The Effect of Storytelling on Increasing Arabic Vocabulary Skills in At-Risk Preschoolers

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Abstract

Storytelling is as old as the history of human being and has been used since the early ages of education starting by mothers and by all kinds of educators. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of storytelling on increasing Arabic vocabulary skills in at-risk preschoolers. The participants in this study were 60 preschool children selected from three preschools located within three elementary schools in Zagazig Educational Edara. ANCOVA and Repeated Measures Analyses were employed for data analysis. Findings from this study indicated the effect of storytelling on increasing Arabic vocabulary skills in the target children.

Keywords. Storytelling, Arabic vocabulary skills, at-risk preschoolers

Introduction

Storytelling is an available communicative mean in storytellers 'command which makes audiences familiar with diverse ideas, feelings and thoughts that are delightful, exciting and entertaining for them. The storyteller's tale is a method for transferring and training the formalities stories, traditions, beliefs and history across the generations (Habibi, 2009). Storytelling is the art or profession of telling a story in the form of poem or prose which is carried out live to the audiences. The narrated stories can be in the form of discussion , songs; singing with or without music, illustrated or not along with images other tools. These stories may come in oral, printed or mechanically recorded forms and one of their objectives should be entertainment. In ancient times, history, traditions, religion, customs, and ethnic pride were transmitted from generation to generation by storytellers (Hejazi, 2005).

Since children like animals, these types of stories are the most popular tales among the children. Children mostly like the characters of these stories which are animals and these animals because talk and think like human beings. Children like to imitate the behaviors and actions of the characters in these stories (Dolakova, 2008). According to Dolakova (2008), some types of tales like repetitive and cumulative tales are very suitable for learning language because their plots are short and they contain repetitive rhythms which can assist children remember the plot of the stories and also enable them to reproduce words and structures in a very short time. In addition, these stories include some comprehensive answers for children's repetitive questions which make the teacher or parents exhausted.

A good amount of research has been done regarding the effects of storytelling in education. "Storytelling has demonstrable, measurable, positive, and irreplaceable value in teaching." Stories can help to enhance recall, retention, and application of concepts in new situations. Storytelling raises enthusiasm for learning new subject matter. (Coles, 1989) The excitement of storytelling can make reading and learning fun and can instill a sense of wonder about life and learning" (Bendt & Bowe, 2000 p. 1).

Georgiou and Verdugo (2010) refer to different reasons for providing storytelling to young learners. In a meaningful context, storytelling can combine listening, speaking, reading and writing. Georgiou and Verdugo (2010) believe that in a meaningful context, grammar, vocabulary and speech that can support comprehension are presented through stories. To Wasik and Bond (2001), stories can make language comprehensible and memorable.

Isbell, et al. (2004) explored the impact of storytelling on increasing the reading comprehension among young learners. The outcome of their study revealed that storytelling was effective for improving the comprehension skills among the children. They concluded that the children who listened to the stories had greater reading comprehension than those

children who just read the stories. To Cameron (2001), storytelling is a kind of oral activity that has been designed for both listening and involvement, and it can make children participate in class activities. He asserts that eye contact between the teacher and the children can play an essential role in storytelling because eye contact is a kind of behavior which is natural in communication, and it can increase the communication ability among the students in the classroom.

Aram (2006) investigated the effects of an early literacy intervention on vocabulary and alphabetic skills on 156 children from low-income preschools in Israel and found mixed results in regard to increases on vocabulary measures. In this study, three preschools were randomly assigned to participate in each of three interventions: storybook reading, alphabetic skills, and combined. In addition, three preschools from a neighboring town served as the control group. As typical for this type of intervention, in the storybook reading condition, teachers read storybooks aloud to the children at the beginning and end of each book reading session. Teachers encouraged the children to actively participate by asking questions, making comments, and sharing their personal experiences before, during, and after the story reading. In addition, teachers asked open-ended questions, expanded on children's utterances, and discussed and elaborated concepts and issues raised in the book. In the alphabetic skills intervention, children were instructed in phonological awareness, such as segmenting words into syllables and sub-syllables; letter knowledge; and basic writing. In the combined program, one session focused on activities from the storybook reading intervention and one session focused on the activities from the alphabetic skill intervention. Aram assessed vocabulary using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), as well as a measure developed by the researcher in which 20 words (two from each storybook used in the intervention) were selected and children were asked to identify the words from a field of four. The vocabulary measures showed that children in the intervention groups significantly outperformed the control group in book vocabulary, but not on the PPVT.

