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Attitudes to Storytelling among Adult ESL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigated tertiary second language learners' attitudes toward storytelling as a classroom activity. Instruction and practice in storytelling were given to 26 international undergraduates for ten weeks. Questionnaires were administered before and after the treatment to assess learners' interest in storytelling and beliefs about its effectiveness as a learning task. The results of the pre-treatment questionnaire showed that while participants' interest in storytelling was very low, their expectations of its effectiveness were relatively high. Asian or low proficient participants indicated higher interest than Europeans or high proficient learners. The results of the post-treatment questionnaire showed that participants' attitudes changed only slightly. The results suggest that initial interest and expectations might play an important role in maximizing the effectiveness of storytelling for adult second language learners.

Keywords: storytelling, attitudes, motivation, interest, adult L2 learners

1. Introduction

This study investigates the attitudes and reactions of adult learners of English as a second language (ESL) to storytelling as a classroom learning technique. Scholars from many fields have pointed out the very long history and prominent place that storytelling has in the human experience. In addition to the apparent universality of telling stories, human stories tend to evoke universal themes accessible to second language learners (Hines, 1995). As Jones (2001) argues, since research as well as common experience demonstrates that storytelling is a very common activity among conversing adults, second language learners need instruction in storytelling to add to their linguistic competence. Moreover, research such as Kang (2004) demonstrates that language-specific features of discourse in general and narrative in particular affect the way learners tell stories, suggesting the necessity of learning the linguistic devices used by proficient speakers of the L2 (second language).

Not surprisingly, storytelling has been used in various ways in ESL classrooms. In a 2010 online survey conducted by Wilner and Feinstein-Whittaker, to which 172 teachers responded, most of whom (77.4%) were practicing in the U.S., 70.2% reported using stories in their classrooms. Interestingly, 61.4%

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of the respondents were teaching at universities or community colleges, indicating that storytelling is used with adults as well as child learners. The goals cited referenced linguistic, communicative, and affective needs of the learners: increasing knowledge of language, skill in speaking and reading, and social communication skills such as collaboration and cultural awareness as well as enjoyment, self-confidence, and poise.

Given the current enthusiasm about this technique, it is important to know much more about how and when storytelling works and doesn't work to advance L2 learning. One area in need of investigation concerns what learners believe about storytelling as a learning method and whether/how those beliefs affect and are affected by actual experience with classroom storytelling. This study investigates the attitudes of a group of undergraduate ESL (English as a second language) learners in a U.S. university speaking-listening course who participate in a variety of activities centered on listening to and telling personal narratives. Over the course of a semester, the learners were asked to listen to stories of about ten minutes and participate in related activities and also sometimes to tell stories of their own. We attempt to find out to what degree the learners find storytelling interesting and believe it can improve their English competence and in what way, if any, those beliefs change over one semester's participation in storytelling activities.

2. Relevant Literature

2.1. Argument for Storytelling in the Classroom

Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm (1998) claim that interest in storytelling as an ESL teaching method is continuing to grow. Their review article summarizes previous research as arguing for benefits of various kinds. Researchers such as Hendrickson (1992) and Morgan and Rinvolucri (1983), among many others, emphasize the affective benefits; the high interest and meaningfulness of the stories engages the learners and causes them to lower their affective filters, thereby increasing intake. Drawing on researchers such as Fisher (1987) and Ma (1994), Morgan and Rinvolucri describe storytelling as fostering pluralism, interactivity, and collaboration, thereby creating an atmosphere where students feel valued. Stories also provide comprehensible input full of authentic language; Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm cite multiple advocates for the use of stories to facilitate learning by activating the learners' schemata and by providing a wide enough range of data for the learners to engage in pattern detection. Moreover, when students learn the structures of stories and the techniques of telling them they increase their language skills relevant not only to oral storytelling but to reading and writing.

Similarly, Wajnryb (2003) divides the motivations for using stories in the language classroom into general ones and ones specific to language acquisition. Regarding teaching in general, stories appeal to learners as a naturalistic means of acquisition, frequently told both inside and outside classrooms for didactic, cultural, and rhetorical purposes. More specific to language teaching, stories in the first place have a special relationship to language in that language is the means by which people mediate and share experiences and thus the material by which a story is constructed. In the second place, story is particularly well suited to provide three conditions essential to learning: exposure to language in the learner's range of access, language that is actually used by the learner, and motivation because the stories involve and engage the learner. Moreover, stories shared in the classroom build the learning community and create the energy and receptivity that promote language learning. Other researchers emphasize the value of storytelling as an integrated tool for improving various language skills (Wright, 1995; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Collins and Cooper, 2005; Colon-Vila, 1997; Hamilton and Weiss, 2005; Garvie, 1990).

2.2. Research on the Effectiveness of Storytelling

Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm (1998) find that although "pedagogical benefits suggested by advocates of storytelling in the language classroom make sense from both theoretical and practical perspectives, few studies can be found which rigorously support the purported benefits of storytelling" (p. 27). This 1998 observation is unfortunately still largely true. Researchers and practitioners continue to trumpet the various values of storytelling in adult as well as children's ESL classrooms. For example, Jianing (2007) advocates storytelling in the context of learning English in China, arguing that the "lively atmosphere and real-life environment created by stories" (Why Stories? section, para. 4) can help learners to overcome their nervousness and fear of speaking. Similarly, Jones (2001) advocates teaching the learners the structure of stories as well as the importance of evaluation in order to foster their skills in the vital activity of exchanging personal stories that has been demonstrated to be so prominent and important in human experience. However, the detailed evidence called for by Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm on such questions as what benefits storytelling imparts, how it does so, when it is most effective, how it interacts with proficiency levels and other characteristics of learners, what kind of training teachers who use storytelling should undergo, etc. is still largely lacking, and this is particularly true of storytelling used with adult language learners.

