry of Education put an end to this problem by introducing a new textbook series especially written to suit the context of Kuwait. However, teachers complained about the amount of information and language activities presented in the units of the new textbook series. With the limited time allocated, forty five minutes per class meeting, teachers became more concerned with the coverage of the big number of units and its lessons over the quality of teaching in order to comply with the scope and sequence plan. Teachers felt trapped by the limited class time and the quantity over quality dilemma. They find it hard to offer pupils enough and equal opportunities to have them participate and get feedback. The lack of time has a negative result on children language learning. Fifth, the classroom size plays a role in hindering the expected classroom interaction and participation. In response to the large classroom size problem, The Ministry of Education limited the classroom capacity to twenty five pupils in first and second grades. But, in third, fourth, and fifth grades the class size can go up to thirty pupils. In both cases the classroom size is large and does not encourage proper language learning. As a result, teachers tend to avoid extended interactions with pupils and accept one word answers. Teaching becomes dominated with one-way interactions which are usually initiated and controlled by the language teachers. Pupils are only invited to respond to teachers' question rather than being engaged in a richer linguistic interaction where they learn to use language. These factors indicate that learners do not learn English in the kind of environment that encourages the use of English.

The above mentioned factors have led to a cumulative weakness in the performance and achievement of elementary school children in their English language learning. Such weakness builds up as students grow older and move from one educational stage to another with a weak background in English. Students' poor achievement in English is referred to as one of the findings mentioned in the Educational Indicators Report of 1998. It is stated that "Achievement in English and mathematics is below average (p. 226)". This explains why English is one of the subjects studied in private tutoring and school tutorials.

The present study focuses on investigating the possibility of employing storytelling as a language teaching tool in the elementary EFL classroom in the State of Kuwait. It is argued that storytelling is an effective tool known for its role in fostering and developing children's oral language (Fasick, 1973; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; and Kies, 1993). It encourages children to listen carefully and deeply. It exposes them to the power of oral language to express their thoughts and emotions. It helps them to practice visualization and develop their imagination. It aids children in developing self-confidence in speech and communication as they build their language repertoire. It teaches them to share their experiences with peers and teachers. This teaching tool helps bring children closer to both peers and teachers and build stronger learning relationships. Storytelling is a valuable language teaching tool that works successfully for both native and non-native language learning.

The study intends first to investigate elementary EFL teachers' knowledge of the importance of storytelling as a teaching tool in the elementary stage. Second, the study will investigate the expected possibilities and hindrances of future application of storytelling in the elementary stage.

Purpose and significance of the present study

The present study aims at investigating the opinions of some elementary school English language teachers regarding the importance of storytelling as a teaching tool to foster children's oral fluency.

The study is of value to EFL researchers in general, and to Arab EFL educators, researchers and teachers in elementary schools in particular, for a number of reasons. First, there is a shortage of research literature on the teaching of EFL in Arabic contexts especially in the State of Kuwait after the introduction of English in elementary schools. Second, there is lack of research of the value of storytelling to young children in general and to EFL young children in particular. Third, the study brings a new avenue to the EFL teaching/learning process that associates it with fun and excitement as a way of creating a positive image about learning English. Fourth, the use of narrative is particularly appropriate to Arab culture and this method should be exploited in the EFL classroom. It's worth mentioning that the Arabic culture is enormously rich with wonderful and amazing stories and folktales. "The One Thousand and One Nights" is a good illustration of that richness. The power of storytelling is revealed when Sharazad kept Sharayar's interest and amusement aroused to listen night after night to what the end of the story told might be. The great ability of Sharazad as a storyteller is seen in blending the events of one story into another to create increasing suspense in Sharayar.

Research questions

The purpose of the present study is to examine the opinions of some of elementary school English language teachers regarding the importance of storytelling as a teaching tool. Specifically, the research addressed two main questions:

- 1) What are EFL teachers' opinions on the possibility of using storytelling as a teaching tool in Kuwaiti elementary schools?
- 2) What are the possible difficulties to be encountered by EFL teachers in using storytelling at the elementary level?

From the main questions, seven open ended questions emerged and raised in the teachers' questionnaire. The questions are:

- 1) Do you think that storytelling is a suitable tool for teaching English as a foreign language in elementary school?