National Early Literacy Panel (2008) also examined the effects of storybook reading on young children's conventional literacy skills such as decoding, reading comprehension, or vocabulary. The panel found an effect size of d=0.60 for shared storybook reading on vocabulary development. However, although the panel did examine vocabulary as a moderator variable, the studies included in the review included participants that were both preschool and kindergarten aged, and were from various socio-economic backgrounds. The panel did not specifically examine vocabulary development in preschool children who were at risk for later language/literacy difficulties.

So, present research study seeks to explore the effect of storytelling on increasing Arabic vocabulary skills in at-risk preschoolers. It addresses the following questions:

1. Are there differences in post – test scores mean between control and experimental groups on vocabulary skills test ?
2. If the programme is effective, is this effect still evident a month later?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 60 preschool children selected from three preschools located within three elementary schools in Zagazig Educational Edara . The participants were selected based on the results of teacher(female) nominations, screening for vocabulary reading skills, school attendance, and parental consent. Screening procedures of the participants included these steps:

Teacher nominations. The teacher was asked to nominate students who exhibited poor vocabulary reading skills and might benefit from additional instruction.

Screening for vocabulary reading skills. All children were assessed using The Vocabulary Test. Based on the results of these assessments, children exhibiting poor vocabulary reading skills were identified as at-risk and possible participants for this study.

School attendance. Regular attendance was one of the eligibility requirements to participate in this study. Previous school attendance records were reviewed, and children with potentially poor attendance were excluded from the study.

Parent consent. A letter introducing the purpose of the study and a consent form were sent to parents of the potential participants. Written consent was obtained before beginning of the study. In addition, an oral solicitation using understandable sentences was read to the preschool children by the researcher. Children without written consent were also excluded from the study.

Children were randomly classified into two groups: experimental(n= 30 , 20 boys , 10 girls) and control (n= 30 , 25 boys and 5 girls). The two groups were matched by age, IQ, and vocabulary reading skills . Table 1. shows means, standard deviations, t- value, and significance level for experimental and control groups on age (by month) ,IQ , and vocabulary reading skills.

Table 1. *Pre-test means, standard deviations, t- value, and significance level for experimental and control groups on age (by month) , IQ, and vocabulary reading skills.*

Variable	**Group**	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**t**	**Sig.**
Age	Experimental	30	61.35	2.25	-.735	-
	Control	30	61.95	2.76		
IQ	Experimental	30	114.15	4.68	-.816	-
	Control	30	115.25	3.79		
Vocabulary	Experimental	30	7.00	6.02	-.843	-
reading skills	Control	30	7.16	7.11		

Table 1. shows that al t- values did not reach significance level .This indicated that the two groups did not differ in age, IQ , and vocabulary reading skills(pre-test) .

Measure

Vocabulary test . was developed by the researcher for evaluating the vocabulary reading skills of at risk preschoolers .

To test reliability, Cronbach's alpha statistics was first employed . The result demonstrated the test produced patterns of responses that were highly consistent, $\alpha = 0.87$.

Test validity

Ten professors of psychology were given the test to rate the items. Agreement proportions were ranging from 90% to 100% .

Test scoring

The score on each item ranging from 0 to 1 score , and the total score on the test ranging from 0 to 22 points .