One relevant empirical study is Foster (2011), which studies the effect of Total Physical Response Storytelling (TPRS, Ray 2012) on L2 (second language) Spanish university students' acquisition of case markers and pronouns used with the verb *gustar*. Foster specifically compares TPRS to processing instruction (VanPatten, 1996), characterizing both techniques as primarily input-based and meaning-oriented. While the students treated with TPRS initially make greater gains in written fluency than the processing instruction and control groups, she finds, the processing instruction students make greater gains in both production and interpretation, and their advantage in production persists on a post-test delayed two and a half months.

However, Foster's (2011) description of TPRS indicates that it differs considerably from the basic idea of students' and teachers' telling stories in class. The teacher first presents target structures using gestures and translations, reinforces them using an extensive series of repetitive questions and answers, then presents a "mini-situation", also by using question-answer, with all students answering the questions and some students acting out the story. The mini-situation is repeated several times, through retelling, reading, and writing, and other related reading and writing activities follow. Thus, although Foster (2011) describes TPRS as presenting input in "story form" (p. 8), it appears rather to be an elaborate technique based on a story sequence but not involving the telling of a story in a way characteristic of either informal conversation or artistic storytelling. Her results must be interpreted as applicable to TPRS specifically, and possible extrapolations to classroom storytelling more generally need to be investigated rather than assumed.

Ko, Schallert, and Walters (2003) study interaction more typical of traditional storytelling, in which students tell personal narratives to audiences comprising two students and one teacher, answer questions from the audience to clarify or elaborate on the story, then retell the story to a different audience. Relating the negotiation of meaning in the question-answer session to improvements or lack thereof between the first and second story tellings, the researchers suggest that effective question-answer sessions were characterized by the teachers' making specific interactional moves to facilitate and advance the negotiation of meaning in the group. However, the role of the learner was also crucial. In the first place, the story chosen needed to be sufficiently interesting to provide elements for negotiation. Subsequently, the story teller had to actively respond to interactional moves from the group, demonstrating willingness to benefit from the negotiation session, and then later effectively incorporate the new information into the retelling.

While the study focuses more on negotiation of meaning than on storytelling per se, it is important to the present study in at least two ways. First, it suggests that storytelling can be a central component of an effective instructional technique in the classroom; most of the learners were able to improve their storytelling, and thus likely gained competence in this important area of conversational skills, and we could reasonably expect that some of the improvements, such as use of more accurate lexical items, would spill over into their general competence. Secondly, and more pertinently, it provides evidence that learner attitudes are important in the learning process. In addition to emphasizing that the learner's role in responding to and incorporating interactive feedback is crucial to improvement, the researchers discuss several learners whose story did not improve despite a high-quality negotiation session, and attribute the lack of improvement in each case to affective factors.

2.3. The Storytelling Construct

It is our position that the prominence of storytelling in conversation is underrepresented in most textbooks. More preference is given to question-answer and goal-oriented styles of conversation, which do not reflect authentic, more digressive and implicit conversation among native speakers of English and many other languages. As Stenson (2003, p. 137) puts it,

> "In everyday conversation between native speakers of English, the question-answer is rarely used. The language learner finds herself lost; she is looking for and waiting for questions and answers. She is looking for both speakers to stay on the same topic. The native speakers, however, are using a different style together. They are using 'conversational storytelling'. In conversational storytelling, speakers tell short stories about events, and the interlocutors' responses are often stories of their own. In many classrooms, the lack of opportunity for conversational storytelling may inhibit students' fluency in L2 English"

We understand a story to be a narration of an event sequence with an organization meaningful to the narrator. In recent decades, the term "storytelling" has gained currency. Sobol (2008) characterizes storytelling as a multidisciplinary art form because it has been practically applied in various areas such as education, health care, social work, psychology, ministry, law, the humanities, or other related fields. The term "storytelling" as used in this discussion also goes beyond artistic performance to cover activities at a range of levels of formality, from professional storytelling to the most casual narrative included in a conversation. The stories used in the class tended to be somewhat more formal than in casual conversation, in that one speaker at a time was designated to tell a story and others were designated to listen and then react in relatively prescribed ways, and they were also of a somewhat standardized length of about ten minutes. On the expectation that skill in more formal storytelling is likely to bleed into conversational storytelling, these choices were made in order to optimize learner interest by controlling to some degree the quality and length of stories and facilitate their participation by giving more guidance. Possible effects of these constraints on the learners are discussed in the section on implications.

In many Asian countries, including Korea, storytelling is often mistakenly equated with story reading. While both use stories as a means to develop language acquisition and literacy, they are significantly different (Isbell et al., 2004; Trostle and Hicks, 1998). In story reading, the teller, and often the listeners, often have a less active role. In storytelling, the teller or reteller constructs the story in their own words. Without the intermediary of a book, the teller looks directly into the eyes of the audience and is free to use gestures, facial expression and body movements to enhance the telling and to help listeners understand the story better (Hamilton and Weiss, 2005). Thus storytelling has the potential to be highly interactive.

