



## Using stories in teaching English for young learners – a study

### KEYWORDS

observation, develop vocabulary, communication, positive attitude.

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**ABSTRACT** *English plays an important role in every part of the world. English is omnipresent in every sector and every walk of life. The young learners should be shown the importance and the interest of learning English for their better future. In schools, teachers give much importance to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and try to cover their portions for the examination. Young learners are fond of listening to tales and stories and this researcher firmly believes that stories help young learners to learn the language successfully. This paper will focus on the importance of using stories by conducting various activities among young learners in the language learning process.*

### Introduction

Young learners are children who are age between ten and twelve years of age. These children are relatively mature with childish and adult features. These children can read and write English but cannot speak with confidence. They are efficient to use the language for communicating with their people around. The young learners are fond of playing games, singing songs, etc., in the classroom.

### Child as an innovator

Children are very curious to new things in life and they show the same amount of interest in learning a language especially when it is being exposed with colorful pictures and stories. Children are fascinated to pictures and stories. Children will never forget anything that is being visually introduced to them; they are very much attracted towards colorful pictures. Introducing stories with pictures to children help them to improve their imagination power and listening skill. They learn new words that enrich their vocabulary effectively. They will be familiar with the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of the language. Children listen to a story with visuals as a result they get involved sometimes personalize with the story and speak authentic English out of involvement.

Stories connect us to language especially for children. Stories are to be listened, watched, read, and for young children, the language skills are helpful to develop listening and narrating skills. Pictures and images help children to understand the story and later, they interact with the text. Through stories children can access information about various sounds of animals, words, singular and plural, tense and, characters. Stories are powerful tools for communication and conversation for children. Stories are helpful to lay the foundations for the development of more positive attitudes towards language learning.

Teaching stories to children is always an enjoyable task. Stories also help children to develop their emotional and behavioural learning. They are many good reasons for using stories in the classroom

Children always enjoy listening to stories. Children's involvement would be praiseworthy and which make them to learn interestingly.

Stories help children to develop their reasoning and communication skills.

- Children identify with the characters, so that, they use the words used by their favorite characters that help them to develop their vocabulary. They remember what is taught, information and rattle off the dialogues in their conversation.
- They listen carefully and develop the ideas orally.
- They will be exposed to rich vocabulary, phrases and rhyme
- They sometimes ask questions; sometimes answer questions and share knowledge with other children or parents.
- They move out of present and sneak into the future and past.

Young children's knowledge of English is limited but they respond in language learning process brilliantly. Some of the children make their own stories using their English knowledge. The benefits of reacting to and making stories are motivation, improving listening skill, language fluency, and communication. Story reading and listening activities develop a positive environment for learning. Using props in the classroom enrich and enliven story narration

### Methodology

This section describes the manner in which data was collected for the study. One hundred students from a government school on the outskirts of Chennai were used for this pilot study. The respondents were studying in Class VIII (aged between 13-14 years & English medium). The children have had exposure to sounds, words and rhymes. The background, age, motivation, confidence of all the thirty children were the same. The respondents were exposed to photos, pictures, cartoon strips, visual advertisement pictures.

### Hypothesis

Does story narration with photos, pictures, actions, and children's involvement help children in English learning? Does the pronunciation get improved? Does vocabulary get improved? Do the children with modern techniques are better than that of the children with ordinary exposure to English learning?

### Materials

Stories were narrated using pictures, advertisement clip-pings, cartoon strips, photos from newspaper and magazines.

For example the researcher had taken the story 'A Cartload of Almonds' for the study. The story goes like this....

A squirrel joined the service of the king of the forest, the lion. He did whatever work was given to him, quickly and well. The lion became fond of him and promised to give him a cartload of almonds as pension when he retired. The squirrel envied the other squirrels in the forest because of their carefree life. He longed to run up and down trees and leap from branch to branch like them but he could not leave the king's side and even if he could, he had to move with courtly dignity. He consoled himself with the thoughts that at the end of his career, he would receive a cartload of almonds, a food that few squirrels got to taste in their lifetime. "They will envy me then", he would tell himself. The year passed. The squirrel became old and then it was time for him to retire. The king gave a grand banquet in his honor and at the end of it, presented him with a cartload of almonds as he had promised. The squirrel had waited so long for this but when he saw the almonds, he was seized with sadness. He realized they were of no use to him now. He had lost all his teeth.

While narrating this story, pictures like squirrel, almonds, forest, lion, trees, expressing sadness, expressing joy etc., had been used in the classroom.

**Observation and results**

The respondents had numerous props to listen to the story and later, made efforts to decode the meanings and sounds and tried to form sentences on their own. The respondents were much enthusiastic when they were listening to the story with pictures. Pictures have an important role in the story –based teaching. Words can be better associated with pictures and the respondents could relate to a sequence of pictures for good memory. This helped them to practice speaking skill and they reconstructed orally with the help of visuals provided. Four items below were identified and discussed here

- Learning new vocabulary
- Learning grammatical rules
- Creating fun in the classroom
- Developing interest towards English learning.

Young learners are always comfortable when learning happens in a fun filled situation. 95 percent of the respondents were comfortable and zealous to learn English through stories.

**Semi-structured Interviews and Results**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 100 respondents from the observed classroom. The purpose was to find out the reasons of understanding English through stories. The interviews were scrutinized and proved that stories were effective for learning the second language.

When interviewed the respondents, they felt that stories in the classroom would lead to open up an avenue to learn English and could establish a confidence among the students. The confidence level of the respondents in terms of English learning in the classroom is very high. Visual media and gadgets have helped the respondents to improve their English knowledge outside the classroom too.

