

Effects of Sequence and Storytelling Methods on EFL Development of an Adult Learner

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Abstract

This paper presents the effects that the sequence and storytelling methods have on an adult beginner learner's English language development. The following research questions guided this study: 1) How do sequence and storytelling methods motivate an adult language learner to improve English? 2) What linguistic aspects do sequence and storytelling methods develop in learner's English? A qualitative research approach, specifically a case study was used to investigate this research. The findings demonstrate that sequence and storytelling methods of EFL teaching positively contribute to English speaking proficiency and empowerment by motivating the learner. The participant appreciated the benefits of sequence and storytelling teaching techniques as they increased enjoyment, cultural awareness, language ability and respected individual learner's needs.

1. Introduction

Sequence and storytelling methods are the traditional means of offering a highly powerful and natural way to learn, convey, and retain information. The neuroscience research shows that the brain is created to receive and retrieve human experience sequentially. This means that foreign language adult learners are likely to learn, understand, and retrieve information when the sequential learning method is used (Slavic, 2016). Sequencing is the ability to comprehend an event's components in a given format, such as the beginning, middle, and end of a story or steps that are followed in learning something in a given order. Sequencing events in learning a foreign language calls for understanding the language from the simple terms to the complex and general to specific terms. This teaching

method is effective in improving the English language of an adult beginner learner. To understand the information provided, learners need to make sense of it as it is being read to remember it later. The ability to identify the beginning, middle, and end makes recalling important events manageable. Analyzing how the sequence of events follows in language learning is essential; blocked or interleaved study sequences can be used separately. They differ in some aspects that contribute to differential learning. For example, they differ in the amount of repetition and alternation in different categories and the number of repetition of the parts of progressively presented stimuli (Borich, 2012).

This study proposes the effects of sequence and storytelling methods on an adult beginner learner's English language proficiency development. The following research questions guided this study: 1) How do sequence and storytelling methods motivate an adult language learner to improve English? 2) What linguistic aspects do sequence and storytelling methods develop in learner's English?

2. Language Proficiency

Research shows that storytelling activities and the sequencing method's application are significant in improving the learners' speaking skills. Students who work individually in storytelling are independent as they are less likely to be distracted by others and have a better opportunity for practice. The learners express a positive attitude and perceptions towards the storytelling method as it is less strict and fun. Through storytelling, learners can recall new vocabulary more efficiently, practice speaking skills frequently, improve the learning performance, and become competent speakers of the English language (Borich, 2012).

Storytelling emphasizes the student's role in constructing knowledge, student's prior experience instead of relying on the instructor's skill to transmit knowledge. It has a better outcome when used hand in hand with the Total Physical Response approach, where learners learn a second language by making special meaning through movement. It is a highly personalized, comprehensive, and contextualized approach that does not subject the learners to stress or anxiety as a repetition of vocabulary. They are practicing physical movement. This makes learning exciting and more manageable. The learning environment is also conducive under such circumstances for learning a foreign language (Kalantari and Hashemian, 2015).

Storytelling and sequencing work interchangeably because for a story to have a good flow, it has to follow a sequence from the beginning to the end. This makes the learner follow the occurrence of events well without any confusion. These specific language teaching and learning methods are also

called TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling). TPRS approach functions in three stages, where in the first two stages, learners develop receptive skills. There are several benefits of TPRS, which are beneficial to both the learners and the teacher. It makes learning a foreign language less complicated. Storytelling makes the learners understand new words easier and get exposed to the way sentences are constructed in the foreign language. It is also the right way of making learners understand how to create a connection between words and flow. This makes the TPRS method popular in second language acquisition.

The vast majority of the studies currently available conclude that the TPRS approach has many advantages over the other teaching methods. Having analyzed 13 reviews, Lichtman and Krashen (2013) found that speaking skills are mastered fastest through storytelling. Next come writing, vocabulary, and grammar competence. Besides, stories proved to be an excellent tool for introducing, practicing, revising, and improving pronunciation skills (Martinez, 2007). Iranian researchers Kalantari and Hashemian (2015) discovered that a foreign language vocabulary develops significantly through storytelling.

3. Participation and Enjoyment

Good stories capture the attention and interest of any listeners. Wood (2016:18) conducted an action in-class research to determine whether storytelling offers any advantages to primary school graders' motivation and participation when learning a foreign language. He reported that "the children enjoyed taking part in the activities even if their level of English was very limited, the idea that they wanted to learn and were not afraid to make a mistake was very pleasant to see". In other words, pupils would ignore their insecurities related to a foreign language when being involved in a storytelling process and complete learning tasks in an enjoyable way. Earlier, similar results were confirmed by Martinez (2007) and Gonzalez (2010) after investigating the impact of storytelling on primary school children's interest in learning English.