In this study, storytelling is regarded as a skill and also as a (class of) teaching technique. Stories told by the instructor, the learners, and guest storytellers formed the central texts and events on which

peripheral activities were based. More details on the classroom procedures are given in the section on method. Since the purpose of the study is to investigate learner attitudes towards the use of stories in the classroom rather than the effectiveness of given uses of stories, the specific peripheral tasks chosen are less important than the centrality of the learner' listening to and telling stories.

2.4. Learners' Attitudes

The relation between students' interest and achievement is well attested (Renninger, 1992; Brown, 2007) and points to the importance of investigating adult L2 learners' interest and expectations concerning storytelling. However, little investigation has been done of learners' attitudes and beliefs concerning storytelling. Braunstein (2006) studied 15 Hispanic ESL students with a combination of survey and observation methods and found that they expect a traditional form-focused classroom but respond very positively to five hours of kinesthetically-oriented instruction that includes the use of TPR storytelling. Nicholas, Rossiter, and Abbott (2011) interviewed five ESL teachers who used personal stories extensively in the classroom and nine of their adult learners. They conclude that both learners and teachers find the use of stories to enhance both the cognitive and affective aspects of language learning, promoting authenticity, motivation, a sense of community and understanding of genre, as well as vocabulary and general language competence.

Research Questions

Storytelling is an effective classroom activity for fostering second language learning, but most of the research in this area has focused on children, not adults, and little attention has been paid to adult learners' perspectives on the topic. The current research further examines college classroom learners' interest in storytelling and their expectations concerning its effects on various language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, and vocabulary) before and after their experience with storytelling as a way of learning. The research questions investigated in this study are these:
1. To what degree are the adult L2 learners interested in storytelling as a classroom activity?
2. To what degree do they believe that storytelling will improve their L2 skills?
3. Do their attitudes change when they experience storytelling as a classroom activity?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants were 26 international undergraduates enrolled in an English course at a public university in the United States designed for improving listening, speaking, and pronunciation. The course was a one-credit adjunct course to a first-year course on academic reading and writing for ESL students; the two courses together constituted a substitution, available to international students, for a required general education reading and writing course. Students' ages ranged from 19 to 23, with the majority aged 20. There were 17 male and 9 female students. Table 1 shows their nationalities and majors.

Table 1. Participants' nationalities and majors. The number of participants is in parentheses.

Nationality		Major
Europe (18)	France (10)	Business (9)
	Austria (1)	Marketing (6)
	Germany (1)	Finance (3)
	Sweden (1)	Biology (2)
	Serbia (1)	Piano (1)
	Russia (1)	Art (1)
	Ukraine (1)	Computer science (1)
	Dual nationality (2)	Biomedical Engineering (1)
Asia (6)	Japan (2)	Sports Management (1)
	Korea (2)	Political Science (1)
	China (1)	
	India (1)	
South America (2)	Venezuela (2)	

As the table indicates, a majority of the students were Europeans, and of the Europeans just over half were French. (Two participants reported being dual nationality holders, one British/German and one French/Irish.) Participants' majors varied widely, with the biggest group being the nine business majors. All except one Korean male student (see below) had lived in the US less than three months at the time of the project.

Participants' self-assessments of proficiency were elicited by means of questionnaire (Appendix 1), using a five-point Likert scale for listening, speaking, reading and writing. Participants' self-rated proficiency averaged 3.9, indicating that most of the participants felt that they were good at English. According to their self-assessed proficiency, as well as their scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), 19 participants were categorized as high proficiency (HP) (above 3.5 on the Likert scale and 600 on the TOEFL), and seven were classified low proficiency (LP) (below 3.2 on the Likert scale and 550 on the TOEFL).

Very interestingly, participants' self-rated proficiency was largely predictable from their nationalities. Most of the European and African participants reported themselves as good at listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English, whereas the Asian students did not. One Korean student, who had come to the US four years earlier and attended a US high school, reported that he was good at speaking English. Otherwise, the Asian participants were in the LP group, whereas all non-Asian participants belonged to the HP group. Writing seemed to be perceived as more difficult than the other three skills. Several advanced participants strong in other skills assessed themselves as 'so-so' or 'poor' in writing. Since this is not the main concern of the study, we omit a detailed discussion.

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. Questionnaire

In order to examine the participants' attitude toward storytelling and beliefs about its effects, anonymous surveys were conducted before and after storytelling instruction (see Appendices 1 and 2). The pre-treatment questionnaire elicited information about the participants' biographies (Part A), self-assessed English proficiency (Part B), and knowledge of and attitudes toward storytelling (Part C). In Part C, the participants were asked to provide information about how much they knew about storytelling, whether they were interested in storytelling, and how they conceived of the effectiveness of storytelling in

improving English skills. For the post-treatment questionnaire, participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling in improving their language skills.

3.2.2. Researcher's Field Notes

For each class, the researcher wrote field notes about the participants' levels of interest, attention, and participation and success in storytelling.

3.3. Classroom Procedures

The experiment was conducted over ten weeks during the fall semester. The class met twice a week for one hour each time. The principal researcher was introduced as a secondary instructor who was a NNS (non-native speaker of English) teacher[3]. She was independently responsible for designing and teaching the class for the storytelling period. Note that the class was conceived of as an English class, not a storytelling class. For thirty minutes the normal instruction was implemented by the regular class instructor, and the other thirty minutes were devoted to the experimental storytelling instruction. The following description refers to the storytelling portion of the class only. Rather than communicative competence, the goals and objectives, shown in Table 2, concerned telling competence.

