A Study of the Effectiveness of Storytelling-Based Instruction to Enhance English Listening and Speaking Skills of Sixth-Grade Students

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Abstract
This research was an experimental study examining the effectiveness of storytelling-based instruction to enhance sixth-grade students’ listening and speaking ability. It investigated learners’ attitudes towards their English lessons after learning English through storytelling-based instruction. The participants were two classes of sixth-grade students, totaling 60 students, selected by convenience sampling from seven intact classes at Bancha-ut School in NakornSrithammarat province. The two classes selected were randomly assigned as experimental and control groups. The data were collected through the English Listening and Speaking Skill Achievement Test. The test was administered to both groups as the pretest and posttest. Following the pre-test, students in the experimental group were taught using the lesson plans of storytelling-based instruction for six weeks for a total of 18 sessions. Meanwhile, the control group was taught using traditional lesson plans that did not employ storytelling. At the end of each lesson the students in the experimental group were asked to write a learning log. After the experiment, their attitudes were explored through the Questionnaire on Students’ Attitudes. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results indicated that the English listening and speaking ability of the students was significantly higher than the control group at the .05 level. In addition, students’ attitudes towards English lessons after the experiment were highly positive. This study demonstrated the effectiveness of teaching English listening and speaking skills based on storytelling-based instruction.

Keywords: Storytelling-based instruction, listening and speaking ability, learners’ attitude.
Background of the Study

In Thailand, English is taught to Thai learners at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Ministry of Education has been revising the English curricula and emphasizing that English should be taught for communication (Ministry of Education, 2006; Soranastaporn, Chantarasorn, & Chumpavan, 2002). The communicative approach has been introduced to Thai teachers, but students’ English skills have not improved (Ministry of Education, 2002). Due to the grammar translation approach, the oral proficiency of learners is not emphasized (Butler-Pascoe & Wiburg, 2003). This problem can be found at all education levels from primary through university (Weerawong, 2004; Wiriyachitra, 2002). Punthumasen (2007) explains that most Thai teachers of English focus on reading and writing skills more than listening and speaking skills. Meanwhile, the community and home environment in Thailand does not promote development of students’ communicative English skills.

Further factors that contribute to this problem include students’ lack of opportunities to use English in their daily lives, English lessons are unchallenging, students are passive learners, and they are too shy to speak English with their classmates, teachers, or with native speakers (Biyaem, 1997; Chiu, Liou, & Yeh, 2007; Wiriyachitra, 2002). According to the Ministry of Education (2002), Thai speakers of English still have serious difficulties in oral communication. Moreover, rural Thai students have even fewer opportunities to experience English (Chiu, Liou, & Yeh, 2007; Pinyosunun, 2005; Rasri, 2002).

With these problems in mind, teaching English for communication to young learners is an important topic to evaluate. Many studies reveal that English is taught best at an early stage. Birdsong (1999) states that young learners are better equipped to develop English language acquisition if they start learning English at an early age. Many experts confirm that children learn foreign languages more quickly than adults (Krashen, Long & Scarcella, 1979; Long 1990). English teachers should be aware of how to teach young learners effectively. Young learners should be supported by contextualizing language with visuals, mime and gestures (Brewster et al., 2004; Gordon, 2007; Shin, 2006). Experts suggest that English teachers should make young learners feel competent and confident by providing them with a safe, entertaining, and educational environment (Schindler, 2006; Scott & Ytreberg, 2001). Shin (2006) also suggests that the more fun students have, the better they remember the language. This is, especially true when they have fun with movement and physical participation. In addition, Nunan (2003) states that
when teaching speaking skills, beginning and intermediate students must be given opportunities to develop both fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, Krashen (1981) states that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, good self-image, and low anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Thus, to teach English for communication to young learners, teachers can use various methods such as video clips, storytelling, songs, task-based learning and game activities (Lefever, 2010; Shin, 2006).

