The Impact of Story Retelling on Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners' learning of Grammar

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Abstract

It has been argued that story retelling can affect language learning. Despite the existence a number of studies on the impact of telling and retelling story on the EFL learners' learning of different aspects of language, no one has ever investigated the impact of story retelling on intermediate Iranian EFL learners' learning of grammar. This study aimed at investigating the impact of story retelling on intermediate Iranian EFL learners' learning of grammar. In doing so, 60 male and female students were selected through convenience sampling. They were divided into two intact classes. The experimental classes were requested to retell the stories told by the teacher twice. After, they received 15 stories, all classes received a test on grammar. The data were analyzed through running independent sample t-tests. The results showed that experimental group outperformed the control group. Therefore, it could be argued that retelling has significant impact on EFL learners' learning of grammar.

Keywords: EFL; story retelling; Iranian

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1. Introduction

The review of literature on learning a new language indicates that up to now several theories have been proposed and declined. Some theories have been named learning oriented while some others have been learner- oriented. Some theories have laid more emphasis on affective factors while some others have totally neglected learners' feelings. One of the languages learning theories which have taken into account the learners' affective factors as well as learning conditions is the theory of input hypothesis which has attracted great attention since the last decades. Krashen (1985) believes that comprehensible input is both necessary and *sufficient* for second language acquisition. Also, Krashen (1985) believes that comprehensible input (i+1) in the presence of a low affective filter is the only thing that can "cause" second language acquisition. In other words, if foreign language learners are exposed to lots of comprehensible input in a low-stress or non-stressful context they will certainly acquire the second language very easily.

Lindsay and Knight (2010) also state that input of the target language is necessary for learners; it can be an exposure to the language in either oral or written forms, in formal or informal settings. The next stage is noticing in which learners become aware of the language to which they are ex-posed. Teacher's role in helping learners know the gap in their learning is also countable in this process. Once learners have the capability of noticing the rule patterns of the target language, they will start to apply their knowledge in writing or speaking activities. At a certain point language learners start to use the target language intuitively more like the way they use their first language (L1). At this stage, the target language has been stored in their memory so that it is immediately accessible and remains there (Lindsay & Knight, 2010).

In order to provide comprehensible input to second language learners, several techniques have been introduced and practiced. One of the techniques through which ample comprehensible input can be provided for the language learners is storytelling. Storytelling is defined as, "relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture" (National Council of Teachers of English, 1992). Because storytelling relies on both the listener and the teller, this strategy utilizes the social element of language. Researchers have found that literacy instruction is most effective when developed through social interaction and collaboration with others (Dugan, 1997).

Miller and Pennycuff (2008) argue that, in order to improve the literacy learning of all students language teachers need to employ different pedagogical strategies. Storytelling in the classroom is one way to address literacy development by improving oral language, reading comprehension, and writing. Because of the interrelated nature of the processes involved in writing and reading, storytelling is a useful pedagogical strategy that can be used in EFL classrooms to increase students' competencies in all areas.

Wallace (2000) argues that, "the phenomenon of storytelling actually becomes a common language that facilitates meaningful communication; we can hear and understand each other's stories because we can usually recognize ourselves in the stories of others- no matter how varied our cultural backgrounds" (p. 436). It is also believed that storytelling not only helps participants enhance the language and logic skills of the children but also results in the development of positive attitudes towards instruction (Cliatt, & Shaw, 1988).

Like many other learning theories, input hypothesis in general and its related teaching techniques have been criticized by some researchers and despite the great importance of comprehensible input in language learning, some scholars (e.g. Swaine,1985; Schemidt, 1983) believe in the insufficiency of input for second language learning. Swain (1985) develops the idea that in order to develop full grammatical competence, learners need to be pushed to produce comprehensible output. It is also argued that although comprehensible input might lead to understanding, it does not include the development of syntactic plans that production processes require. Schmidt (1983) also argues that opportunities for production alone will not necessarily lead to improvement; it is necessary that the learner be encouraged to produce correct output, in the face of communicative shortcoming.

