

Effect of Storytelling on Listening Skills and Vocabulary of Preschool Children

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Abstract

Storytelling has been used as the oldest form of learning. Even though for years, storytellers shared stories with children, up till now very few researches have been conducted on impact of storytelling on children's learning. The current research was an effort to explore the effect of storytelling on listening skills and vocabulary of preschool children. This study was a quasi-experimental design. The total sample comprised of 14 participants of preschool children aged 5 years divided in 2: control (n=7) and experimental (n=7) groups through non-random sampling. The data was collected and assessed by means of globally recognized scales Morrow's Retelling 10 Point Scale for listening skills and Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) for vocabulary. Six stories were selected for storytelling; first story for pre-test, four stories for interventions and sixth story for post-test story telling. The statistical analysis was done by conducting independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test to compare scores among control and experimental groups. The post-test results and the researcher observations affirmed that preschool children who were exposed to storytelling with props were highly engaged in story retelling; incorporating minute details which verified listening attentively and carefully maturing their listening skills and revealed better, meaningful, and deeper understanding of vocabulary.

Keywords: storytelling, listening skills, vocabulary, preschool

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Introduction

From as long as we know, storytelling has been a powerful medium in the learning process of young children. Cameron (2001) demonstrated that storytelling is a verbal skill that is considered not only for listening but also contributes to class participation, as he believes the powerful eye contact between a teacher and a child is exceptional during storytelling which helps building the communication skill in the classroom.

Storytelling is a skill of using language, verbalizing with body movements and gestures to illustrate and put in picture the elements and images of a story to particular listeners. It is a popular pedagogical manner of enhancing learning outcomes (Sharda, 2007). McKay (1997) states storytelling being a magical tool shared between the teller and audience. She further described that it 'as a meeting of minds where visions, feelings and memories are passed on in words'.

Listening being the primary linguistic ability that children acquire is the most important communication skill both in the classroom and for regular day to day existence. Storytelling is one of the ways through which skills of listening can be created. Research and surveys have revealed nonetheless that the skill of listening is not given sufficient consideration in elementary schools particularly, through storytelling (Akintemi, 2014). Vocabulary is broadly defined as the 'knowledge of words and word meanings' and it is something that expands and deepens over time (Hunt & Eisenhart, 2010). Logan (2012) defines the term "vocabulary" as the terms and expressions familiar and known to children which they use effectively to communicate. Pullen (2010) describes vocabulary as a strong forecaster of later reading attainment.

Satish, Jain, and Gupta (2009) defined storytelling as an ability of a person (the storyteller) to grasp, process and communicate appropriate events according to the listener's preferences. Rossiter (2002) illustrated storytelling as a form of communication and means of education that consist of written human history to be passed off to the next generation.

Leading economists, researchers and scientists provide evidence-based conclusions on the significance of early intervention in learning new skills for children (Saif, Inam, & Abiodullah, 2020). Literature revealed that storytelling engrossed the children by improving involvement and attention span as compared to passive children participation in a regular classroom setting (Richter & Koppett, 2000).

According to Serrat (2010) storytelling induces prevailing emotions and insights as well as influences audiences through captivating story structures, descriptions and life-lesson narratives.

Ahrens (2011) and Fast (2014) acknowledged the enduring power of story narratives for building a child's vocabulary acquisition, helping him to start reading early.

Bruce (2014) affirmed that stories can be narrated to children anywhere one is, making different story lines and scenarios exciting and lively. Riddersporre (2014) claimed children learn a lot by not only telling, but also by listening.

Research on storytelling has been valuable in indicating and demonstrating that it can hold essential benefits for preschooler's language development and can promote their oral language and listening skills. Preschools are structured places of learning for children aged between 3 to 5 years according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Preschool age ends when formal kindergarten begins as stated by McGoey, Eckert & Dupaul, 2002.