- 2) In your opinion, how familiar are elementary English language teachers with the application of storytelling as a teaching tool in the language classroom?
- 3) Have you been trained in how to tell stories?
- 4) Would you like to be trained in how to employ storytelling as a language teaching tool?
- 5) How sufficient is the class period time for the application of storytelling?
- 6) What are the possible difficulties you may face when employing storytelling?
- 7) Are you in favor of or against the variation of language teaching tools in the elementary EFL classroom?

Method and materials

Participants:

One hundred teachers took part in this research (see table 1). The aim was to select a representative group of elementary schools teachers. The participants came from two educational districts out of the six Kuwaiti educational districts, Al-Asemah and Hawalli. All participants were females representing 20 different elementary schools with an average of five EFL teachers each. This reflects the recent educational policy to feminize the teaching staff in almost all elementary schools. Although a few schools in the different six educational districts are still run by male administrators and teachers, male teachers were excluded from this study as they represent a minority among the elementary teachers population. It's worth mentioning that in Kuwait public elementary schools, boys attend different schools than girls although teachers at the boys schools can be females. The demographic characteristics of the participants are explained next.

Out of the one hundred participants 56 per cent were Kuwaiti teachers and 44 per cent were Arabs. Forty-eight teachers held degrees in English and Education compared with fifty-two with degrees in English and Literature. Teachers' qualifications show that over 50 per cent of teachers are of non-education majors. Forty-four teachers teach boys while fifty-six teach girls. It is important to consider that the nature of boys differs from that of girls in the way they behave and act as they are known for being more active and energetic. Pupils' sex is an important factor to consider as that will help to see if it will have an impact on teachers' opinions regarding future application of storytelling. Sixty-two per cent of the participants came from Hawalli Educational District, while 38 percent came from Al-Asema. This may suggest that the teaching load could be less for those teachers in Hawalli District. Fifty-five per cent of the teachers possess up to five years of experience and all are Kuwaitis, while almost one quarter of the participants are 26 per cent with more than six years of teaching experience. Only nineteen per cent possess over ten years of teaching experience. This indicates that the majority of the participants are fresh blood teachers.

Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables	Description	No.
Nationality	Kuwaiti	56
	Non- Kuwaiti (Arab)	44
Qualification	BA English and Education	48
	BA English and Literature	52
Sex of Learners	male	44
	female	56
Educational Districts	Al-Asema	38
	Hawalli	62
Years of Experience	(1 - 5)	55
	(6 - 10)	26
	Over 10	19

Instrument and procedure:

The present study is descriptive incorporating both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In order to familiarize the teachers with the study, teacher were given an introductory paragraph explaining storytelling and its importance and application in the language classroom (see appendix). In addition, they received seven open-ended research questions with enough space for teachers to provide their responses. Data were collected in two phases. In phase one, visits were paid to the selected schools. The senior teachers and other available EFL teachers were familiarised with the study, and were encouraged to read the introductory paragraph for any clarifications or questions. After that, teachers' answers were collected for analysis. Phase two took place after writing the teachers' responses to questions one and six and arranging them in a list form. As for question one, teachers had to rank the responses based on the importance of storytelling. As for question six, they had to rank the possible encountered difficulties when employing storytelling method.

Review of literature

Many educators and researchers advocate the use of storytelling in the learning and development of the oral language skills of young children. Many research studies have been conducted with native speakers. According to Genishi (1988), children's language is complex. They have an enormous vocabulary (Rubin & Wilson, 1995). Children as well understand far more than they can speak (Snow, 2001). Meaningful experiences especially during the early years of life can create opportunities to increase and sustain language growth (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; and Genishi, 1988). Being active participants in their acquisition, children construct their language as they learn. Through social interaction with adults and children, children learn language patterns (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Children's language could be developed through a variety of classroom activities and tools. Storytelling is an effective tool which can bring children to a world of amusement and learning at the same time. Through storytelling, children are encouraged to learn language by using language. Kies et al. (1993: 5) summarized their findings in their study "Oral language development through storytelling: an approach to emergent literacy" as "Allowing children to use their own language in a less structured environment such as storytelling, sharing a thought/idea, discussing stories, give them practice in using language and an opportunity to gain experiences through an informal exchange among peers and adults". Strickland & Morrow (1989) argued that storytelling can be used as a tool to advance language development in early childhood classrooms. Wade (1984: 9) indicated that "In schools stories may additionally be used to convey information, to introduce new ideas or experience, to test learning or even to control behavior". Fasick (1973) found that hearing the complicated language of stories help children to understand and to apply the more complicated language used in school.