Procedure

Screening : The participants in this study were 60 preschool children selected from three preschools located within three elementary schools in Zagazig Educational Edara . The

participants were selected based on the results of teacher(female) nominations, screening for vocabulary reading skills, school attendance, and parental consent.

Pre-intervention testing : All the sixty children completed The Vocabulary Test , which assesses Children's vocabulary reading skills. Thus data was reported for the students who completed the study .

Experimental Design: An experimental pretest-posttest control-group design was used in this study. In this mixed design, two groups are formed by assigning half of the participants to the experimental group and half to the control group. Both groups were pretested and posttested in the same manner and at the same time in the study. The bivalent independent variable was the storytelling training and it assumed two values: presence versus absence of storytelling training. The dependent variable was the gain in scores on vocabulary test.

Results

Table 2 shows data on ANCOVA analysis for the differences in post- test mean scores between experimental and control groups in Vocabulary test scores . The table shows that the (F) value was (246.60) and it was significant value at the level (0.01).

Table 2. *ANCOVA analysis for the differences in post- test mean scores between experimental and control groups in Vocabulary test scores*

Source	**Type 111 sum of squares**	**df**	**Mean square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Pre	10.148	1	10.148		
Group	401.575	1	401.575	246.60	0.01
Error	92.818	57	1.628		
Total	1297.277	59			

Table 3 shows T test results for the differences in post- test mean scores between experimental and control groups in Vocabulary test scores. The table shows that (t) vale was (17.53). This value is significant at the level (0.01) in the favor of experimental group. The table also shows that there are differences in post- test mean scores between experimental and control groups Vocabulary test scores in the favor of experimental group.

Table 3. *T. test results for the differences in post- test mean scores between experimental and control groups in Vocabulary test scores*

Group	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**T**	**Sig.**
Experimental	30	13.20	1.34	17.53	0.01
Control	30	7.16	1.31		

Table 4 shows data on repeated measures analysis for Vocabulary test scores. The table shows that there are statistical differences between measures (pre- post- follow up) at the level (0.01).

Table 4. *Repeated measures analysis for Vocabulary test scores*

Source	Type 111 sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	661.250	1	661.250	363.148	0.01
Error 1	105.611	58	1.821		
Between Measures	794.978	2	397.489	193.121	0.01
Measures x Groups	596.933	2	298.467	145.011	0.01
Error 2	238.756	116	2.058		

Table 5 shows data on Scheffe test for multi-comparisons in Vocabulary test scores. The table shows that there are statistical differences between pre and post measures in favor of post test, and between pre and follow up measures in favor of follow up test, but no statistical differences between post and follow up test.

Table 5. *Scheffe test for multi-comparisons in Vocabulary test scores*

Measure	Pre M= 6.76	Post M= 13.20	Sequential M= 12.86
Pre	--	--	--
Post	8.43*	--	--
Follow up	8.10*	0.33	--

Discussion

The main objective of the present study was to explore whether there were differences in post – test scores mean between control and experimental groups on Vocabulary test scores. The study also examined if the intervention was effective, if this effect was still evident a month later.

The results of this study as revealed in tables 3 and 5 show that the storytelling intervention was effective in improving the Vocabulary test scores of children in experimental group, compared to the control group whose subjects did not receive such an intervention.

The findings of the current study were in line with the earlier studies. Joyce (2011) investigated the impacts of song picture books on the vocabulary acquisition among the children in kindergarten. He found that song picture books had a positive effect on increasing the vocabulary acquisition of students in kindergarten. Mohamad Rafik (2005) was another researcher in the area of storytelling who investigated the effects of storytelling on the elementary students. He found that storytelling was effective for the elementary students. Maasumeh Abasi(2014) indicates that storytelling is an effective way to improve the abilities of vocabulary learning for children in kindergartens. Al Rashid (2012) which reported that storytelling was effective in increasing vocabulary learning of less proficient young adults.

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