Table 2. The goals and objectives of the class

Outline	Explanation
Goals	Students will • enhance their imagination and visualization. • increase vocabulary. • refine speaking skills. • improve listening skills. • enhance writing skills. • improve pronunciation. • enhance critical and creative thinking skills.
Objectives	*Terminal objectives* Students will • understand a 10-minute story. • tell a 10-minute story. • make up stories in their own words *Enabling objectives* Students will • retell the story they heard in the classroom. • tell a 10-minute story in their own words.

No textbook was used in the class. Each class consisted of an introduction, conversational storytelling, story listening and telling, and story reflection activities. A sample lesson plan is provided in Appendix 3. Various genres of stories from folktales to personal tales were told by an instructor, invited storytellers, or student volunteers. The students also told stories to the class and in small groups. Information about the stories and tellers appears in Appendix 4.

To encourage imagination and visualization, no written materials, illustrations, or visual aids were provided during storytelling. In addition to stories told live, recorded performances by of the well-known storyteller Donald Davis (*That's What Mamas Do*, 2001) and other storytellers were shown. The length of

each story was about 10 to 15 minutes.

As illustrated in Appendix 3, each lesson consisted of pre-storytelling, storytelling and post-storytelling.

3.3.1. Pre-storytelling: Conversational Storytelling

For this warm-up activity, students were arranged in a circle or in small groups. The instructor told a personal story and then asked students to take turns sharing their stories on a given topic, related to stories students were about to hear in the class or to holidays such as Halloween or Thanksgiving. If a story was from Korea or Japan, students were asked to share their familiarity and travel experiences concerning that country. For example, before hearing a scary story, students were encouraged to share scary experiences or episodes from their early childhood and cultural differences about scary stories (See Appendix 3). Students were encouraged to produce longer sentences rather than shorter ones to match the turn-taking practices of typical conversational storytelling.

3.3.2. Storytelling: Listening to or Telling Stories

During storytelling sessions, professional storytellers, including the instructor, told stories in various genres from folktales to personal tales. The stories were told actively, using various voices, gestures, facial expressions and body movements to make them vivid. Students had the opportunity to interact with the teller. For example, the teller sometimes paused and asked the student to predict the next part of the story. In this way, the students were encouraged to be active listeners rather than passive ones. Most students also told stories to their peers or to the whole class. Their storytelling events were scheduled in advance, to allow preparation. Since class time was limited, students who wanted to retell stories they heard in class or tell their own stories for language improvement were individually assigned to meet outside class with the researcher and sometimes with peers.

3.3.3. Post-storytelling: Story Reflection Activities

To enhance students' speaking and writing skills, various oral and written reflection activities were conducted. One of the major oral activities was retelling stories. The instructor prompted the retelling by asking, "What happened first?", "What happened next?", etc. Students were encouraged to answer the instructor's questions or elaborate on parts of the story and to tell parts of the story to the group (sometimes practicing with no audience first), using their own words and gestures. In addition, students were asked to tell short fables or personal stories after writing them down and practicing their delivery. For written reflection activities, students completed a story reflection sheet that included a synopsis of the story and descriptions of main characters and themes (See Appendix 5 for an example).

3.4. Data Analysis

To determine whether participants' attitude had changed over the treatment period, responses were first categorized as positive (either agree or strongly agree), negative (either disagree or strongly disagree), or neutral (neither agree nor disagree). The possibility of relations between participants' attitude and proficiency (or nationality) was then investigated.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Interest in Storytelling

The results of the pre- and post-treatment questionnaires are comparatively discussed below. The pre-treatment questionnaire responses appear in Table 3.

Table 3. Participants' interest in storytelling indicated on pre-treatment questionnaire (N=26)

Item	(Strongly) Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	(Strongly) Disagree
I knew about storytelling before class.	58% (15)	12% (3)	31% (8)
I knew about storytellers before class.	35% (9)	8% (2)	58% (15)
I am interested in storytelling.	27% (7)	23% (6)	50% (13)
I am interested in listening to stories.	35% (9)	19% (5)	46% (12)
I am interested in telling stories.	19% (5)	15% (4)	65% (17)
I am interested in listening to and telling stories.	27% (7)	42% (11)	31% (8)

(The number of responses is given in parentheses).

As the table shows, over half of the students (58%) were familiar with storytelling, but fewer than half (35%) knew about storytellers. When students were asked to define the terms "storytelling" and "storyteller", they had some trouble explaining the concepts. In particular, participants from Asia countries tended to not distinguish "storytelling" from "story reading" or "storyteller" from "story readers". Very few respondents acknowledged that storytelling was an occupation. In many Asian countries, it is not common to find people employed as storytellers.

Participants' interest was very low overall. Only 27% of the respondents (7 out of 26) were interested in storytelling. A similar proportion, 35%, was interested in listening to stories. However, when it came to telling stories, even fewer - 19% of the respondents (5 out of 26) - were interested. Participants reported that they were afraid of telling stories in front of an audience. While children generally love storytelling (Wright, 1995; Hamilton and Weiss, 2005), our results suggest that adult learners may be considerably more reluctant to tell stories in their L2 classroom. Perhaps telling stories was a challenging task even for proficient L2 participants because they had had little chance to tell stories anywhere in the past. Participants also may have perceived storytelling as an entertainment form that had little relation to their English proficiency generally or to their academic English skills specifically.