Research suggests between the ages of three to six years is a phase of language explosion with expansion of vocabulary from 900 to 8000-14000 words, depending upon individual exposure and social experiences of children mentioned by Cheema, Ahmad & Perveen, 2020. Storytelling can prove to be a great asset in the building of a wide range of vocabulary for these young, absorbent minds. Kazi, Moghal and Aziz emphasized in 2018 that a child's learning of pragmatics of a language begins as early as four years of age, followed by their understanding to speak according to the needs and demands of the listener. Therefore, it can be concluded that storytelling enables the child to build a wide range of vocabulary through greater variety of sentence structure, tone and words. Storytelling acts as a stimulant not only in teaching preschoolers' new vocabulary but also in developing better listening skills.

The purpose of this study was to shed more light on the beneficial effects on how the use of interactive storytelling among preschool children (aged 3-5 years) can promote their oral language skills; enhancing vocabulary building and listening skills. This being one of few attempts to undertake research in Pakistan on storytelling and its effect on preschoolers, aimed to assist researchers working in the field of education to familiarize a wider public to the significance of storytelling to preschoolers.

The study had the following objectives:

- 1) To find out the effects of storytelling on listening skills of preschool children.
- 2) To find out the effects of storytelling on vocabulary of preschool children.

This study assisted in highlighting the significance of storytelling and its incorporation into the classroom routine for better learning outcomes. It enabled storytellers to realize the significance of their skill and helped in informing parents and educators regarding the role of storytelling in developing listening and vocabulary skills of preschoolers.

A conceptual framework was designed for carrying out the research as follows:

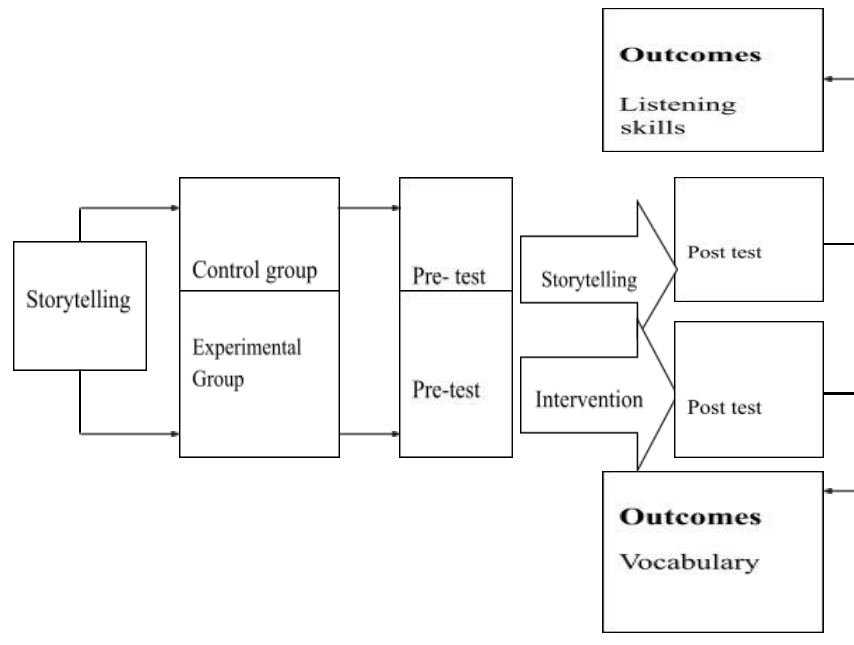


Figure 1: Proposed Hypothesized Model

Methodology

This study was a quasi-experimental research consisting of pre and post testing that aimed at finding out the impact of storytelling on listening skills and vocabulary development of preschool children. 14 children were randomly selected from a private school in Lahore, divided into two halves and randomly allotted as a control group and an experimental group. The only consideration in selection was: (i) the children who were regular were included in the study (ii) any child with a learning difficulty was excluded

from the study. The reason for selection of a particular school was due to their willingness to support the study and permission to carry out the experiment. The researcher intended to take a sample of 30 participants, 15 in each group - control and experiment, but the school allowed only 2 days a week to visit and due to children's exams coming up in next month, couldn't continue this study further in upcoming weeks, hence the sample was cut down to 14 participants only. The researcher after gaining school approval took minors participant consent from their parents through a consent form. This study approximately took a period of 2 months in collecting the data. Six stories were selected for narration to assess listening skills and vocabulary development.

A separate room (computer room) was provided for storytelling sessions.