The storytelling method, according to Ellis and Brewster (2002) encourages students to learn English while having fun and building confidence. Lee (2007) also supports the use of stories to enhance students’ four skills in a variety of activities. A story is an effective tool for early language teaching and helps develop positive attitudes towards a foreign language (Ellis & Brewster, 2002; Malkina, 1993; Murdoch, 2002; Phillip, 1993). In Thailand, the storytelling method has been tested to determine its effectiveness in learning skills. Chiewchorhor (2008) finds that storytelling increases students’ listening ability. Similarly, Phuwarat (2003) reveals that the use of songs and tales enhances the listening ability of fifth grade students. Numerous international studies verify that storytelling increases students’ motivation to participate in stories and improves their English skills (Prabripu, 2000; Seedhouse & Li, 2010; Seidel, 2002).

The storytelling method clearly helps students develop their English skills. As the curriculum is aimed at enabling learners to acquire knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes towards English (Ministry of Education, 2008), storytelling is a perfect tool that is challenging and provides more opportunities for students to use English. Storytelling can motivate students to communicate. In consideration of studies described above, the present research is concerned with analyzing how storytelling can enhance the ability of students.

**Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the effectiveness of storytelling-based instruction to develop sixth-grade students’ English speaking and listening ability.
2. To examine students’ attitudes towards their English lessons after learning English through storytelling-based instruction.

**Research Hypotheses**

The hypotheses of this study are defined as follows:
1. On the post-test administration of the *English Listening Test*, the mean score of students in the storytelling-based instruction group will be higher than the control group.

2. On the post-test administration of the *English Speaking Test*, the mean score of students in the storytelling-based instruction group will be higher than the control group.

**Variables**
The independent variable was teaching speaking and listening skills based on storytelling-based instruction. The dependent variables included the scores on student’s English speaking ability and listening ability in both groups and the attitudes of students in the experimental group after learning through storytelling.

**Population and Sample**
The population involved in this study consisted of 220 sixth-grade students at Bancha-uat School in NakornSrithammarat. The sample included 60 sixth-grade students selected by drawing from seven classrooms. The students were divided into two groups of thirty students who were randomly selected for participation in the experimental and control groups. They are native Thai speakers and demonstrate a wide range of English ability.

**Research Instruments**
The research instruments used for collecting data in this study consisted of English listening and speaking skills achievement tests, questionnaires concerning students’ attitudes towards learning English through storytelling and learning logs. Storytelling lesson plans were also constructed by the researcher and they were employed with the experimental group.

**The English Listening and Speaking Skills Achievement Tests**
These tests were constructed by the researcher. The pre-test and post-test were identical. The tests were administered to measure students’ ability to communicate before and after the experiment. To construct and design the test, the researcher used the sixth-grade Primary English curriculum, story books and classroom testing techniques adapted from Heaton (1990). The first section of the test focused on speaking. It comprised describing pictures, sequencing pictures and telling a story as described by Johnson (2001). The second section focused on listening comprehension and consisted of twenty multiple choice questions.

**Analytic Scoring Sheet**
The assessment and evaluation of speaking skill was based on an analytic rubric adapted from Heaton (1990) and Sae-Ong (2010). The assessment used the pre-test and post-test speaking tasks.
for both groups. The researcher plus two assistants (English teachers at Bancha-uat school) evaluated the learners’ performance. The analytic scoring consisted of four categories: 1) content, 2) fluency, 3) grammar and 4) vocabulary. Rating descriptions were based on a scale of 1-5 marks.

**Questionnaires concerning Students’ Attitudes towards learning English through Storytelling-Based Instruction**

The questionnaires were used to explore students’ attitudes towards learning English through storytelling. The questionnaire was created in Thai and consisted of two main parts. The first part contained ten questions to measure students’ attitudes towards story-based instruction. The questions were based on Likert’s rating scale (5 = Highest, 4 = High, 3 = Moderate, 2 = Low, 1 = Lowest). The mean scores were categorized into five levels: 4.51-5.00 = highly positive, 3.51-4.50 = positive, 2.51-3.50 = neutral, 1.51-2.50 = rather negative and 1.00-1.50 = negative. The students rated each statement according to their opinions and preference. The second part of the questionnaire comprised three open-ended questions. This encouraged students to make comments about the activities in the storytelling-based instruction.