The post-treatment questionnaire also addressed the same issues and also participants' satisfaction with the use of storytelling in class. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Participants' attitude toward storytelling indicated on post-treatment questionnaire (N=26)

Items	(Strongly) Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	(Strongly) Disagree
I was interested in storytelling.	27% (7)	12% (3)	62% (16)
I was interested in listening to stories.	38% (10)	15% (4)	46% (12)
I was interested in telling stories.	19% (5)	19% (5)	62% (16)
I liked the use of storytelling in the classroom.	27% (7)	8% (2)	65% (17)
I enjoyed listening to stories in class.	27% (7)	8% (2)	65% (17)
I enjoyed telling stories.	23% (6)	8% (2)	69% (18)

I enjoyed writing the synopses of stories.	15% (4)	8% (2)	77% (20)
I enjoyed the classroom activities related to the stories.	23% (6)	8% (2)	69% (18)
Overall, storytelling is enjoyable in the classroom.	35% (9)	19% (5)	46% (12)
Stories are for children, not for adults.	38% (10)	15% (4)	46% (12)

With respect to interest, the results on the pre-treatment and post-treatment questionnaires are very similar, indicating that the students' attitudes toward storytelling were not changed over the treatment period. Consistent with the low interest in storytelling, only 27% of the participants (7 out of 26) liked the use of storytelling - the same percent that responded positively to the item "I am interested in storytelling" on the pre-treatment questionnaire. The rates are similar for "I enjoyed listening to stories in class (27%)," "I enjoyed telling stories (23%)," and "I enjoyed the classroom activities related to the stories (23%)." For the item "I enjoyed writing the synopses of stories (15%)," the positive rate was even lower, indicating that the writing task was dispreferred. The results of the two questionnaires in conjunction with the researcher's field notes suggest a number of reasons for the generally low interest in storytelling. One might relate to participants' conceptions of stories. As Table 4 indicates, 38% of the respondents agreed that stories are for children, not for adults. In an informal interview, one French female student said, "Storytelling must be used in children's classroom rather than adults'," and she reported that she was not interested in storytelling. These responses suggest that some learners might think of stories in a narrower sense than the researchers, focusing on the kind of stories used for children's entertainment and disregarding other forms, especially the kind of conversational story that frequently occurs in adult casual discourse. Beliefs about the appropriateness of stories in adult language learning may be affected by the learners' prior experience with language texts, specifically by the lack of attention to stories in most L2 texts. Learners might reasonably assume that if listening to and telling stories were an effective way of gaining competence, story tasks would be prescribed in their learning materials more often.

Moreover, the results indicated that participants' interest in storytelling was closely related to their satisfaction with the use of storytelling. A relatively interested student commented: "It is much better with storytelling than using a regular English book. You learn to be good listeners." Another responded, "Stories are funny. It can help classroom active [sic]. Storytelling can make us know each other better." The researcher's observations and discussions with some students suggest that students with positive attitudes toward storytelling enjoyed story listening as well as storytelling, were very active and enthusiastic in classroom activities, and felt that they improved their L2 skills, especially listening, speaking and pronunciation. The uninterested students tended to think the storytelling was relatively ineffective. One learner commented "I think English class and storytelling class must be separated into two different classes. Storytelling is not for everybody." Comments like this suggest that learners might be thinking of storytelling as an art form, not as an activity that occurs in everyday conversation. If this is their perception, the effect of storytelling for adult L2 learners might be maximized if a storytelling class is designed as an elective.

Another reason for the dislike of storytelling might concern L2 proficiency level, which was also related to interest. One participant stated, "Some students are bored with storytelling, especially good English speakers. And I think it would be better to do presentations of different subjects, or debates for them." On the other hand, real beginners, who found it hard to communicate, commented that storytelling was very stressful because of their lack of proficiency in English. Thus, it is possible that neither the most nor the least advanced learners enjoyed storytelling. However, it was likely that it was actually more appealing to LP learners than to HP ones. 81% of the HP respondents (17 out of 21) were not interested in storytelling, whereas 80% of the LP respondents (4 out of 5) were interested in storytelling. Most of the bilingual respondents reported that they were not interested in storytelling. Thus,

among these participants, the less proficient they were, the more interest they had. However, this does not hold for real beginners who found it hard to communicate. One Japanese male participant, who rated himself very poor at speaking English, stated that he was not interested in storytelling, because he found it stressful to tell stories because of his low proficiency.

There was also evidence of a relation between nationality and attitude. Most of the Asian students liked storytelling whereas the European students generally did not. However, as described in section 3.1., most of the European participants were very fluent, whereas the Asian participants were not, making it impossible to separate the effects of proficiency and nationality in this study. This ambiguity was repeated in the results of an informal survey about interest in storytelling conducted outside the classroom during the same time as the classroom research. Forty-five international students who used English as their L2 taking classes at the same university filled out the same survey form shown in Appendix A asking about their language background and attitude toward storytelling. Of the Asian respondents, 28 out of 29 indicated that they were interested in storytelling, compared to only 31% of the European respondents (5 out of 16). However, as with the students in the class, most of the European students evaluated themselves as HP learners, whereas most of the Asian students did not. Thus, it is again not clear whether attitude is relating to both proficiency and nationality, or whether one apparent relation is simply a reflection of the other. More research, with more balanced numbers of participants in terms of nationality and proficiency levels, is needed to clarify this point.

4.2. Expectations Concerning the Effect of Storytelling

This section discusses participants' expectations of the effectiveness of storytelling in improving various L2 skills. The results from the pre-treatment questionnaire are presented in
Table 5.