Pre-test, Intervention and Post Test Procedures

For the purpose of this study, 6 storybooks were read to the children. One story book was read to children before the beginning of the intervention program i.e. the pre-test story; one story book was read after the interventions, while 4 story books were used for the intervention program. The gap between each intervention story was same for all 4 stories.

The first story was read to both groups together for pre-test and each child was individually assessed for listening skills through story retelling and for vocabulary through Vocabulary Knowledge Scale using vocabulary words from the story book.

The next four stories were read separately to each group. The researcher was provided 2 specific days and 2 consecutive periods (45 min each). Storytelling was held for the control group on one day and for the experimental group on the next day. The control group had the 4 sessions of storytelling through the book only, whereas, for intervention for the experimental group, props (laminated pictures, story characters) were used for storytelling. Along with that 4 cards with written words: Where, What, How, End were used. These 4 words functioned as key words and reminded the children of the structural element of the story and this was named "the path of the story".

The first card labeled with the keyword "Where" referred to the story's setting, the second card with the word "How" referred to the initial story episode, the third card with the word "What" referred to the story plot and the last card with the word "End" referred to the resolution and the end of the story. These cards functioned as the children's basic means of

reproducing the story read to them. Retelling of these 4 intervention stories was done through pasting/putting pictures from the book under each card.

The intervention program consisted of 2 levels. At the first level and before the storybook reading the teacher explained to the children that each story has a particular structure, she presented the cards and put them on a white board. At the second level the teacher read the story and while she was referring to each story element, she placed the corresponding picture under specific cards. Each child retold the story by using this “story path”.

At the post-test level a storybook was read to both groups collectively. Just like the pre-test story, no picture cards or props were used in the post-test story too. The pre-test and post-test stories were from the same children’s author Eric Carle.

After the end of all 6 stories, the Morrow’s 10-Point Retelling Scale and Vocabulary Knowledge Scale assessed each child in both groups, individually.

Instruments of Data Collection

The instruments used for data collection were Morrow’s Retelling 10 Point Scale for assessment of listening skills, Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) for assessment of vocabulary knowledge, story books for story telling for both control and experimental groups and props and laminated pictures only for experimental group.

Morrow’s Retelling 10 Point Scale

Morrow’s Retelling 10 Point Scale designed by Lesley Mandel Morrow (1985) was used for assessing listening skills Morrow’s retelling scale is divided into 5 segments: setting, theme, plot episodes, resolution, and sequence. Each section is marked with a score of 4 for character and setting, a score of 1 for theme, a score of 1 for plot episodes, a score of 2 for resolution and a score of 2 for sequence. The total score is 10 points. For instance, in the setting category, if the child names a location where the story took place, he would score one point. If basic components of the story were excluded from the original story, there were no points given. If any essence of an element was repeated, half a point was scored. To adapt highest raw scores to be equivalent to 10 in each group, raw scores were placed over maximum scores and multiplied by 10. The total of the five categories assessed equals the overall story transcription score. Cronbach alpha reliability of this scale for the current study was .93.

Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)

The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) was designed and established by Sima Paribakht and Marjorie Welsche in 1996. It is a 5-point self-assessing measure that permits pupils to show their understanding of the items of vocabulary. The VKS enables students to specify limited understanding of items, which permits a deeper assessment of vocabulary outcomes. According to the author, *'the VKS should be viewed as a practical instrument for use in studies of the initial recognition and use of new words'*.

This tool uses a 5-point scale comprising of a self-report and performance items to obtain stimulated and demonstrated knowledge of specific words in writing. The VKS ratings range from complete newness, through identification of the word and vague sense of its meaning, to the capacity to use those words in a grammatically and semantically accurate manner in a sentence. Students are handed a list of focal words and questioned to stipulate how close their knowledge is for each, and, for self-report levels III—IV, they must reveal this understanding. Self-reported knowledge of words in categories I & II for 1 and 2 scores is accepted by the VKS and it demands a proof of comprehension for higher scores. Wrong responds in self-report items III, IV or V will give a score of 2. Scoring 3 signifies that an applicable synonym or rendition has been provided for self-report categories III or IV. If the word is utilized in constructing a sentence validating the learner's comprehension of its sense in same context although with imprecise syntax or a misguidedly derived form is given (e.g., "losed" for "lost"), a score of 4 is given. Scoring a 5 signifies both semantic and grammatical suitability in use of the focal word, even when there are some mistakes present. Cronbach alpha reliability of this scale for the current study was 0.96.