Several educationists have drawn attention to storytelling as a possible influence on the development of children's language that leads to literacy development. According to Peck (1989) telling stories to children in the classroom increases both oral and written language development. In addition telling stories advances reading and listening comprehension. According to Ellis (1997) storytelling is an active way to develop children listening skills. It helps children to differentiate between quiet listening and active listening by participating in the process. Thus, children are offered natural opportunities to grow as language users. In the light of that, children who are frequently exposed to stories tend to have more complex syntax and developed vocabulary (Roney, 1989). Reed (1987) and Davis (1982) argued that storytelling increases attention span, listening skills, and accuracy of recall. In addition, it enhances the sequencing ability and fluency in writing.

Soundy (1993) suggested that storytelling is an active bridge to emergent literacy. Children who participated in storytelling education programs demonstrated productive behaviors related to increased literacy (Allison and Watson 1994; and Speaker 2000). Similarly, Malo & Bullard (2000) said that storytelling could be a powerful tool compared to other tools in developing skills that prepare children for reading. Trostle & Hicks (1998) conducted a study on older children of ages seven and eleven years old. They found that storytelling improved reading by increasing children's comprehension and vocabulary development. In addition, storytelling is a positive tool that promotes language development

in speech and receptive skills including listening and reading. Therefore, storytelling advances the fluency of children's verbal expressions (Friedberg, 1994).

According to Collins (1999) storytelling has many applications in educating elementary children. It provides a conceptual framework for thinking. Kim (1999) said that storytelling is considered as a key cognitive skill in the process of intellectual development. Storytelling is considered as a developmental tool for eliciting thoughts (Friedberg, 1994). This enables children to obtain a more ordered sense of the world. Maguire (1985) stressed that storytelling is effective in developing the child's ability to think symbolically and metaphorically. Storytelling serves many purposes including vocabulary acquisition, concentration and recall (Farrell & Nessel, 1982; and Maguire 1985).

Myers (1990) conducted a study on children in second through fifth grade where some stories were read and some were told. She concluded that children who attended the storytelling group enjoyed their time and had a positive interaction with the storyteller. What is special about storytelling is that words are not memorized but are created through the active interaction between the storyteller and the children. This co-creative aspect is a form of two-way communication (Roney, 1996). Eye contact increases the interaction between the storyteller and children as it raises their attention. This makes the experience more personal and effective (Zeece, 1997; and Malo and Bullard, 2000). Kies et al. (1993: 47) described the adult-child relationship during storytelling time "perhaps the greatest power of storytelling is the opportunity to strengthen the adult-child relationship through devotion, sharing and trust". Teachers can benefit from this teaching and relationship tool to supply children with experiences on different topics, and encourage oral development.

Speaker et al. (2004) believed that creative and predictive interaction and participation during storytelling time serve to enhance language use. In a pilot study, they investigated the qualitative changes in verbal fluency (vocabulary, grammatics, length of utterance and sentence formation) in three, four and five year old pre-schoolers who were actively involved in a pre-school program at The College of New Jersey. The four weekly storytelling units were developed based upon established themes (feelings, holidays, health and storytelling). Weekly, ten books were chosen on each theme. Open-ended questions were developed to promote discussion and dialogue about the story elements. The aim of the study was to provide a framework for the implementation of the art of storytelling in individual classrooms. This included the proper questioning tools teachers should use when asking questions to elicit creative and predictive thinking. Speaker et al found that the consistent exposure of the sampling pre-school children to storytelling enhanced grammatics, vocabulary, length of utterance and sentence formation. Speaker et al (2004: 11) concluded that the "progress made by the children in this pilot study would suggest that there is an important developmental trend indicating that increased exposure to storytelling may foster emergence of more advanced stages of language development".