4. Cultural Awareness

Along with the beneficial language learning outcomes of storytelling, students can develop a sense of cultural and emotional diversity. Martinez (2007) highlights the importance of using literature to develop learners' cultural competence of a target language. Through becoming familiar with cultural

and social contexts different from their own, they start thinking critically about the world and their place in it. "Stories are windows open to the world. They bring in views about different people, new countries and diverse cultural values, can prepare learners for openness, awareness, tolerance, and acceptance towards other ways of understanding life and stories about different cultures can help integrate children from different migrant backgrounds." (Wood, 2016:4)

5. Creativity in Learners and Teachers

Spanish researcher Gonzalez (2010) asserted that telling stories motivates learners to use a foreign language more creatively than required by standardized textbook tasks. More freedom is given to how to use spontaneously received knowledge. Moreover, after introducing the storytelling approach as a supplement to the primary curriculum of her Spanish classes with elementary school pupils and adults, an experienced second language teacher, consultant, curriculum developer, and book writer Jeanette Borich (2012: para. 21) reflected: "Now, more than ever, I recognize the importance of working hard to be the creative, effective teacher my students deserve. And I know from their positive feedback that storytelling is making a difference in how they think about the experience of learning a foreign language."

6. Methodology

This research aims to analyze the effects of sequence and storytelling methods to improve the English language of an adult beginner learner. We achieved this goal by approaching it as a qualitative research study and specifically as a case study of a Korean English language learner.

One English language learner, Kim, participated in the present study. Kim is a Korean native and speaks English as a second language; she is majored in Korean dance and has hardly learned the English language in the past. The participant moved to Almaty, Kazakhstan, because of her husband's profession. For this case study, Kim's English language learning progress with sequence and storytelling methods was examined; one of the researchers, Lee, became an English language teacher of Kim and recorded Kim's language development. Kim has one daughter and one son, and they both attend an international school. To support her kids' education, Kim was enthusiastic about learning English and communicating with teachers. Although Kim was an absolute beginner of the English language, she was highly motivated to learn English due to her international school circumstances.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and teaching and learning reports from 5-month English lessons. Two formal interviews were conducted, and the length of each was about 1 hour and 20 minutes.

English lessons also took place at the researcher's office twice a week from October 2019 to February 2020. During the first ten weeks of the lessons, ten different daily life episodes, mostly happening in the kitchen and bathroom, were overviewed and practiced. Ten topics are as follows: 1) how to make a bowl of cereal; 2) how to toast bread; 3) how to fry eggs; 4) how to cook Ramen; 5) how to wash your hands; 6) how to clear the table; 7) how to wash the dishes; 8) how to do laundry; 9) how to take care of your dog, and 10) how to use an ATM. Those topics are excerpted from *English for Everyday Activities* by Lawrence J. Zwier, published in 2011, and each episode consists of 8 basic sentences. One topic was covered for each week, and the researcher recorded all the sequences in English. Then, the participant practiced reading the sequence every day at least three times and sent her voice recording of the assigned sequence to the researcher as an assignment.

During the last eight weeks, the researcher read an English series book of *Little People, Big Dreams* from Frances Lincoln Publishers (Shelley, 2019) to Kim. Similar to the former sequence telling, the researcher recorded the storytelling and sent the audio file to Kim. Then, Kim listened to the story, practiced read-aloud, recorded her storytelling, and sent her recording to the researcher.

Interviews were conducted in Korean. The necessary data were extracted from the original Korean transcripts, and then all relevant parts of the interviews were translated into English. Finally, the acquired information to reveal Kim's language development was thoroughly analyzed from in-person lessons and audio-recordings sent from Kim. These were used to answer the research questions for this paper.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that sequence and storytelling methods of EFL teaching positively contribute to English speaking development and learner empowerment. The participant learner appreciated the benefits of sequence and storytelling teaching techniques as they increased enjoyment, cultural awareness, language ability and respected individual learner's needs.

As shown from the results of this study, the sequence and storytelling methods are one of the most effective language learning techniques. They involve training learners by exposing them to the simplest concepts of language and moving gradually to the most complex while ensuring that they

understand every step. Storytelling involves the extensive reading of stories in the target language, then translating them by telling the story captured in the reading. These learning methods help learners grow motivation towards learning the language and improve proficiency in the language. The more the learner gets motivated, the more they are willing to explore on their own, which helps perfect their English skills.

It is also evident that using sequential and storytelling methods of language learning helps to transfer extrinsic motivation into intrinsic inspiration. The more the listener gets excited about what they engage with, the more they get motivated to read more on the subject. Therefore, the use of sequence and storytelling for beginners is one of the most appropriate ways to ease and fasten the language learning rate.

Storytelling also creates a sense of connection to real-life events. The use of stories tries to build trust and familiarity, allowing the learners to engage themselves in the story where they are. This makes them open to more ideas hence more receptive to the basics of the language. It also connects the reader with what is happening in the story compared to what happens in reality.

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