Storybooks

Six stories were chosen for this study. All stories selected for the study comprised of clearly themed story structures including defined characters encountering specific situations with difficulties or purposes. Storybooks chosen were considered for their subjective appeal i.e. their interesting theme, attractive illustrations and repetition element along with humour. Another inspiration for selecting these books was to establish developmental value. For example, "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" story introduces children to numbers, days of the week, names of the fruits, and life cycle of a caterpillar. "Pete the Cat" series develops a lesson among children about not getting upset no matter what chaos we go through in

our daily lives. “Dear Zoo” originates problem solving and thinking aptitude. While stories like “Elmer” and “The Mixed-Up Chameleon” introduce the concept of diversity, tolerance and acceptance. Storybooks selected for this research were based on insect/animal/reptile themes. Six stories chosen were;

1. The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
2. Pete the Cat I Love my White Shoes by Eric Litwin
3. Pete the Cat and his Four Groovy Buttons by Eric Litwin
4. Dear Zoo by Rod Campbell
5. Elmer by David McKee
6. The Mixed-Up Chameleon by Eric Carle

These books have been listed in ‘The Kindergarten Canon: The 100 Best Children's Books’ by Petrilli, 2012.

Props (Puppet – Pictures – Vocabulary word Cards)

Laminated pictures were used for storytelling for the experimental group for four intervention stories. Exact pictures from the storybook were used for children to relate the story path while retelling the story. A list of seven targeted words from all six stories were selected and laminated as well for the vocabulary knowledge assessment. Main character puppet of the intervention stories was used for storytelling. All the pictures for the props made by the researcher were exactly the same from the book illustrations. Targeted vocabulary words from story ‘The Very Hungry Caterpillar’ were Tiny, Hungry, Ate, Through, Stomachache, Big and Beautiful.

Targeted vocabulary words from the story ‘Pete the Cat I love my White Shoes’ were

Street, Stepped, Large, Cry, Singing, Mud and Wet.

Targeted vocabulary words from the story ‘Pete the Cat and his Four Groovy Buttons’ were Favourite, Colourful, Popped off, Another, Think, Round and Big.

Targeted vocabulary words from the story ‘Dear Zoo’ were Pet, Heavy, Naughty, Jumpy, Thought, Wrote and Perfect.

Targeted vocabulary words from the story ‘Elmer’ were Tall, Short, Happy, Trunk, Rain, Decorate and Patchwork.

Targeted vocabulary words from story ‘The Mixed-Up Chameleon’ were Cold, Tongue, Zoo, Wish, Hide, Run and Swim.

This study approximately took a period of two months for data collection. Six stories were selected for narration to assess the listening skills and vocabulary. The school administration allowed games period on Monday and Wednesday for storytelling sessions. The first story (pre-test) took longer time for assessing each participant individually as children took time (more than 10 minutes) to retell the story. A separate room (computer room) was provided for storytelling sessions.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The present research explored the influence of storytelling on listening skills and vocabulary development of preschool children. Data was collected for assessment of language skills and vocabulary of preschool children by means of globally recognized tools Morrow's Retelling 10 Point Scale and Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS).

The analysis and interpretation of data was conducted by using Independent Samples T-Test and Paired Samples T-Test with help of SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Bar charts and data tables were used to represent the results of the data.

A series of statistical analyses were conducted to see the effect of storytelling on listening skills and vocabulary development on preschool children. The data analysis strategy involved

1. Descriptive analysis for analyzing demographic information data.
2. Reliability for the scales was computed for the present sample using Cronbach alpha.
3. Independent samples t-test was applied to compare mean score of listening skills and vocabulary knowledge for both groups in pre-test, intervention and post-test conditions.
4. Paired samples t-test was conducted to see differences in mean scores of pre-intervention and after intervention 1, intervention 1 and intervention 2, intervention2 and intervention3, intervention3 and intervention 4, intervention 4 and post intervention and pre and post test on listening skill of control and experimental group.