The review of literature of output hypotheses indicates that several techniques for encouraging language learners to produce language have been introduced by different applied linguists. One of these techniques is language learners' retelling stories. Story Retelling is a procedure which makes a child able to play a large role in reconstructing stories. It also underlies both social and academic development. While narrating stories, the speakers use language for an extended period of time. Such an active participation with stories leads to increased language development, comprehension as well as an interest in books and in learning to read (Evans & Strong, 1996). After reading, retellings provide more opportunities for the reader to reconstruct the text. That is, they enhance and extend the readers' comprehension processes while providing evidence insights into understanding the two processes. Even though no method is able to completely represent comprehension, retellings limit the reader's ability to represent *whatever* has been comprehended. Story retellings indicate that readers use complex predicting and confirming strategies when they are concerned with unfamiliar concepts in a text (Goodman, 1982). This is significant because such strategies are essential for effective comprehension to occur.

Story retelling seems to have the capacity to develop skills but it has not been greatly tested. Researchers have utilized story retelling most often as an assessment tool in studies to investigate developmental trends in comprehending stories (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Thorndyke, 1977). In the few studies that have been done using story retelling as a strategy for developing skills (Morrow, 1985; Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Zimiles & Kuhns, 1976), positive results have been found in increased ability in comprehension, language development, as well as in the inclusion of structural elements in stories retold by the children.

In story retellings, readers or listeners tell what they remember about the story orally or through dramatization, drawing, or writing (Morrow, 1989). Retelling does not mean memorizing but it means recounting the using the children own word. Retellings require children to think more conceptually to look at the bigger picture rather than answering specific questions about the text. Retelling also helps learners internalize concepts and information such as vocabulary and story structure (Brown & Cambourne, 1987). The greater experience children have with retelling, the more they can understand, synthesize, and infer. As Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus (1991) believe, retelling is grounded in an understanding of the crucial role that oral language plays in both the formation and sharing of meaning. More recently Rachmawaty and Hermagustiana(2010) have argued that learning a new language is an autonomous and a collaborative process. It is autonomous when a learner learns independently, whereas it is collaborative when learners and a teacher work together.

Stoicovy (2004) states that retelling techniques can improve students' reading comprehension. He also believes that based on several studies, retelling has positive influence on language learning as it promotes students' ability in rearranging information from the text that they have read. Based on the arguments for the positive influence of retelling in language learning, this study aims at investigating how story retelling as a recommended output technique can help Iranian language learners in improving speaking fluency and accuracy.

Rachmawaty & Hermagustiana (2010) strongly argue that retelling as a technique can be applied to improve students' speaking fluency. Despite such positive findings, it is not known yet whether such a technique can positively influence EFL language learners' speaking fluency, accuracy, and comprehensibility. It is not either clear whether story retelling has the same impact on the learners' speaking fluency, accuracy, and comprehensibility. Therefore, this study is an attempt to fill in the gap and to clarify whether story retelling can have any significant impact on the development of EFL learners' grammar development.

2. Objectives of the Study

The first objective of the present study is to investigate the impact of story retelling on beginner and intermediate language learners' grammar development. In doing so, the following research question was raised:

Does story retelling have significant impacts intermediate Iranian EFL learners' grammar development?

3. Method

3.1. Design of the Study

This study will be carried out adopting a pre-test and a post-test design. Pretest was administered before the treatment and posttest was administered at the end of the treatment period.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were 60 male and female students (aged from 18 to 22 years) who have passed interchange intro and one at language institutes or academic canters. They were assigned to and control groups (30 students in each group). In order to make sure that there was no statistically significant initial difference between the participants, a placement test was administered to all groups. The researcher randomly assigned two classes as control and two classes as experimental groups. The participants in all groups were given 15 stories adapted from EFL web sites within a 15-session teaching period. The only difference was that each member of the experimental groups was required to retell the story twice in the classroom. After the treatment, all groups received a same posttest.