In their study "The effects of storytelling and story reading on the oral language complexity and story comprehension of young children", Isbell et al. (2004) studied two groups of children from age three to five years old. During the course of the study, the two groups heard the same twenty four stories. However, group "A" heard the stories told. Group "B" heard the stories read from the book. Isbell et al., elicited both pre- and post-language samples from the participants by asking them to retell a story they had heard and create a story using a wordless story book. Then, the language samples were transcribed and analyzed using measures of language complexity and story comprehension. Isbell et al. found out that both storytelling and story reading produce positive gains in the oral language. Children who heard the stories told show improved story comprehension in their retelling. Yet, children in the story reading group demonstrated language complexity. However, both storytelling and story reading are not used in the elementary EFL Kuwaiti classroom.

Summary

Drawing on my review of research on storytelling, I wish to highlight some of the main points that are of importance to my study:

- 1) Children's language can be best developed through meaningful interactions with more competent and experienced peers and adults.

- 2) Storytelling can be an effective teaching tool to develop children's language.
- 3) Storytelling teaches children how to develop their listening skills by increasing their attention span.
- 4) Storytelling enriches children's speaking ability as it is a good tool to build their vocabulary.
- 5) Storytelling helps in fostering emergent literacy.
- 6) Storytelling develops children's imagination, thoughts and their sense of the world.
- 7) Storytelling enriches the learning environment with positive attitudes towards learning new concepts, information, or experiences.
- 8) Storytelling leads to a positive relationship between the storyteller (the teacher) and the audience (children) through both verbal and non-verbal communication.
- 9) Although storybook reading helps in improving children's language complexity, storytelling helps in improving children's comprehension and verbal fluency.

Storytelling can be employed favorably over storybook reading as a tool for teaching English to children. Storytelling can contribute to the oral language development of foreign language learners as it has already played a positive role in first language acquisition. Consequently, it is expected that storytelling can be successfully implemented in the EFL curriculum as a teaching tool.

After investigating the opinions of some of the elementary school EFL teachers regarding the importance of storytelling as a teaching tool in elementary school, the research data were analyzed and the findings are presented next.

Results and discussions

In this section the results of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions presented earlier.

Research Question 1. The suitability of storytelling as a language teaching tool in the elementary classroom.

Ninety per cent considered storytelling a suitable tool to teach a foreign language to elementary school children. Teachers thought that storytelling would work well for children as it suits their nature. Children have a short attention span, therefore the different characters and colorful events of a story would attract their attention better during storytelling time. They believe that storytelling would offer children better chances to learn English in a non-threatening situation. The connected structure of story which begins with a proper scene setting of the background and main events, a problem, a climax, a resolution, and a conclusion, helps children follow coherently the flow of events. It allows them to comprehend the main ideas presented and the vocabulary mentioned. This eliminates the difficult time children face figuring out the meaning of new vocabulary. Simply put, they can understand it from the context. Teachers stressed that storytelling helps them to associate language learning with fun and enjoyment which are important elements for children at this stage of their life. However, 15 per cent out of the 90 per cent suggested that storytelling would be more suitable to grades three, four and five than early grades as children would have a good background in English, a rich vocabulary repertoire, and the ability to speak it better. On the contrary, 10 per cent did not agree at all to employ storytelling in the elementary classroom regardless of the grade factor. They raised several reasons as hindrances in the employment of storytelling. Those reasons will be presented when answering question 6 on the expected difficulties when employing storytelling (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Distributions of the answers to question 1

Question 1	overall agreement	Nationality		Qualification BA in		Experience		
		KW	Non-KW	Eng. Arts	Eng. Edu.	1-5	6-10	10+
Does storytelling suit elementary pupils?	90%	53%	37%	41%	49%	49%	23%	18%

In general, ninety per cent of teachers' responses supported the choice of storytelling as a suitable teaching tool in the elementary classroom. The following are some of their reasons. Teachers stated that storytelling plays a major role in developing the four language skills. It plays an important role in associating language learning with fun. It enriches children's vocabulary. It develops children's listening comprehension. It introduces children to the structure of the language indirectly. It helps children to learn about the culture of the foreign language. In addition, storytelling creates a positive learning atmosphere. It enhances the children's imagination and creativity. It suits children's nature as they have a short attention span. It builds a good relationship between the teacher and her pupils. It attracts students' attention with its colorful events and characters. Storytelling raises the level of children's curiosity to learn more about its events. It suits children's interests in listening to stories as they do at home. It provides children with opportunities for real classroom interaction. Finally, storytelling has a positive influence on learning good manners and morals.