Descriptive analysis for analyzing demographic information data

The table below shows the demographic features of the participants. Information was collected from parents regarding their age, education, profession, child's birth order and the number of siblings of the child.

*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants***Testing Reliability of Scales Used**

Table 1
Reliability Test for Morrow's Retelling 10 Point Scale and Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)

Scales	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Morrow's Retelling 10 Point Scale		
Pre-test	5	.61
Intervention 1	5	.64
Intervention 2	5	.74
Intervention 3	5	.80
Intervention 4	5	.83
Post Test	5	.93
Vocabulary Knowledge Scale		
Pre-test	7	.60
Intervention 1	7	.67
Intervention 2	7	.86
Intervention 3	7	.85
Intervention 4	7	.93
Post-Test	7	.94

Independent Samples T-Test for comparison of Control and Experimental Groups in Pre-test, Interventions and Post test

Table 2
Independent Samples T-Test for comparison of Control and Experimental Groups in Pre-test, Interventions and Post-test

M	Control		Experiment		t-test		Effect size	
	SD		M		t	p	η^2	d
Pre Listening Skills	4.14	0.64	4.52	0.63	1.12	.285	.095	0.59
Pre Vocabulary	18.86	1.57	19.57	2.23	0.69	.501	.038	0.37
Inter1 Listening Skills	4.43	0.99	5.42	0.71	2.16	.052	.280	1.15
Inter1 Vocabulary	19.57	1.51	22.29	2.14	2.74	.018	.385	1.47
Inter2 Listening Skills	4.33	0.96	5.67	0.79	2.83	.015	.400	1.53
Inter2 Vocabulary	18.86	1.35	24.57	2.94	4.68	.001	.646	2.49
Inter3 Listening Skills	4.47	0.69	5.81	0.74	3.47	.005	.501	1.87
Inter3 Vocabulary	18.29	1.60	24.00	1.73	6.41	<.001	.774	3.42
Inter4 Listening Skills	3.85	0.74	6.04	0.56	6.23	<.001	.764	3.34
Inter4 Vocabulary	18.57	2.51	26.29	2.93	5.30	<.001	.701	2.83
Post Listening Skills	4.28	2.51	26.29	2.93	5.30	<.001	.865	4.67
Post Vocabulary	20.14	1.57	30.14	2.54	8.84	<.001	.867	4.74

An independent sample t-test was led to compare the pre-test listening skills scores for control and experimental groups. There was no noteworthy difference ($p=.285$ and $p=.501$) in scores for both; listening skills for control group ($M=4.14$, $SD=0.64$) and experimental group ($M=4.52$, $SD=0.63$), and in scores for vocabulary for control ($M=18.86$, $SD=1.57$) and experimental group ($M=19.57$, $SD=2.23$).

An independent sample t-test was performed to draw comparison between intervention 1 listening skills scores for control and experimental groups. There was no significant difference ($p=.052$) in scores for listening skills for control group ($M=4.43$, $SD=0.99$) and experimental group ($M=5.42$, $SD=0.71$). Whereas, there was significant difference ($p=.018$) in scores for vocabulary for control group ($M=19.57$, $SD=1.51$) and experimental group ($M=22.29$, $SD=2.14$).

An independent sample t-test was performed to draw comparison in the intervention 2 listening skills scores for control and experimental groups. There was significant difference ($p=.015$ and $p=.001$) in scores for both; listening skills for control ($M=4.33$, $SD=0.96$) and experimental groups ($M=5.67$, $SD=0.79$) and for vocabulary, for control ($M=18.86$, $SD=1.35$) and experimental groups ($M=24.57$, $SD=2.94$).