**Learning Log**

A learning log was employed to explore participants’ reflections about what they learned in each lesson. It consisted of three main questions. The first question asked about vocabulary learning, which focused on new words, phrases and idioms. The second question concerned the satisfaction with the learning activity, which focused on activities students liked. The last question allowed for additional comments. The experimental group was asked to complete the learning log at the end of each lesson.

**Storytelling-Based Instruction Lesson Plans**

Five storytelling-based instruction lesson plans were constructed. Each lesson plan was used for three sessions of 50 minutes. According to Ellis and Brewster (2002), each lesson plan consists of three storytelling activity stages. The pre-storytelling activity stage provides a context for the activity to familiarize students with the topic as well as activate their prior knowledge, motivate them and elicit key vocabulary. In this stage, a teacher explains the purpose of an activity and demonstrates it. The while-storytelling activity stage is when students listen to a story and carry out an activity that uses the target language from the first stage. During this process, the researcher circulated the classroom and monitored their efforts, helping as necessary. The post-storytelling
activity stage is when students consolidate language from the second stage by doing tasks and individually producing language. The researcher ran a reflective review during this stage to evaluate the activities and performance.

Findings

English Listening and Speaking Ability
The following section presents the findings for the first objective: To examine the effectiveness of storytelling-based instruction to develop sixth-grade students’ English speaking and listening ability. The mean scores of all students were compared to determine whether there was any significant difference between the pre-test means and post-test means using an independent t-test. The results revealed a significant difference at the .05 level. The experimental group performed substantially better. Table 1 shows the results of the calculation of the overall means of the students.

Table 1
Difference in the Mean Scores of the English Listening and Speaking Pre-test and Post-test of Students in the Experimental Group and Control Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Pre-test Scores</th>
<th>Post-test Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18.53</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.67</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the 0.05 level (Sig<0.05)

The overall mean scores on the pre-test of the experimental group (M=18.53) were higher than the control group (M=14.67). The mean scores of the post-test of the experimental group (M=24.37) were higher than the control group (M=14.77). The post-test mean scores of the experimental group and control group indicated a significant difference value of 0.00, which was lower than the 0.05 level. The results demonstrated a significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups at the 0.05 level. Figure 1 shows a bar graph of comparison of the overall mean scores of two groups.
To support the first objective, the mean scores of the sixth-grade students’ English listening ability on pre-test and post-test were compared between the experimental and control groups. Table 2 shows the results of the students’ English listening mean scores.

**Table 2**

*Difference in the Mean Scores of the English Listening Pretest and Posttest of Students in the Experimental Group and Control Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Pre-test Scores</th>
<th>Post-test scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-test Scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( M )</td>
<td>( S.D. )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the 0.05 level (Sig<0.05)

The English listening mean score of the post-test for the experimental group (13.40) was higher than on the pre-test (\( M=12.77 \)). Conversely, the mean score of the post-test of the control group (\( M=9.23 \)) was lower in the pre-test (\( M=9.57 \)). The mean score on the post-test of the experimental group (\( M=13.40 \)) was higher than the control group (\( M=9.23 \)). In addition, the post-test mean scores of the two groups indicated a significant difference value of 0.00, which was lower than the 0.05 level. The results demonstrated a significant difference between the posttest scores of the experimental group and control group at the 0.05 level. This means the listening ability of the
students taught through the storytelling-based instruction group was significantly higher than the control group. Figure 2 shows a bar graph of comparison in the listening means scores.