Teachers' reasons were written in a list form under two headings, language learning and general learning. In the second phase of this study, teachers were asked to rank their reasons for the suitability of storytelling to elementary children based on their importance to language learning. Table 2.2 below represents the ranking of those reasons.

Table 2.2 Suitability of storytelling to elementary school children

Teachers' reasons for the suitability of storytelling to elementary school children	Total
A) Language learning:	
1) It associates language learning with fun	90
2) It develops listening comprehension	88
3) It enriches pupils vocabulary	87
4) It develops the four language skills	77
5) It introduces language structure indirectly	64
6) It teaches pupils about the FL culture	38
B) General Learning:	
1) It suits pupils short attention span	90
2) It builds good teacher-pupils relationship	89
3) It attracts pupils attention	88
4) It enhances pupils imagination	85
5) It creates a positive learning atmosphere	82
6) It raises pupils level of curiosity	77
7) It suits pupils interest in stories	75
8) It provides opportunities for real interaction	74
9) It teaches positive morals and attitudes	65

Table 2.2 showed the importance of storytelling in associating language learning with fun and attracting children's short attention span as revealed by teachers ranking. Teachers' reasons resembled the previously discussed issues in the background literature.

Research Question 2. Familiarity of elementary EFL teachers with storytelling as a teaching tool in the language classroom.

Ninety-seven per cent indicated that they are not familiar with it and do not use it when teaching. Teachers stated that they have not seen their colleagues using this technique during exchange classroom visits or school visits within the same educational district. They indicated that it is not used because it is not part of the teaching techniques recommended by the supervision department. Although there are some stories included in grades 4 and 5 textbooks, they are for reading only. When it comes to those suggested stories, teachers simply read them and ask children to answer the questions. Therefore, teachers simply do not apply storytelling technique in their classrooms. To help children understand the meaning of the new words, teachers tend to translate them into Arabic. Others consider children's attempts to answer dialogue questions as part of re-telling the story of the lesson. Interestingly, some teachers think of their introduction to the lesson as storytelling. The 3 per cent who mentioned applying storytelling did so to children outside school as part of voluntary teaching services (see table 3).

Table 3. Distributions of teachers responses to question 2

Question 2	overall agreement	Nationality		Qualification BA in		Experience		
		KW	Non-KW	Eng. Arts	Eng. Edu.	1-5	6-10	10+
Do teachers know how to use the tool?	97%	42%	42%	47%	50%	54%	25%	18%

While conducting this study I saw some teachers going to their classrooms with big boxes full of different puppets, soft toys, masks and so on. They explained that children love to play games and role-play and this helps them to learn English. This indicated that the interest in using storytelling exists. Those teachers need proper guidelines through professional training to apply those techniques and teaching tools properly. One of the teachers talked about benefiting from the assigned stories in the textbook by taking her children to the school library. She assigns a monthly visit. There, she selects a story that suits their linguistic level, interest and in relation to the syllabus. She realized that during story reading time children showed a great interest and keenness in listening quietly to the story and raised related questions.

Generally, the answers reveal a lack of teachers' knowledge on how to apply storytelling as a language teaching tool. Teachers need to know how to tell stories in the first place. This requires a special training for them to attend. They need to know about the main structure of story, the setting, events, problem, climaxes, resolution, and conclusion, and how to present it in the right order without reading from a text. Also, teachers need to know how to attract and keep children's attention during storytelling time. It is important to know how to begin and end the story hour. They need to know how to create a mood for listening and a critical listening ability. It is very important for teachers to know how to deal with disruption.

This takes us to the third question which investigates whether the teachers have been trained in how to tell stories or not.

Research question 3. Teacher training in the employment of storytelling.

Ninety-eight per cent of the teachers stated that they had not received any training regarding storytelling or its application as a teaching tool in the elementary foreign language classroom. The other 2 per cent said that they learned about it as they studied abroad. Teachers' answers reflected that this teaching tool is not taken into consideration in the elementary classroom (see table 4).

Table 4. Distributions of teachers responses to question 3

Question 3	overall agreement	Nationality		Qualification BA in		Experience		
		KW	Non-KW	Eng. Arts	Eng. Edu.	1-5	6-10	10+
Have you ever been trained to use the tool?	98%	54%	44%	47%	57%	53%	26%	19%

Research Question 4. Teachers interest in training in the employment of storytelling.