An independent sample t-test was led to compare the intervention 3 listening skills scores for control and experimental groups. There was

significant difference ($p=.005$ and $p<.001$) in scores for both; listening skills for control ($M=4.47$, $SD=0.69$) and experimental group ($M=5.81$, $SD=0.74$) and for vocabulary, for control ($M=18.29$, $SD=1.60$) and experimental group ($M=24.00$, $SD=1.73$) respectively.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the intervention 4 listening skills scores for control and experimental groups. There was marked difference ($p<.001$) in scores for both; listening skills for control ($M=3.85$, $SD=0.74$) and experimental group ($M=6.04$, $SD=0.56$) and for vocabulary of control ($M=18.57$, $SD=2.51$) and experimental group ($M=26.29$, $SD=2.93$).

An independent sample t-test was performed to compare the post-test listening skills scores for control and experimental groups. There was significant difference ($p<.001$ and $p<.001$) in scores for both; listening skills of control group ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.53$) and experimental group ($M=6.38$, $SD=0.35$) and for vocabulary in scores for control ($M=20.14$, $SD=1.57$) and experimental group ($M=30.14$, $SD=2.54$).

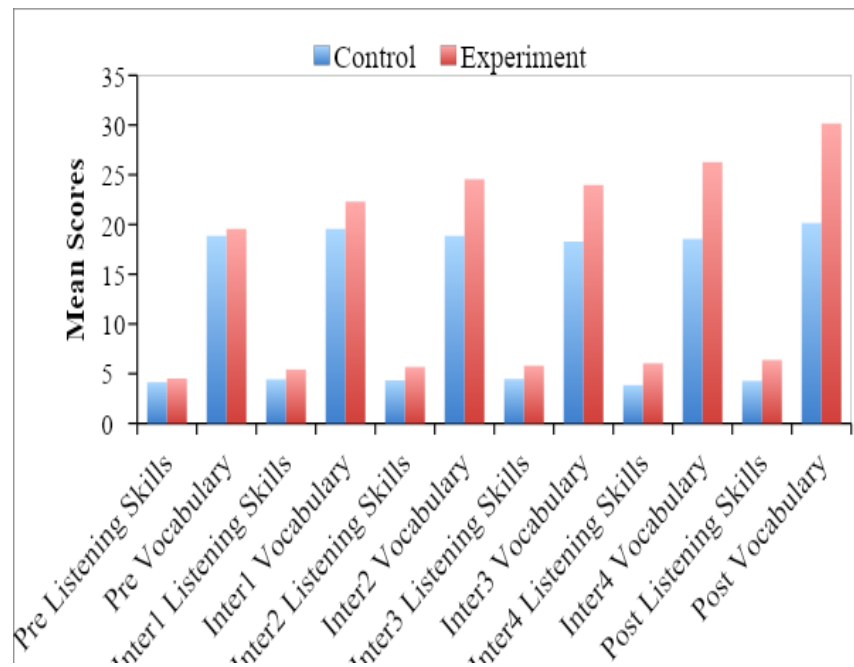


Figure 2: Comparison of means scores of control and experimental groups listening skills and vocabulary in pre-test, intervention and post-test stories

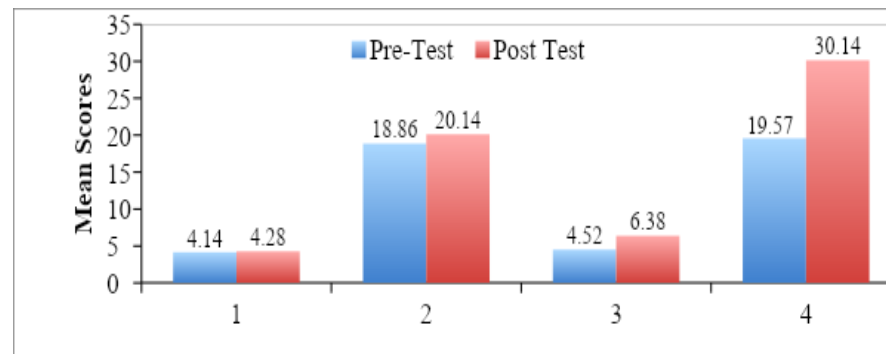
Paired samples t-test to see differences in mean scores in pre-intervention and after-intervention

Table 3

Paired Samples T- Test for Pre-Test and Post Test for Control and Experimental groups