![Comparison of Listening Means Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups](image)

**Figure 2.** Comparison of Listening Means Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

The English speaking pre-test and post-test mean scores of the two groups are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Difference in the Mean Scores of the English Speaking Pre-test and Post-test of the Experimental and Control Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Pre-test Scores</th>
<th>Post-test Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>2.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>2.551</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the 0.05 level (sig<0.05)

The English speaking mean score of the post-test of the experimental group ($M=11.30$) was higher than on the pretest ($M=5.73$). Similarly, the mean score of the post-test of the control group ($M=5.53$) was higher than the pre-test ($M=5.10$). The results revealed that the mean scores of the post-test of the experimental group ($M=11.30$) were higher than the control group ($M=5.53$). The post-test scores of the experimental group and control group showed a significant difference value.
of 0.00, which was lower than the 0.05 level. The results indicated a significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental group and control group at the 0.05 level. This indicates that the speaking ability of the students taught through the storytelling-based instruction group was significantly higher than the control group. Figure 3 shows a bar graph of comparison in the speaking means scores of the two groups.

![Comparison of the Speaking Means Scores of the Experimental Group and the Control Group](image)

**Figure 3.** Comparison of the Speaking Means Scores of the Experimental Group and the Control Group

**Learning Log**

A learning log was used by the experimental group to address the first objective. It was employed to explore participants’ reflections about what they learned in each lesson. The results indicated that the activities encouraged students to practice English listening and speaking skills, which enhanced their ability.

The following section presents the findings for the second objective: To study learners’ attitudes towards their English lessons after learning English through storytelling.

**The Students’ Attitude towards Storytelling-Based Instruction**

Students self-rating scores from the attitude questionnaires were analyzed and calculated for the mean and the standard deviations and interpreted into five levels from negative to highly positive. The result showed that students had a positive attitudes towards storytelling-based instruction at a highly positive level (\(M=4.56\)). The learners were most positive towards item 4 \((M=4.77)\). They
responded that they learned a lot of English vocabulary after listening to English stories. The second most positive mean score was item 8 ($M=4.70$). They answered that they liked to learn English through storytelling because they were not bored. However, learners expressed a low level of positive mean score towards item 2 ($M=4.50$) and item 5 ($M=4.23$). The students liked to speak English and they had more confidence after they learned through storytelling. In addition, they had good attitudes towards storytelling. Stories helped them imagine, develop their ability and learn new vocabulary. They agreed that storytelling should be used in class.

**Discussion**

**The Students’ Achievement in English Learning through Storytelling-Based instruction**

A variety of factors contribute to the effectiveness of storytelling-based instruction. According to Ellis and Brewster (2002), storytelling promotes language learning. The researcher narrated stories that contained natural repetition of key vocabulary and structures to help students remember details and anticipate what was about to happen next in the story. The stories also allowed the researcher to introduce new vocabulary by showing pictures and illustrations. The learning logs from lesson two showed that 30 percent of students remembered the vocabulary because it was very interesting and had a lot of repetition. Lee (2007) explains that stories enhance students’ four skills. The data showed that the mean scores on the post-test of the experimental group ($M=24.70$) was higher than the control group ($M=14.77$). The ability of the students taught through storytelling was significantly higher than the control group. The findings were consistent with Chiewchorhor’s study (2008). Chiewchorhor indicates that storytelling increases students’ listening ability. The mean scores of the post-test of the experimental group ($M=13.40$) was higher than the control group ($M=9.23$). This was because students had listen to a picture storybook being read aloud, which helped them remember information, language and content. In addition, the mean scores of the English speaking post-test of the experimental group ($M=11.30$) were higher than the control group ($M=5.53$) because all students practiced the target language by using group or pair work activities. According to Nunan (2003), pair work and group work activities increase the amount of time that learners get to speak in the target language.

In a broader sense, storytelling promotes imagination and fantasy (Ellis & Brewster, 2002). Similarly, Tutas (2000) points out that storytelling encourage critical thinking, creative thinking and imagination. According to students’ learning logs, they enjoyed imagining the stories. In the while-storytelling stage, the researcher provided the students to guess and predict what was
coming next. In the post-storytelling stage, the students were required to re-create the story, draw a picture and describe story pictures. This activity encouraged students’ imagination, critical thinking and creative thinking.

Storytelling is also motivating and students become absorbed in stories (Stockdale, 1995). Ellis and Brewster (2002) explain that listening to a story is a shared social experience and promotes motivation and confidence. In learning logs from lesson three, 10 percent of students said that the stories motivated and the activities promoted their self-confidence and imagination, consistent with findings by Seidel (2002). The results revealed that students were highly motivated to participate in storytelling.