Out of the 100 participants, 85 per cent of the teachers welcomed the idea. They pointed out that training would provide them with the necessary skills to be good storytellers. This, with no doubt would have a better impact on their children's oral language development. However, 15 per cent believe that training is not necessary. They believe that storytelling is not a difficult teaching tool to apply since many of them practice it at home with their children. This point is a very important one which shows how familiar children are with stories and it is part of their daily lives. However, those teachers need to consider the importance of professional training in developing their natural storytelling abilities.

Table 5. Distributions of teachers responses to question 4

Question 4	overall agreement	Nationality		Qualification BA in		Experience		
		KW	Non-KW	Eng. Arts	Eng. Edu.	1-5	6-10	10+
Would you like to trained?	85%	49%	36%	40%	45%	48%	24%	13%

Research Question 5. Sufficiency of class period length for the application of storytelling.

Teachers opinions varied. Seventy-eight per cent of the teachers strongly believe that the class period time is totally insufficient to introduce this teaching tool. Forty-four per cent of the rejection came highly from teachers teaching at boys schools. They believe it is hard sometimes to maintain class control to tell the story smoothly without any interruption or experiencing mischievous behavior from some of the boys. Teachers suggest a special class period for storytelling in order to be able to include this teaching tool as part of the EFL teaching techniques. They explain that the intensive and long syllabus they have to cover makes it difficult to squeeze storytelling. They believe that telling the story takes time to make it understood by all children. Therefore this even requires an extra hour for discussion and other related activities. So it is impossible to be part of a lesson. Teachers wonder about the extra time they need to prepare for the story and the accompanied teaching aids. They are afraid that this may take some of their family time at home.

The other twenty-two teachers are divided as follows. Six per cent of the teachers see that the time is enough to present the story and that all depends on the effectiveness of the teachers. The other 16 per cent think it is feasible on certain conditions. This includes the length of the story, the suitability of the story to the linguistic level of the learners in terms of content, vocabulary, and structure, in addition to the teacher's ability to employ the time effectively (see table 6).

Table 6. Distributions of teachers responses to question 5

Question 5	overall agreement	Nationality		Qualification BA in		Experience		
		KW	Non-KW	Eng. Arts	Eng. Edu.	1-5	6-10	10+
Is the class period time enough?	78%	45%	33%	36%	42%	43%	21%	14%

In general, teachers stress that the English linguistic level of children is often not sufficient to make them follow the events of a story. Also, learners', individual differences make it hard on teachers to tell stories that suit all children. This might make some children raise questions in Arabic to know the meaning of certain words or get an explanation to some of the events. Class size as well plays a role to how successful the employment of storytelling can be. It becomes hard to include all children in discussion in crowded classrooms. Class size is limited to 25 pupils in both grades one and two. However, the number exceeds up to 30 in third, fourth and fifth grades. Therefore, teachers suggest that for this tool to be employed effectively it is best to be related to the taught units and included in the scope and sequence plan.

It is clear that teachers need training in how to tell stories, prepare them, employ their voices, facial expressions and body language to engage their children in the telling/learning process. In addition, they need to know how to deal with noisy children and disruption. As for children, they need to be in an attractive surrounding to live the story imaginary world. This creates the proper mood to listen to the story, understand it's events and vocabulary. This could be achieved through dedicating a special class period or two to storytelling.

Research Question 6. Difficulties teachers may face when applying storytelling as a teaching tool.

Ninety even per cent said that they would experience difficulty when employing storytelling. The other 3 per cent did not share their opinions in answering this question (see table 7.1). Teachers raised a number of the difficulties that might be faced when applying this teaching tool (see table 7.2). It would be hard on teachers to choose related stories to the syllabus which suit all children linguistic competence. Stories may not be available in the school library and that adds extra work on them to shoulder. The preparation of the accompanied teaching aids like puppets, toys, pictures, etc. is another difficulty. According to teachers this will affect their budget and put them under financial pressure if they are required to provide them. Some of the classrooms are not an attractive surrounding for storytelling. They need some suitable furniture and decoration to create the right atmosphere. Crowded classrooms make it hard on teachers to offer fair and equal attention and participation opportunities to children. The lengthy syllabus does not foster the inclusion of storytelling as part of the scope and sequence plan. It needs to be reduced in the first place to be able to do so. The class period is not enough to tell stories and do other related activities.