Table 5. Participants' pre-treatment expectation value (%) of the effectiveness of storytelling

Items	(Strongly) Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	(Strongly Disagree)
Storytelling helps to improve listening.	77% (20)	19% (5)	4% (1)
Storytelling helps to improve speaking.	73% (19)	15% (4)	12% (3)
Storytelling helps to improve reading.	58% (15)	15% (4)	27% (7)
Storytelling helps to improve writing.	58% (15)	8% (2)	35% (9)
Storytelling helps to improve pronunciation.	65% (17)	23% (6)	12% (3)
Storytelling helps to improve vocabulary.	85% (22)	12% (3)	4% (1)
Storytelling must be taught in a language classroom.	23% (6)	42% (11)	35% (9)
I am confident to tell a 10-minute story.	19% (5)	27% (7)	54% (14)

Compared with the interest in storytelling, the expectations of its effectiveness were notably more positive. The positive response rates ranged from 85% for vocabulary to 53% for reading and writing, with listening (77%), speaking (73%) and pronunciation (65%) intermediate. In spite of the high positive expectation rate, however, only 23% of the participants agreed that storytelling must be taught in a language classroom. As expected, most of the participants were not confident about telling a 10-minute story. This suggests that telling stories can be perceived as a challenging task for even proficient learners to do without any practice.

The positive rates for almost all skills in the pre-treatment questionnaire decreased considerably in the post-treatment questionnaire. For comparison, the results of the pre-treatment and post-treatment

questionnaires for each skill are presented together in

Figure **1.** . With respect to listening and speaking, in the pre-treatment questionnaire 77% and 73% of the respondents, respectively, predicted that storytelling would effectively improve them; the percentage went down to 27% and 35%, respectively, in the post-treatment questionnaire. With respect to reading and writing, 58% of the respondents decreased to 12%. For pronunciation, 65% went down to 38%. Even for vocabulary, the rate was reduced from 85% to only 42%.

How can we account for this change in the participants' attitude? The response on the effectiveness of storytelling in the post-treatment questionnaire roughly corresponded to the rate on the interest in storytelling in the pre-treatment questionnaire. In other words, we can say that the students who were interested in storytelling perceived effectiveness in storytelling. We can speculate that when participants were interested in storytelling they actively attended to classroom activities, and they perceived-improvement, quite possibly actual improvement, because of their efforts. Without interest and effort, it might be hard to experience any effectiveness in storytelling, in accord with the general proposition that attitude influences achievement (Weinburgh, 2000; Brown, 2007). It is a truism that successful learning relies heavily on how much effort learners make. High interest triggers enthusiasm, which in turn affects achievement.

Figure 1. Expectations concerning the effectiveness of storytelling
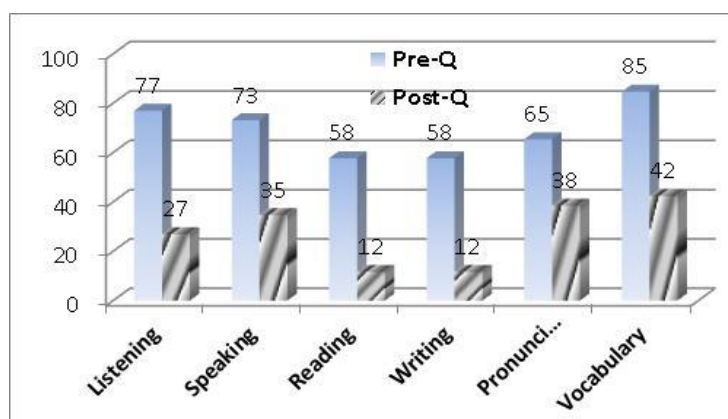
Another likely reason for the low perceptions in the follow-up survey was that the treatment period and running time (one hour per week for ten weeks) was too short to afford participants sufficient practice in storytelling. Thus, it seems natural that participants showed some skepticism concerning whether they truly improved their L2 skills. In order to maximize the effect of storytelling, a longer treatment period would be necessary.

Even within the short period, some participants believed that they improved their L2 skills. As seen in Figure 1, listening, speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary were the skills perceived as undergoing the most improvement. These skills are discussed below based on the researcher's field notes as well as the questionnaire responses.

With respect to listening skills, seven out of 26 participants responded that their listening skills were improved. One said, "Storytelling is easy to improve my listening. Listening is my weakest part. I think I improve my listening a lot and I really enjoy listening to stories in class." She stated that in the beginning, it was very hard to understand the whole story, and failure to understand a few words caused her to stop listening. After further experience listening to stories, she was able to understand the stories better and maintain attention despite missing a few words. With a high degree of interest, attention and enjoyment,

she felt that she truly enhanced her listening skills through storytelling. Other participants with positive attitudes reported similar experiences.

With respect to speaking skills, nine participants responded that they truly improved their speaking through storytelling. Generally, the participants who showed high interest and actively participated in telling positively evaluated the effect of storytelling on the improvement of speaking. Nevertheless, there were individual variations. The one Japanese female participant was very interested in storytelling and was eager to tell stories to improve her speaking. After the treatment, though, she was not sure whether she truly improved her speaking skill, but responded with 'neither agree nor disagree."

Concerning reading and writing, only one participant responded that storytelling helped to improve those skills. Since they were mainly exposed to story listening and telling, improvement of reading and writing skills was not expected. When they were asked to write a story reflection, they did not receive any comments or feedback on their writing.