The interviews with the respondents made clear that they felt that using stories in the classroom was essential for a productive learning process. Stories had helped them to improve their listening and speaking skills. The respondents stated that in the initial stages using stories would

be interesting whereas in the advanced stages it would be useful to use techniques like twitter, facebook, SMSes, blog for learning English.

**Survey Questionnaire and Results**

A questionnaire was distributed to the respondents aiming to discover their English learning process and their dependent on the use of stories in the learning process. This method helped the researcher to get information about the respondents' awareness about using stories. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure that the language was easy to understand for the respondents. The researcher cleared the doubts of the respondents pertaining to a few questions.

The questionnaire given to the respondents consisted of 15 questions and divided into three groups. Each group revolved around the practice of using stories in the classroom, stories for thoughts, and stories for learning English. The results of the responses were analyzed and presented here.

**Scores have been given as**

- 5 marks for strongly agree -SA
- 4 marks for agree -A
- 2 marks for disagree - DA
- 1 mark for strongly disagree – SDA
- 3 marks for neutral and unanswered -N.

**Table 1: Stories in the classroom**

Item	No	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
Stories are helpful in learning English in the classroom	100				7	93
Teacher should be use stories while teaching English	100			5	10	85
Teacher should teach English with fun filled stories in the classroom.	100				6	94
Stories are necessary in the classroom	100			5	20	75
Stories in the classroom help me to learn English language	100			3	10	87

This group helps the researcher to find out the use of stories in the classroom. 93 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed to use stories in the classroom to learn English language. None of them refuted the use of stories in the classroom. 85 percent of the respondents wanted their teachers to teach English through stories. Humor plays an important role in the learning environment. 94 percent respondents stated that using stories would create a congenial atmosphere in the classroom. 75 percent of the respondents stated that stories are necessary in the classroom. 87 percent of the respondents claimed that they could learn English easily through stories.

**Table 2: Stories for thoughts**

Stories in media help to learn English words and pronunciation	100				4	96
Prefer to use stories and their related activities	100				5	95
Often translate ideas from stories into own narration	100	4	6	3	12	75
I use dictionary to know meanings of unknown words	100	10	7	2	22	59

Thoughts can be communicated with a help of a language. Stories are highly helpful to

express one's thoughts by using vocabulary or expressions from them. 96 percent of the

respondents stated that they were highly benefited from media. The respondents

acknowledged that they could improve their English vocabulary and pronunciation easily.

95 percent of the respondents strongly agreed to use stories in the classroom. 75

percent of the respondents felt that they frequently translate their ideas from heard stories

into their own narration. 59 percent of the respondents stated that they referred to

dictionary on account of knowing meanings of unknown words.

**Table 3: Stories for learning English**

English is very important in the present world	100			100
I am comfortable to learn English through stories	100		2	98
I am partially comfortable with English	100	20	2	78
I find it hard to use and understand some English terms or words out of the context	100		11	89
I use some of the phrases and words of the stories.	100		05	95
I fear in making mistakes while speaking English	100		1	99

The survey proved that using stories in the classroom is appreciative. The respondents could learn English with the help of stories. When the learners are getting motivated and encouraged, this method is a fruitful one.

All the respondents claimed that English is considered to be important in the present world. 78 percent of the respondents were partially comfortable with English. All the respondents were comfortable to learn English through stories in the classroom. 89 percent of the respondents stated that they would find difficult to understand hard words in English out of the context. 95 percent of the respondents believed that they would use some phrases and words of the stories which they had heard in the classroom. 99 percent of the respondents stated that they would fear in making mistakes while speaking English.

### Findings and recommendations

The study has proved that using stories in the classroom would help students to understand and learn English easily. It is quite obvious that the use of stories in the classroom would facilitate the learners to learn the second language. Language can be learnt through practice, not merely by understanding the concept of the language. Stories help students to develop divergent thinking.

The data show that all the students are quite positive about the use of stories in English classes, but the amount of it depends on learners' interest in learning in English. Students are longing and interested to speak in English

but blockage of making mistakes deter them to do so. Many students have understood that necessity is the mother of invention and taken enough steps to hone their English skill by listening to news and reading English newspapers positively.

The sources of exposure to English include Films, television, and radio. The respondents stated that media like newspapers, television, movies and radio are some of the sources for them to learn English. The media in Tamilnadu extensively uses English in almost all the programmes. The English exposure through the media also facilitates learning English and hence gets importance in their daily speech.

The results of the present study show that stories in English language classrooms help learners to communicate well in English language. Stories assist and facilitate the learners to communicate better in English language. Using stories is a teaching aid where learners can share anything with others without shyness. The interest and exposure always help a learner to whet his language skills. Teachers should choose the teaching materials which would suit the needs of the learners. They should motivate the learners to speak in English. It is the duty of an English teacher to make students understand that English is not a subject to be frightened but a language to be used effectively.

### Conclusion

Activity based learning story telling is a predominant way of teaching a language to children. The activities should be designed in such a way that they should develop the listening and speaking skills of learners. Every child has its own style of learning a task. The methods that the researcher adopted have gained momentum among children. Children must be helped to acquire English competence as soon as possible at the early stage. Children's vocabulary, fluent in expressing thoughts, understanding meanings, etc should be checked at the early stage. Children should be exposed to sounds, words, rhymes, stories, songs, so that, they could develop the knowledge of English. They should associate sounds with rhymes, words, etc., as a result, listening and speaking skills could be developed tremendously.