Table 7.1. Distributions of teachers responses to question 6

Question 6	overall agreement	Nationality		Qualification BA in		Experience		
		KW	Non-KW	Eng. Arts	Eng. Edu.	1-5	6-10	10+
Would you experience difficulties when applying it?	97%	55%	42%	47%	50%	54%	25%	18%

Children's limited linguistic and communicative competences would greatly affect the story-telling process. In addition, children's individual differences make it hard to finish a story and discuss its events and related activities as planned. This may lead some children to speak Arabic instead of English to understand something and make themselves understood. Disruptive and noisy children are another major difficulty. This will affect the classroom management and control, as it also influences children's understanding of the story. The timing of the class period is another vital factor, especially when the class meets at the end of the school day. This makes it hard to attract children's attention to listen and participate. Furthermore, unexpected visitors may affect the flow of storytelling and lead to interruption of the story-telling process. Teachers need training to be able to tell stories effectively. They must know what is it like to be a storyteller and the qualities of one. Teachers are concerned about criticism they might receive from their supervisors if they fail to meet their expectations as good storyteller.

Table 7.2. Expected difficulties when applying storytelling

Difficulties teachers may encounter	Total
1) Need for teacher training	97
2) Long syllabus to cover	93
3) Preparation of accompanied teaching aids	91
4) Large class size	90
5) Children limited linguistic competence	89
6) Learners' individual differences	88
7) Availability of stories in school library	86
8) Short class period	84
9) Choice of relevant stories	80
10) Unattractive learning/ classroom environment	79
11) Accountability to supervisors	78
12) Timing of class period in the timetable	74
13) Noisy pupils	67
14) Visitors' distraction	47

Research Question 7. Teachers in favor of or against the variation of language teaching tools in the elementary EFL classroom.

All of the 100 participants agreed on the importance of utilizing new language teaching tools in the elementary EFL classroom. Teachers explained that varying the teaching tools and techniques and introducing something new like storytelling to the elementary EFL classroom would attract pupils' attention and interest during the learning process. New teaching tools means associating the English language learning with fun, joy and amusement. This suits to a greater extent the nature of children as they quickly lose interest and become easily distracted. In addition, children's short attention spans encourage teachers to engage them into a variety of attractive and appealing activities. Teachers consider children as smart and creative creatures. Therefore, the more they experience new teaching techniques to achieve the same goal the more intelligent they grow.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of the study was to examine the opinions of some of the elementary EFL teachers regarding the importance of storytelling as a language teaching tool. In general, teachers draw attention to some of the potential effectiveness of storytelling as a language teaching to children. The comments gathered from the participants reflected many of the findings of the previously discussed background literature.

According to the participants, storytelling could be an effective language teaching tool in

the EFL classroom. Teachers believed that storytelling can add a new avenue to the EFL teaching. Storytelling brings fun and excitement to children. It makes them feel relaxed while learning a foreign language. Story structure, with its different sequences and complications of events, allows children to sharpen their memories while being engaged in the processes of learning, understanding, and remembering the events. These elements foster their memories and make them not only remember the events of the story but also the important and relevant vocabulary. Teachers stressed that listening to stories enriches children's vocabulary and allows them to choose the proper words to express their ideas. Teachers thought that storytelling bridges the gap of individual differences among children. Furthermore, low language achievers will gain self-confidence over the learning process. They will appreciate their modest participation attempts during storytelling time. Thus, storytelling helps in enriching children's language and foster their communicative abilities.

The present study also looked at some of the possible difficulties teachers may encounter when employing storytelling as a language teaching tool. To mention a few, teachers are in need of training to become good storytellers. The preparation of the accompanied teaching aids is another obstacle. The large class size plays a major challenge. The lengthy syllabus makes it impossible to make space in the scope and sequence plan for storytelling. Children's poor linguistic competence is another factor to consider.

There are several important factors to take into account for future possible employment of storytelling as a language teaching tool in the elementary EFL classroom. First, it is necessary to reconsider the content versus time issue. As it has been revealed by the participants that the allocated time for the English language does not match the large syllabus. This makes it difficult for teachers to include a new teaching tool like storytelling as part of the scope and sequence plan. This limits teachers chances to be creative in their teaching and make language learning more fun and appealing to children. According to teachers, finishing the textbook based on the scope and sequence plan puts them in a race with time. Therefore, it will be very hard to find time to apply storytelling without specifying a special class period for it and including it in the scope and sequence plan.