The perceived effectiveness of storytelling on pronunciation and vocabulary was slightly higher than on listening and speaking skills. Ten and 11 participants perceived a positive effect on pronunciation and vocabulary, respectively. Telling stories is likely to have improved their pronunciation by causing participants to identify their own pronunciation errors. For example, one participant said, "I know what my mistakes are during storytelling. They are better realized once telling it out loud instead of reading it in silence. And I try to avoid the same mistakes upon my practices." Another participant reported, "I did not know my pronunciation mistakes. However, when they were pointed out, the number of mistakes was radically reduced." With respect to the effect of storytelling on vocabulary, almost half the participants agreed that their vocabulary increased through storytelling. One Chinese participant said, "Once I did not get the meaning of words, I lost the whole story line. I realize that understanding the meaning of words is very important to follow the story well. Thus, I try to write a note about the words that I don't understand in the story and ask them to the instructor. Once I know the meaning of words from the story, I find that I don't forget it. This training helped me to increase the amount of vocabulary." Most of the other participants who positively responded to the effect of storytelling on vocabulary in general agreed with her.

To sum up, the perception of the effectiveness of storytelling for the improvement of L2 skills overall differed from the pre-treatment expectations. Since the treatment period and running time were very short, it seems natural for the students to show some skepticism. Even after this short period, however, some participants responded positively concerning the effectiveness of storytelling especially with regard to listening, speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary. There may have been a close relationship between interest and perceived achievement, in line with earlier research.

5. Conclusion and Implications

While the pre-treatment questionnaire responses indicated that a high proportion of the participants expected storytelling to improve their English skills, especially vocabulary, listening, speaking, and pronunciation, the proportion of participants interested in storytelling was relatively low. There was evidence that Asian learners showed more interest than European ones, and/or that less proficient learners showed more interest than more proficient ones. Thus, when preparing to teach English through storytelling with adult L2 learners, social and individual factors such as nationality and proficiency need to be taken into consideration. Different strategies may need to be applied for beginners. For example, encouraging them to describe pictures in a story format might be helpful. However, since the number of participants was unbalanced in terms of these two factors, further study is necessary.

Moreover, the post-treatment questionnaire responses demonstrate that simple exposure to storytelling does not always increase learners' interest. Even learners who believe that storytelling can be

an effective learning task may think that it is appropriate only for children, and this attitude may be confounded with the perception of storytelling as an entertainment form, exclusive of its use in casual conversation. Therefore, it seems advisable when teaching storytelling to adults to prepare them by explicitly discussing the rationale, including the common use of storytelling in conversation, possibly even asking them to record for one day all the times they tell or hear stories in casual conversation.

Students may also be more predisposed toward storytelling if it is included in more language learning materials. While more exposure to storytelling would probably benefit almost all learners, a case can also be made for teaching it in a separate course. In this way, the interest existing among some learners can be more fully exploited for its motivating potential. In this study, some evidence indicated that participants' positive interest levels correlated positively with their active participation in the classroom as well as their successive achievement. Therefore, addressing the value that learners assign to storytelling before and during providing instruction may increase the effectiveness of the technique.

Several limitations to this study could be addressed in future research. The lack of balance among the participants in terms of nationality and proficiency calls for research to explore a possible relation between participants' attitudes and their nationalities or proficiency levels. Moreover, the treatment period and running time (30 minutes twice for ten weeks) was very short for learner to accomplish certain goals. Given these concerns, it is difficult to claim that the results from this study can be applied equally to other adult L2 language learning situations. Further research is necessary to generalize the results.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. "L2" (i.e., English in this study) is generally used as a cover term to refer to ESL (English as a Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) (Brown, 2007, p. 3)
2. Attitude generally relates to a person's desire to study and interest (Corbin and Chiachiere, 1995)
3. There were two instructors, each responsible for teaching 30 minutes of the one-hour class sessions. The primary instructor, a Swahili-English bilingual, used a regular textbook for oral-aural college-level skills. The secondary instructor, the principal researcher, had lived in the US for ten years, held a Ph.D. in Linguistics and an M.A. in Storytelling, and had taught English at several universities for more than 20 years combined.
4. Professional storytellers refer to people who work in the field of oral storytelling. There are numerous professional storytellers in the world (International Storytelling Center 2011, www.storytellingcenter.net). Many of them run their individual websites (e.g., visit http://www.marilynmcphie.com/calendar.html for Marilyn McPhie and http://www.ddavisstoryteller.com/ for Donald Davis). There are also considerable voluntary setting of storytelling in the public library, hospital, and school.

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APPENDIX 1

Pre-treatment questionnaire

Part A. Biographical information

1. Gender: Male   Female

2. What is your age?   _____

3. What is your nationality?   _____

4. What is your native language? _____

             (if you grew up with more than one language, please specify)

5. What is your major here in college? _____

6. What is your status here in college? _____

7. How long have you stayed in the US? _____

Part B. Rate your proficiency in L2 English

1. Rate yourself according to the following categories   VP P So-So G VG

    (circle one number on the scale on each line)

    Your overall comprehension ability in English: 1   2   3   4   5
    Your overall speaking ability in English: 1   2   3   4   5
    Your overall reading ability in English: 1   2   3   4   5
    Your overall writing ability in English: 1   2   3   4   5

(VP= Very Poor, P=Poor, G=Good, VG=Very Good)

2. Do you have an accent when you speak English? If so, please rate the strength of your accent according to the following scale.