Students’ Attitudes towards Storytelling-Based Instruction

The second objective addressed in this study was to study learners’ attitudes towards their English lessons through storytelling. Satisfaction was highly positive ($M=4.56$). According to Gardner (1985), positive attitudes lead to improved language proficiency and play a very important role in language learning. It was found that storytelling satisfied the students in all aspects. They liked learning English through storytelling because they had an opportunity to communicate with the teacher, learned a lot of English vocabulary, had fun, could imagine the story and pictures and they were not bored. They also learned foreign culture from the lesson such as life style and food. In addition, the students liked to speak English words or sentences and they had more confidence to speak English after they learned English through storytelling.

Many researchers agree that storytelling is an effective tool to develop positive attitudes towards foreign language learning (Ellis & Brewster, 2002; Malkina, 1993; Murdoch, 2002; and Phillip, 1993). The data from open-ended questions showed that the main thing students learned was new vocabulary (56.67%), how to tell a story (26.67%) and listened to English stories (16.67%). The data also showed that when questioned about their satisfaction to have English storytelling-based instruction in the class, students responded that 53.33 percent of students wanted to have English storytelling-based instruction in the class because they liked to listen and tell English story very much. The 46.67 percent of students responded that English storytelling-based instruction was fun and it was not boring. In addition, 20.00 percent of students wanted to learn more vocabulary and learn English storytelling with the teacher again. Relative to above mentioned, Ellis (2000) explains that positive attitudes enhance learning while negative attitudes impede it. Chamber
(1999) adds that learning occurs more easily when a learner has a positive attitude towards the language.

In summary, positive attitudes towards storytelling affects the development of students’ English listening and speaking ability. Students’ satisfaction with learning English through storytelling was highly positive ($M=4.56$). The results revealed that storytelling successfully enhanced students’ English speaking and listening ability at the 0.05 level. Students also improved their self confidence, motivation and classroom participation.

**Implications of the Study**

The important implication of the study is derived from the finding that storytelling-based instruction effectively enhanced students’ English speaking and listening ability. Storytelling-based instruction could be applied as a teaching tool in Thai English language learning and teaching from the primary level. This effective tool provides students an opportunity to develop their listening and speaking skills in learning English and it also helps develop positive attitudes. However before giving tasks, the teacher should explain clear procedures and check students’ understanding before allowing them to do the activities. If students get their work before receiving clear instructions, they will focus on the work instead of listening to the teacher.

In addition, teachers should not have high expectations of students’ speaking ability because they may exhibit different proficiency levels in one class. Teachers should be patient and try hard to encourage them to speak. At first, let them work in pairs. When they are familiar with speaking or feel more confident, ask them to speak to the whole class.

Moreover, teachers should walk around the class to monitor students while they are doing activities. Some of them might need help from the teacher; especially the low proficiency students and this could help them focus on their activity more completely.

Finally, before telling the story to students, teachers should create an atmosphere for storytelling by getting students to sit in a circle and make sure that everyone can see the teacher’s face and the illustrations in the story.
Limitations of the Study
There were two limitations in this study. First, this study was limited by time. The research was conducted within 6 weeks because the researcher was not a teacher at the school. If there were longer period of time of experiment, the results might have been different. Second, during the experiment, an annual sport school event took place. The period of experiment had to extend beyond the planned schedule. The researcher had to make up classes for some periods of teaching on Saturday. A different class time could influence the results.

Recommendations for Further Studies
Recommendations for further studies are as follows:
1. The research should be expanded to study the results at other levels, such as lower secondary to find out whether storytelling-based instruction would be beneficial.
2. This research should also be conducted to examine the effectiveness of using storytelling-based instruction to enhance students’ writing ability. Activities in storytelling-based instruction encourage students to create a story, share ideas and use critical thinking. These promote learners’ abilities and are suitable for short narrative writing.

References