3.3. Instruments

In this study, two different instruments were used for collecting the needed data: a placement test and a grammar test.

3.3.1. Placement test

The researcher used the Solutions placement test designed by Edvards (2007) at Oxford University after consultation with teachers and was designed to assess students' knowledge of the key language. The test contains: 50 multiple choice questions which assess students' knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary from elementary to intermediate. The participants' with scores of 26 to 36 were labeled pre-intermediate and the students with scores above 39 are labeled intermediate. The reliability of the test was estimated through KR-21 approach. The reliability index of the test was 0.78 which was acceptable.

3.3.2 Grammar test

This test was developed by the researcher. It consisted of 30 multiple choice items. The items were constructed based on the content of grammar syllabus which was covered by the teacher during the term.

3.3.3 Treatment

Control and experimental groups of the study received a treatment consisting of fifteen- 90-minute sessions. In addition to covering the contents of the textbook, 15 stories for intermediate language

learners retrieved from http://www.eslfast.com were distributed among the participants of the control and experimental groups. Participants in experimental group were required to retell the story twice to their classmates in the classroom. However, the participants of the control group were supposed to read the stories by themselves without any oral presentation.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

At first the placement test was administered to the all language learners' attending language institute of Zabansara in Ahwaz. Sixty students whose scores fall above the cutoff score of intermediate level were selected. They were divided into four intact classes. Two classes were assumed to be control and the other two intact groups were assigned as experimental groups. The experimental classes were requested to retell the stories told by the teacher twice. After, they received 15 stories, all classes received a test on grammar. The data were analyzed through running independent sample t-tests.

4. Results of the Study

The results including the descriptive statistics on pre-test and posttest as well as the results of independent sample-t-tests are shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Results of the pre-test

	Mean	SD	T	df	p
experimental	14	2.2	0.9	58	0.12
Control	14.5	1.8			

As shown in the above table, there was no significant difference between the groups' mean scores on the pre-test (t=0.9, df= 58, p=0.12>0.05). Therefore, there was no initial difference between the groups on the pre-test.

Table 2: Results of the post-test

	groups	N	Mean	t	df	p
Scores	experimental	30	27.2	9.4	28	.001
	Control	30	22.3			

As it is shown in the above table, the mean scores of experimental and control groups' on the grammar post-test are 27 and 22.3, respectively. Therefore, it could be argued that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The results of t-test also show that the means of the groups are statistically significant (t= 9.4, df= 58, and p= 0.001<0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis which indicates that there is no significant difference between the groups' mean scores is safely rejected. It could be argued that story retelling has significant impact on the learners' grammar development.

5. Discussion

This study was an attempt to investigate whether story retelling has any significant impact on improving Iranian intermediate language learners' grammar development or not. At first the data needed for the first two questions of the study were submitted to independent sample-t-tests to compare the effectiveness of two different interventions designed to increase learners' grammar development. The independent variables were the type of intervention (storytelling via story retelling), and the dependent variable consisted of scores on the post tests administered after the intervention was completed. Participants' scores on the pre-intervention administrations of the pre-test tests were used as the covariate in this analysis. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure

that there was n-o initial difference between the groups. Therefore, the changes made between the groups on the post-tests were surely due to the impacts of the treatment. After adjusting for pre-intervention scores, there was a significant difference between the two intervention groups on post-intervention scores on grammar test. Therefore, it could be strongly discussed that the findings of the present story are consistent with the findings of (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Thorndyke, 1977; Morrow, 1985; Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Zimiles & Kuhns, 1976; Xu, 2007; Stoicovy, 2004; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993; Gambrell, et al., 1991). The findings are also consistent with Kameli (2014) who argued that story retelling can significantly affect EFL learners' speaking fluency and accuracy.

Acknowledgements

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