  No Accent   Very weak   Weak Intermediate Strong   very strong
    0   1   2   3   4   5

3. What skills do you want to improve in the class? _____

Part C. Storytelling in English

1. Please decide whether you strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Agree Nor Disagree (N), Disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD) about the statements. There is no correct answer but all you have to do is give a sincere response. Place an (X) in the box that shows your opinion.

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
I knew about storytelling before class.					
I knew about storytellers before class.					
I am interested in storytelling.					
I am interested in listening to stories.					
I am interested in telling stories.					
I am interested in listening and telling stories.					
Storytelling helps to improve listening.					
Storytelling helps to improve speaking.					
Storytelling helps to improve reading.					
Storytelling helps to improve writing.					
Storytelling helps to improve pronunciation.					
Storytelling helps to improve vocabulary.					
Storytelling must be taught in a language classroom.					
I am confident to tell a 10-mintue story.					

2. Do you have any comments on your language or storytelling background which you think are important but which you were not asked about in this questionnaire?

 _____

 _____

 _____

THANKS FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

Please take a moment now to check that you have answered all questions.

APPENDIX 2

Post Treatment Questionnaire

A.   Please give sincere answers as only this will guarantee the success of the study. Please decide whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither agree Nor disagree (N), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD) with the statements. There is no correct answer; all you have to do is give a sincere response. Place an (X) in the box that shows your opinion.

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
I was interested in storytelling.					
I was interested in listening to stories.					
I am interested in telling stories.					
I liked the use of storytelling in the classroom.					
I enjoyed listening to stories in class.					
I enjoyed telling stories.					
I enjoyed the classroom activities related to the stories.					
Using stories were favorable to me.					
Stories are for children, not for adults.					
Overall, storytelling was enjoyable in the classroom.					
Storytelling helped me to improve listening.					
Storytelling helped me to improve speaking.					
Storytelling helped me to improve reading.					
Storytelling helped me to improve writing.					
Storytelling helped me to improve pronunciation.					
Storytelling helped me to improve vocabulary.					
Storytelling must be taught in a language classroom.					
I am confident to tell a 10-minute story.					

B. Please give at least three comments on what you are thinking of the use of storytelling in the classroom at college. Your sincere comments are welcome!

 _____
 _____
 _____
 _____

Thank you very much for your honest response and for your help with this study. Your responses will help to improve future language instruction.

APPENDIX 3

A sample lesson plan from the fifth week

Contents	Time / Who	Strategies / Activities	Skills enhanced
Introduction	5 min. Instructor	**Class Objectives of the week** -listening and understanding stories -enhancing speaking -enhance pronunciation with clear articulation and loud volume -The instructor describes this week's story theme — "scary" stories.	Listening, speaking, pronunciation
BEFORE STORYTELLING: conversational storytelling	5 min Instructor and students	-Encourage students to share about scary experiences or stories. -Talk about experiences in childhood. -Students volunteer to answer the instructor's questions. -Talk about a story background to tell (The title of the story is "The 'Dead' Cat" (also "A Tale of Two Sisters").	Listening and Speaking
STORYTELLING	5-15 min. Instructor others	-Students listen to stories from the instructor. Listening Tips: -Try to have the five *wh-question* types in your mind while you listen to the story as follows: -Have an imaginary story map about the story like a tree and branches -Write down the words that are not clearly understood during the listening.	Vocabulary, Listening and Speaking
AFTER STORYTELLING:: Story reflection (oral or written)	5-10 min. Instructor and student	After the story, the instructor asks students how well they understood it. Depending on time, either oral or written reflection is conducted in the classroom. Story reflection questions about a story: Describe the characters in the story. Tell us about the birth of the two sisters. What happened to their mother? Tell about the character of the stepmother. Describe how the stepmother obtained the real power in the family. Tell us about the stepmother's plan.	Listening comprehension and Writing

APPENDIX 4 Stories and storytellers in the class

Title of stories	Source	Teller
The Wenny Old Man	Korean folktale	Instructor
The Herdsman and the Weaver	Korean folktale	Instructor
The Stories of a Cat and Dog	Personal stories	Instructor
The Red Cat	Japanese folktale	Instructor
A Cat in a Shopping Bag	American scary tale	Instructor
The Two Sisters	Korean folktale	Instructor
Seven Foolish Fishermen	French folktale	Instructor
Lazy Jack	England folktale	Instructor
Appalachian Jack	Appalachian folktale	Invited storyteller
Travel to Bhutan	Personal story	Invited storyteller
The Grateful Crane	Japanese	Invited storyteller
Halloween Party	Personal story	student
Boat Race	Personal story	student
To Johnson city	Personal story	student
Golf Tour	Personal story	students
Trip to New York	Personal story	student
That's What Mamas Do (DVD)	Personal story	Donald Davis
Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Folktale	student
Little Red Riding Hood	Folktale	student
The Three Little Pigs	Folktale	student
Indian New Year Festival	Personal story	student
The Traveler and the Bear	Aesop's fable	student
The Wind and the Sun	Aesop's fable	student

APPENDIX 5 Written Story Reflection

Name: _____   Points: _____/10

    1.   What is the title of the story? (1 point)
        _____

    2.   Who are the characters in the story? (1 point)
        _____

    3.   What is the theme (or lesson or moral) of the story? (1 point)
        _____

    4.   What's the story about? Write a synopsis. (5 points)
        _____
        _____
        _____
        _____
        _____

    5.   How did you react to the story? Provide your comments and feedback. What do you like the most and what do you dislike the most? (2 points)
        _____