Second, in-service training is crucial for promoting teachers professional development. In this study teachers raise their need for training in general and in storytelling in particular in order to keep abreast with new trends in EFL teaching. Thus, teachers need to be trained to become storytellers and attract and keep their children's attention and interest. They need to learn how to transform the learning environment from being an everyday classroom to an attractive and positive learning environment. Moreover, teachers need to be trained on how to benefit from the available material to create their own teaching aids for the stories they will tell. This will help in avoiding any financial pressure they may face later on if the teaching aids are not provided for them.

Third, teachers' points of view presented in this study regarding storytelling reflects what other voices in the teaching field hold. This shows teachers' willingness to be open to new trends in their teaching professions such as storytelling. Therefore, it is important that education policy makers and curriculum designers listen to teachers' opinions and suggestions as they reflect the teaching field experience. This will allow education policy makers and curriculum designers to be more realistic in their decisions.

Finally, what has been described in this study takes us a step further to draw the following recommendation. A suggested model on how to apply storytelling in the elementary classroom is needed. This requires further research in this topic to provide a framework for implementing storytelling in the elementary EFL classroom. This could include the choice of stories, preparation and presentation of the story, the seating in the classroom, how to handle pupils participation and disruption, as well as other related issues.

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Appendix

Kuwait University
College of Education
Curriculum and Instruction Department

Serial No.:

EFL Teachers' Opinions on Using Storytelling as a Teaching Tool in Kuwaiti Elementary Schools: Possibilities and Hindrances

Dear Teacher:

This study is designed to find out information about "**The Opinions of Teachers' Teaching English as a Foreign Language on Using Storytelling as a Teaching Tool in Kuwaiti Elementary Schools: Possibilities and Hindrances**". Your participation is of great value as it will contribute to the findings of the study. The study consists of two parts. Part one is on demographic characteristics. Part two covers an introductory paragraph on storytelling and seven research questions.

Thank you for your co-operation.

The Researcher ,,,,

Part One:

Demographic Characteristics

Gender:	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nationality:	Kuwaiti	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Kuwaiti	<input type="checkbox"/>
Qualification:	Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	Eng. Literature	<input type="checkbox"/>
Educational District:	Asima	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hawalli	<input type="checkbox"/>
Years of Experience:	1-5	<input type="checkbox"/>	6-10	<input type="checkbox"/>
			10+	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part Two:

Please, first read the following introductory paragraph on storytelling as a teaching tool. Then, provide your answers to the study questions.

Storytelling depends on oral narration of events. The language teacher should select a story which is suitable in its theme, objective and vocabulary to the age of learners and cognitive level. It is preferable that the selected story is related to the topics learners studied. Storytelling is known for its role in attracting young learners' attention and fostering their oral language. It creates a friendly, encouraging language learning atmosphere. In that respect, the language teacher needs to decorate the language classroom with relevant pictures, and provide suitable real objects. It is important to rearrange the seating to avoid the traditional seating which is in rows. It is preferable that students sit on a carpet around the teacher. Once storytelling time starts, the teacher must act as a narrator of events. This requires him/her to color the voice and change its tones, use body language and gestures to express the meanings. At the end of storytelling session, the teacher can ask simple relevant questions about the new vocabulary, characters, major events, and so on. In advanced levels, the teacher can assign learners to role-play the story.

Objectives of storytelling:

- 1) to vary the teaching techniques in the language classroom.
- 2) To help children express their ideas and feeling using a foreign language.
- 3) To enhance practicing positive behavior through the moral of the story.
- 4) To associate language learning with fun and joy.

- 1) Do you think that storytelling is a suitable tool for teaching English as a foreign language in elementary school?
- 2) In your opinion, how familiar are elementary English language teachers with the application of storytelling as a teaching tool in the language classroom?
- 3) Have you been trained in how to tell stories?
- 4) Would you like to be trained on how to employ storytelling as a language teaching tool?
- 5) How sufficient is the class period time for the application of storytelling?
- 6) What are the possible difficulties you may face when employing storytelling?
- 7) Are you in favor of or against the variation of language teaching tools in the elementary EFL classroom?