Groups	Pre-Test		Post-Test		t-test		Effect size	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	P	η^2	d
Control								
Listening Skills	4.14	0.64	4.28	0.53	-0.57	.590	0.026	0.24
Vocabulary	18.86	1.57	20.14	1.57	-2.47	.049	0.337	0.82
Experiment								
Listening Skills	4.52	0.63	6.38	0.35	-14.92	.000	0.949	3.65
Vocabulary	19.57	2.23	30.14	2.54	-7.23	.000	0.813	4.43

Figure 3: Paired Samples T- Test for Pre-test and Posttest for Control and



Experimental groups

A paired-samples t-test was performed to note variance in pretest and posttest on listening skills of control and experimental group. There was no significant difference ($p=.590$) in scores for listening skills for the control group ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.53$). Whereas, a notable difference ($p=.000$) in scores for listening skills for experimental group ($M=6.38$, $SD=0.35$) after posttest.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to see differences in pretest and posttest on vocabulary of control and experimental group. There was a

significant difference ($p=.049$ and $p=.000$) for the control group ($M=20.14$, $SD=1.57$) and experimental group ($M=30.14$, $SD=2.54$) respectively in scores for vocabulary after post intervention.

Results and Discussion

Results of the present study are broadly concurrent with past research showing positive developments in a child's listening skills and vocabulary. The stories narrated during intervention sessions, with help of props and pictures, for the experimental group revealed significant differences as compared to the control group in both; listening skills and vocabulary knowledge. This result supports the hypothesis of the research; there is substantial difference in listening skills and vocabulary of children who received intervention. These results are consistent with the findings of Wu (2008), who concluded that the pictorial and illustrative stories attract more attention of the readers. Concurrently, Brown (1975) concluded that children restructure stories by sequencing the events of a story in order. When taking part in such endeavors, children are making up an inner depiction of the story. This was also confirmed by Caine (2005), that brain sciences are discovering how the brain is connected to systematize, recollect and access knowledge of stories and their pictures and that every relationship, experience and object is logged in the brain as a story.

According to Serrat (2010), storytelling is the clear portrayal of concepts, attitudes, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or descriptions that suggest dominant emotions and perceptions. He affirmed that storytelling can impact spectators through stories or narratives. The stories chosen and narrated in this present study all had meaningful lessons for children in daily life, like in the story Elmer, the personal experience of the elephant was narrated how he felt when he discovered him different from the rest of elephants and wanted to change his appearance. This concept of diversity and acceptance in children from an early age tends to develop to love and accept them as they are.

The results of the present study show that preschoolers associated the targeted vocabulary words from the stories with the story structure and made sentences in relevance to the story. These findings concur with studies of Satish, Jain, and Gupta (2009) who verified that '*storytelling is a process in which a storyteller can retrieve appropriate events and correlate information from the story*'.

Conclusion

The research was an effort to investigate the effect of storytelling on listening skills and vocabulary of preschool children. The results of this study indicated strong support for the use of storytelling in beneficially improving listening skills and vocabulary of preschoolers. The findings were also concurrent with the previous studies emphasizing storytelling as a tool used for vocabulary acquisition and developing listening skills. The post-test results and the researcher observations affirmed that preschool children who were exposed to storytelling with props were highly engaged in story retelling; incorporating minute details which verified listening attentively and carefully maturing their listening skills and revealed better, meaningful, and deeper understanding of vocabulary.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are offered for future learners and educators individually or as a part of various organizations dealing with preschool children and their learning processes. Future research may be conducted on effects of storytelling as a learning and teaching strategy within the early childhood classroom set ups. Teachers should use storytelling as a tool for teaching new vocabulary and introducing language/grammar concepts to young children in both Urdu and English languages. Government should provide picture books and visual aids to schools both in English and Urdu. Holding workshops and seminars for teachers and school heads on the importance of reading and instruction on making picture books can prove beneficial. Also, there should be more awareness campaigning by the government and non-government organizations to highlight the significance of storytelling on listening skills and vocabulary building of preschoolers.

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Citation of this Article:

Ahmed, M., Inam, A., & Saif, J. (2021). Effect of storytelling on listening skills and vocabulary of preschool children. *Journal of Early Childhood Care and Education*, 5 (2), 13-30.